

Learning

Father loves

We trust in a God whose essence is love. God our Father also has the attributes of holiness, righteousness, justice, and is without sin, but first and foremost He is love.

We want children to know that we follow a God who out of His great love, which is His true essence, has created and is creating everything. We see the majesty of His creation by looking at everything from the stars to our toes and also experience awe that He continues to create and gives new life.

So where is God? We want to help children understand that God can be found anywhere He is sought. This means that no matter how far we run our next turn can always be into God's arms. Trying to picture the size of God is hard for even the most experienced Christians, but we hope to instill a belief in children that God holds the world in His hands and nothing happens that surprises Him.

We do not follow a God who sits back and does not interact with the creation He has made. Instead we worship a God who wants to have a relationship with us and desires for us to communicate with Him. This of course is basically what prayer is and we hope to show children that prayer is something special but also something that is quite common, in that we all can do it anytime anywhere.

We believe that God has created people of all different colors, sizes, cultures, talents, personalities, and passions and that each and every person is valuable. We want to help children to understand that they are truly valuable to God and that those who they meet that are different than them are also valuable creations of God.

We are also not only created by God but we are called to be His sons and daughters. He has chosen to adopt us and so no matter what our parental situation is here on earth, we can know that we have a loving Father in heaven who wants us to know His perfect love.

Experiences

Baptism

What is baptism? We know physically that it involves some water, but what does it mean and why is it important? One thing to remember about baptism is that it is first and foremost about God and His promises. One way we emphasize that here is that we perform infant baptisms. I know that some might think that it is a little strange to baptize a baby when they can't even acknowledge what is going on or remember it later in life. But this is a way for us to remember and emphasize the fact that we can be part of God's family not because of anything we accomplish but because God loves us and has adopted us as His children. So in infant baptism, there are some questions and answers and some promises made both by the parent/s and also by the congregation to raise this child to know the love of Christ, but the more important factor demonstrated in the waters of baptism is that God has chosen this child and the water is a sign and seal of God's promises to them.

It is a sign of God's love and forgiveness and it is a seal of the Holy Spirit marking this child as a member of the Family of God. The child has done nothing to deserve this grace and mercy but we have the high calling of reminding that child as they grow of that seal that was placed on them in baptism.

If a child was not baptized as an infant, we are happy to baptize them any time later in life. Once they are old enough to articulate their faith for themselves, then we often combine the sacrament of baptism with a profession of faith, just as we would with an adult coming to know and follow Christ for the first time.

Rhythms of worship by Examples

We all worship something and we all have a certain pattern to our lives so the question is not really if we will show our children "how" to worship but really they will be watching us to see "what" to

worship. Communal worship is an important part of our Christian walk and we both want our children to see us and participate with us in those times of collective worship and also have a chance to learn about it through age appropriate classes.

At this stage of development a key role for adults in the lives of the children is to be an “example”. This doesn’t ever stop as they get older of course but it is clear that children age 0-6 especially learn from watching those around them and imitating what they see especially from those that love them.

Prayer

Children at a very young age can participate in different ways in prayer. At this age it is important to instill the value of prayer and make it something that is both experienced as a group/family and as an individual. Letting them know that God wants a relationship with them just like any other relationship, and that takes communication.

Programs to accomplish above

Nursery

Having a safe, loving, and fun nursery is an important part of our Family Ministry at MRC. On Sunday mornings you may drop off your children ages 0-3+ and know they will be well cared for during their time there. We have two rooms across the hall from one another that makes up our nursery. One room is for infants, where children usually stay until they are walking around pretty steady on their own. Then they move across the hall to the larger room where there is still lots of love plus a few more active toys.

Worship & Wonder

This program provides a place where children 3 yrs to Kindergarten can worship in an environment created especially for them. The time includes a Call to Worship, a Biblical story, a response time, a small snack, and a closing time. This setting gives the children of this age a concept of an order of worship and a time of learning that is customized to their ages. This is held every Sunday morning from when the kids are dismissed part way through the service until 11:30.

Wee Kids

On Wednesdays from about September to April we offer this program for 3yr olds through Kindergarten that strives to provide a place for children to feel welcome and loved while they learn about God’s love for them. The night involves play time, a video lesson, and craft time. The kids are able to learn in a format that is appropriate for them and be cared for by loving volunteers. They will also bring home a booklet so they can continue their learning at home.

Family Nights

On 4 different Wednesday during our program year we have scheduled what we call Family Nights where parents come with their children and enjoy different things like pumpkin carving, lip sync contests, game show nights, pinewood derby races and other fun events. We believe that age appropriate programs are important for children but having the whole family together having fun and being part of the church together is vitally important too.

At home practices

Prayer

Teaching your child how to talk to God and also how to listen to God are important steps on their path of faith. Don't let the worries and guilt of not being sure what to do or how to do it stop you from having times of prayer together. There are many prayers out there that are great for reciting together at bedtime or mealtime. Starting young helps children to realize that prayer is a common and necessary part of life that doesn't need to be scary or intimidating.

Bible reading

You might think that the some stories in the Bible, especially the King James, might be a little hard for your little one to understand, and you would be correct. Fortunately we live in a time with many great children's Bibles, that don't have the whole text but share key stories and truths from the faith, that are great to be read to and with children at this stage. There are also always plenty of great devotionals that families can go through together and then also have for individual children as they grow older.

Being Together

This probably doesn't sound like a very spiritual practice but it is a vital and it is something that is best started early. When children are young and before they have a 'social calendar' start setting the habits of being together. This can range from day trips together, playing games together, and eating together. The old debate of quality time vs quantity time is a false dichotomy. We need both and invest in this early because once sports, school work, band, choir, dance, friends, and jobs get on the calendar it will be harder and harder to find that time. Our faith, at its most basic fundamental level, is about relationships and one of the most important places to practice relationships is in our homes.

Building a support web

No matter how much effort we give, raising children usually takes more than just the parent or parents who live in the home. We believe that it is vital to the faith development of your children that you give lots of opportunities for them to develop relationships with other adults who will help care and guide them. This of course can be teachers, but make sure that it is a larger circle then that too, so that as they grow they know that there are many people in their lives who care about them and are there in a time of need.