

NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST

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Announcements: *Mandated Reporter Training for May 9th at Grove Presbyterian Church has been cancelled due to the pandemic (are you surprised?). We are working on rescheduling for June. I will keep you posted.*

Rediscovery Paves the Way for Reformation

Our time sheltered at home seems to be a time of rediscovering family and home. With no school, sports, childcare, stores and entertainment centers open, families are forced to be creative at home. For the most part, I am greatly encouraged and excited to see and hear about all the fantastic family activities which are happening – cooking together, doing chores together, playing together and learning together. Obstacle courses designed from furniture, mealtime becoming a science lesson, walks turned into biology lessons or lunch becoming a math lesson. Windows have become canvases. Time is taken to observe anthills within the sidewalk and raccoons sleeping in trees. Backyards, front yards and patios have been better used than previously. I have seen more baby strollers out and families working in their yards than during any other spring. It has been wonderful seeing, of course from a distance, families rediscovering family. One young parent commented, “My wife and I have been discussing the situation and we think it has happened so people realize what their busy lives have been lacking. Parents need to get back to family life. We spend way too much time outside of the home. Too bad it has taken sickness to bring families back together.”

This brings to the church leadership two questions:

1. As sheltering at home moves from the short-term to the long-term, how do we support the families over the long-term?
2. Once we comeback together as a physical church, how can Christian Education continue to honor the rediscovered family?

As sheltering at home moves from the short-term to the long-term, how do we support the families over the long-term?

The longer people are in close quarters with limited activities the more likely they are to get on one another’s nerves. With the threat of lost income, parents become more stressed. Child abuse and domestic violence become a threat to those nurturing family events described above. With children not going to school and parents not going to work, this threat can become hidden and shielded from mandated reporter eyes. While a mandated reporter for all of my professional life, I always have believed that observation and intervention before the situation gets out of hand is a better approach than simply waiting and knowing how to report at crisis level.

As Christ’s Body in the world, let’s focus on preventing situations leading to abuse. What can the church do to alleviate the stress and frustration during this time of close quartering?

Here are some ideas, but you know your own congregation and regional demographics better than I, so feel free to expand and adapt as the Spirit guides.

1. Make available a church helpline for people to call when they are *starting* to feel stressed or need help (food, money, break from childcare or just a place to vent). Make certain the congregation is aware of this and has the number nearby. Make certain that someone will answer that call.
2. Make contact with each family unit on a regular basis whether through phone or zoom. Just knowing that someone will call each week or that there will be another person to talk with is helpful.
3. Divide the congregation up into subgroups which are responsible for one another (This protects your pastor's family from being overwhelmed.)
4. Create an emergency childcare team to provide respite childcare when a stressed parent calls. We cannot offer group childcare, but a single parent at wits end trying to work from home could benefit from one healthy person sitting with children while taking time for self.
5. Create zoom activities for the children and/or adults (choir, Sunday school, fellowship, Bible study, just saying hello meetings). These do not have to be long – 15-30 minutes works well but gives an opportunity to see the “outside” world.
6. Remind parents of survival tactics:
 - creating a routine helps
 - getting outside for physical activity benefits both adult and child
 - nurturing alone time – a short period of time when everyone just goes to their own area (for younger children its naptime – mom and dad nap too; for older children it might be going off to play or read on their own – mom and dad have alone time too; for couples it might mean just going off to engage in a hobby alone)
 - calling for help as being an acceptable behavior should be nurtured by the church
7. Be familiar with reporting so that a proper response can be made should it come to that.

Please share any other ideas you find helpful.

Once we comeback together as a physical church, how can Christian Education continue to honor the rediscovered family?

I firmly believe that when we come out of this pandemic the face of Christian Education and the church will be reformed. Leading up to this event, the younger generations were making it known to those who were paying attention

- that the fortified walls of denominational practice were starting to crack.
- that the Body of Christ is shifting from acknowledging and responding to the individual needs and roles of each part to recognizing the integrated and interrelatedness of the parts in being a whole.

With virtual worship the norm now, people are able to tap into worship from any church any where at any time. This opens the way for more worship experiences and more worship time. I

wonder if we actually are worshipping more these days as we check out several services instead of just attending one. As people return will there be heightened interest in attending more than just one church – going to one church for its worship, another for its mission activity, another for its youth group? Will churches see the benefit in combining forces, sharing resources, partnering through staff and building on one another’s strengths?

As families realize the joy of being together for worship and learning, when they return, they may not be willing to divide into developmentally appropriate age groups as the church of the 1900’s firmly planted into Christian Education practice. As families have experienced different forms of worship, they may not be willing to settle for just one form – more resources may be needed for home worship. Intergenerational Sunday school or choirs, home visiting Sunday School teachers, true family worship, neighborhood family gatherings and continued use of technology may be concepts which will need to be embraced.

It is too bad that it took the COVID 19 pandemic to help us rediscover God’s gift of family and the unity of Christ’s body. The question now is how do we prepare for the reformation which will follow?

Websites:

Some Sneak Previews of What is Coming From the Office of Faith Formation:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/faith-practices-toolkit-sampler/?fbclid=IwAR3MPfGWHRijogtaSEEWqXHhYoftado9oP7MdaCXNF2uK6QLbc6XaTcg-U0>

Some Free Resources From the PCUSA Store: <https://mailchi.mp/pcusastore/2rap4ldyit-1140975?e=3219f3057b>

Including Art in Worship: <https://mailchi.mp/sanctifiedart/unraveled-when-our-plans-fall-apart?e=d379a8b14c>

More Easy Guidance on Music Licensing:

<https://www.easysonglicensing.com/pages/help/articles/music-licensing/music-licensing-for-web.aspx>

Books:

Bush, J.C. and P. R. Cooney, *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2002.

Smith, T. *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2017.

Allen, H. C. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches Through Intergenerational Ministry*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Chalice Press, 2018.

Blessings – Stay Healthy – Stay Safe – Stay Faithful