



# Sabbath Practices Ministry Kit for Children

*Hospitality, Prayer, Service, Storytelling and Retreat*

## introduction

It is important to introduce sabbath practices to children beginning at a young age. Children learn from their environment, by repetition and by example. In using the age specific ministry kits keep in mind that the idea is that practices are introduced with generations individually and with all ages together to form intergenerational faith communities. Use this ministry kit alongside the essential tools for each practice as you teach and guide children in your community. Many of the practices will be engaged in at the same time and naturally flow from age specific to intergenerational. Each of the 5 practices in this ministry kit have a section of things to consider, ways to engage and a resource list is provided at the end of the kit. The kit is meant as a guide and a launch pad for leaders.

## Practicing Hospitality with Children

*Children discover and experience God's love for them in the practice of sharing God's love with others.*

### things to consider

Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger (those not like us) as much as it is about showing hospitality to those we know. Be aware of boundaries and safety when talking about the Biblical concept of welcoming strangers as a practice of hospitality with children.



Children may be at different places with their desire and ability to share with their peers, particularly if they feel they're giving things away and not receiving anything tangible back. Reinforce the idea that sharing hospitality is an act of both giving and receiving.

Children have far fewer material possessions and financial resources than adults. Encourage them that hospitality lies in our *actions* and our *attitudes*, not in how many resources we have to share.

Consider that children may become distracted easily and grow bored with longer tasks; having an adult helper alongside them in the hospitality activity may be helpful. For example, if you offered children the opportunity to be a greeter for worship, it may be helpful to partner them with another peer and an adult volunteer so that they don't wander off from the front doors of the church.



Younger children especially are great at identifying what they want and need but may need help to recognize what others need. Encourage them that hospitality isn't just about creating welcome for ourselves but creating welcome that meets others where they're at, too.

If children are practicing hospitality during worship, consider where your congregation is with regards to children's presence and involvement in worship. Children won't do things perfectly or "how we've always done it" and that's okay! But don't set children up for a negative experience if they offer up a slightly different way of doing things that church members aren't prepared for or receptive to.

### **engaging in hospitality**

**Welcoming the Stranger:** Help children learn about what it means to feel like a stranger or someone that feels different than everyone around them. Use books to engage in this conversation. Use the language of hospitality when talking with children about racism and inclusion. Talk with children about how to welcome others into both the church community and their neighborhoods/schools.

**Invite children to serve as greeters for worship.** They can do this with their family unit or be paired with background checked adult volunteers in the church.

**Intergenerational back-to-school/church program year kickoff blessing.** Rather than only the children receiving back to school blessings at the start of a new school year, offer space in worship for adults to offer a blessing for the child's upcoming school year and for the children to return a blessing to the adults for the new church year.

**Make welcome or "thinking of you cards".** Children can make drawings and cards for visitors and/or church members. This is especially helpful way to use the church directory and when new children visit the church.

**Lead children in setting and decorating the Communion Table in your Sanctuary.** Talk about how setting God's table where all are welcome is an act of hospitality. How can the table reflect that welcome? If doing online services, challenge families to have children set up their communion table for a worship service that will include communion.

**Make affirmation sheets with children.** One page per child in the class, with their name at the top. For each child, everyone in the class shares an affirmation. Children can write (or draw pictures) on the pages for their affirmation, or you might assist younger children by writing their comments on the pages of each child. Children can take home the pages and hang them in their bedroom or somewhere special to them.



## Practicing Prayer with Children

*Teaching children they can always pray to God, teaches them that God is always there for them.*

### things to consider

It's important to consider that children are at different places with their vocabulary and ability to articulate ideas. Prayers will likely need to be simpler ideas and concepts appropriate to their age levels.



Children may struggle with suggesting things to pray for. It may be helpful to provide question prompts – for example, “Can we pray that everyone feels safe this week?”

Children will need reassurance that their prayer requests are “okay.” By affirming children in their prayer suggestions, you affirm for them that God hears and cares for all our prayers. It's essential for children to learn that prayer is appropriate for all situations and concerns. Take care to teach children that prayers aren't a wish list at the same time as assuring them that all prayers have value. When their prayer list includes a list of wishes, make sure to help them expand.

Keep prayer requests relevant to children's lives. If you ask children to pray for things that are foreign to them (like for a successful job interview) it might make God seem foreign by association.

When engaging in abstract methods of prayer like art, music, body movements etc., it is important to be aware of developmental characteristics of children. Preschool aged children may not grasp how music can be prayer, but it is still appropriate to talk about all of the ways we talk to and listen for God. Helping children practice different ways to engage their whole selves with God takes time and practice over their entire childhood.

### engaging in prayer

**Art Prayer.** Children can experience prayer through doodling and crafting, even with no words. It is very important that the process is open-ended. Introduce the time of art prayer with something like, “we will now pray by coloring/painting/drawing etc....” Be very aware of how you interpret children's artwork. You might ask, “Would you like to tell me about your prayer?” Do not label the artwork with captions without their permission. Never praise the quality of the art with phrases like, “that is pretty” “you did a good job” or “that is nice coloring.” Instead, let them talk (or not) about their artwork and thank them for sharing.



**Music Prayer.** Simple songs that children may already know, or can easily learn, can be offered as prayers. Introduce the time of prayer with music by saying something like, “We will now enter into a time of prayer by listening to this music. I wonder how we can listen for God in this music?”

**Kinesthetic Prayer.** Invite children to assign simple movements to a prayer. They might spin in a circle like the rushing wind of the Spirit. Or lie down flat on the ground to express gratitude for Sabbath. Look for motions and movements to our communal prayers, such as the Lord’s Prayer, so that children can begin to engage in these prayers at a young age.

**Breath Prayer.** Invite children to think of something they want to pray for themselves as they breathe in and invite them to think of someone or something else to pray for as they exhale.

**Silent prayer.** Small periods of silence (30-60s) with a thought to ponder can offer children an experience of quiet meditation. It is important to give children time and space to practice controlling their bodies. Offer simple phrases during this time such as “God loves me.”

**Nature Walk.** Take children on a walk and stop to pray for the things they choose in nature. Consider having some of these items added to a prayer center in a classroom or to their worship areas at home.

**Scripture Verse Prayer.** Choose a simple verse (like Psalm 56:3) and invite children to offer it as their prayer. Help children choose different verses that they can memorize and repeat at different times of the day as a prayer.

**Journaling.** Children can keep a simple journal that they use to keep their daily prayers in.

**Fill in the Blank Prayers.** Children may find it easier to give one-word answers to prompts that you provide. For example, “Today we want to pray for our animals \_\_\_\_ (Children fill in the blank here with pet names) \_\_\_\_.” This can be a helpful tool to engage children in worship during prayer times.

**Prayers of the People:** Help children engage in praying for the people of the church, the community and the world. Consider having a large, on-going prayer wall to engage in these prayers and then help children connect with this part of your worship service. Encourage families to mirror this practice at home.



## Practicing Service with Children

*Through service, children learn that anyone can and should be the “Hands and Feet.”*

### things to consider

Consider that some volunteer agencies may have age restrictions for volunteers. Encourage your church to partner with one or more organizations that will celebrate and encourage children serving. Build relationships with those organizations so that all are familiar with one another.



Encourage adult volunteers assisting children with service opportunities to make space for the children to take the lead and participate. Adults are there to support the children, not do the project for them.

Children, particularly younger children, will need projects and tasks to be simple and age appropriate. For example, instead of organizing a whole canned food drive, children may be responsible for stacking cans on storage shelves.

Children will likely want to see visible results from their projects. Offer them projects that allow for them to see a result rather than intangible goals.

Consider the language you use when teaching children about service. Othering language like “the needy” or “the unfortunate” is unhelpful. Use people-first language that invites children to understand people they are serving as equal to them. Encourage children to name things they have in common with whomever they are serving

### engaging in service

**Form a regular service group just for children:** These groups are often referred to as “mission possible” or “kids with a purpose”. Engage this group in regular community acts of service such as:

- making placemats for Meals on Wheels
- assembling toiletry kits or blessing bags
- engaging in earth care projects such as litter pick-up or gardening
- adopt a food pantry
- bake and share animal treats with an animal shelter
- no-sew fleece blankets for different organizations serving children or families
- helping children learn about advocacy and fundraising for organizations
- recognizing public service workers such as firefighters, police, healthcare workers



**Have education classes around partnership and language for service.** Engaging in the practice of service on a regular basis is an important part of our faith life that can be taught to children at a young age. Teaching the appropriate language for service with communities in need is an important foundation to build at a young age. Role playing and honest conversations in a safe space is helpful.

**Engage in service for the church community.** Have children included in church building maintenance days with appropriate activities. Children may also come up with their own projects that the church building may need. The practice of service also happens in serving church members with cards for those that are ill or homebound or engaging children in fellowship activities such as helping with meal service, set-up or clean-up.

**Small acts of service.** Teach children about small acts of service in their everyday lives that they can carry out. Offer up a challenge for coming up with ways to serve others in daily acts such as helping with household chores, offering to clear the family dinner table or doing small tasks for someone that is unexpected.



## Practicing Storytelling with Children

*When children share their story, they begin to connect their story to God's larger story.*

### things to consider

Consistently use “I Wonder” language with children when telling Bible stories and other stories of faith. Help them to see themselves in God's story by asking open-ended questions that encourage conversation and reflections.



Remind children about listening and make sure that each child is heard when they share. Children who are talked over or ignored might become reluctant to share again in the future. Children need to feel affirmation – create a safe and non-judgmental space for children to share their stories. Create space for children to listen to stories from all generations. Help adults tell their stories to children in a way that is engaging.

Children may be reluctant to share about themselves. Consider offering specific, simple prompts that they can respond to and help them organize their answers. “How does your family practice serving others?” “What do you like to do?”

Conversational story-sharing may be a challenge for younger children. Offer them different ways to tell their story like crafting or journaling.

### engaging in storytelling

**Invite children to offer their gifts in worship.** When children bring their passions to worship leadership, they're telling their story – who God has created them to be. Recognize that children can tell their story in worship in more ways than just speaking. Consider singing, musical instruments, drama, dance, bulletin art or even poetry for liturgy.

**Invite adults of the congregation to join the children's Sunday school class and share about their lives, with time for Q&A with the children.** You can also set this up over zoom. Make sure children are not online with adults one on one. When children know the stories of more adults and also feel like their story is heard, they connect with the faith community.

**Create a “God-Viewing” window.** A window in the classroom or home that you regularly use to look out and identify ways God is at work in our lives. This is especially effective for online gatherings where children can literally show the window and tell the story of what they have seen.



**Ask children what they don't believe.** Sometimes it can be easier to state what we don't believe than what we do. Use ideas about what children don't believe ("God is evil") to help them define what they might believe to be true.

**Create statements of faith, both as a classroom and as individuals.** Through first modeling a classroom statement of faith with things like, "We believe God wants us to help each other," you model for children how they can create their own statements with simple concepts that they also believe.

**Provide age-appropriate Bibles to your church's children.** Identify ages that you will gift Bibles in your congregation. There are board book Bibles for toddlers, great storybook Bibles for preschoolers and then the more traditional Bibles for elementary students. Help children see their story in God's story at each of their ages and stages.

**Invite children to "Show & Tell" about an object or location that is important to their faith.** They might bring in a picture of a place that is special to them or the object itself, if it's easily transportable.

**Give children a backpack blessing tag at the start of the school year that they can proudly display at school or wherever their backpack goes with them.** Children will enjoy sharing with their peers that they belong to their church community – if you can get your church's logo on the tag, even better!





## Practicing Retreat with Children

*Practicing retreat teaches children the importance of making space for connection with God.*

### things to consider

Practice retreat in smaller time chunks “at home” before or in addition to going away for weekends or longer. Help children understand the difference between going on vacation and practicing retreat.



Will your retreat be just children or an intergenerational retreat that also includes children? If parents are included, be sure to consider the dynamics of parents being present with their children as well, particularly with regards to who will be leading program content and who is responsible for addressing any inappropriate or distracting behavior from children.

Children may have little to no history of experiences away from their parents and families. If planning an overnight or day retreat, be sure to prepare for homesickness.

Consider the group – does everyone already know each other well or is the group still getting to know one another? Be sure to include space throughout the retreat for children to not only connect with God but to connect and build community with each other.

Retreats are new and different experiences. Don't assume that class rules automatically carry over to retreat; children will need clear expectations for their participation in the retreat. Consider making a group covenant that everyone signs as one of the very first retreat activities.

Child protection policies are always important. They are *especially* important for offsite retreats and adult volunteers working with children on retreat.

### engaging in retreat

**Encourage children to go to summer camp.** Older elementary children, usually 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up, can attend camps on their own. Many camps have options for younger children to attend with an adult from their family.

**Plan an all-church retreat and have special options throughout the retreat for children.** Offer a nature hike just for the children, a special craft or recreation time, etc. Use the language of retreat throughout the experience with children so that they understand that they are connecting with God in a special way.



**Use a prayer labyrinth.** If your church doesn't have a labyrinth, you can create one easily and inexpensively from ideas online or see if a local park may have one. Children of all ages can engage in the labyrinth, especially if you give them objects to hold or guided activities.

**Encourage families to practice retreat in the home over a shared meal.** Going screen-free around the dinner table and employing a daily family check-in are both ways that children can engage with daily retreat alongside their families.

**Offer a fellowship meal to families with children at your church.** Gathering for a simple meal and conversation will often be a perfect way for children to detach from the stresses of school and hobbies and to enjoy fellowship & rest with their peers and family.

**Provide families in your church with quality faith formation resources that they can use outside of Sunday morning.** Parents engaging with their children in faith formation activities on a regular basis models for children what setting aside a special time to connect with God looks like.

**Yoga, meditation or mindfulness activities.** Helping children control their bodies and relax gives them space to retreat, even if just for a small amount of time. Use language that encourages them to connect with God during these moments.

**Set up prayer stations in your children's classroom or around the church.** Prayer stations are like mini retreats. They have guided activities that utilize a variety of learning styles and help children connect in different ways with God.



## Where can I learn more?

### Books

*Shanti Means Peace: The Story of the Fellowship of the Least Coin* by Anna Hansen Bedford. Presbyterian Women, 2014.

*Peanut Butter & Cupcake* by Terry Border. Philomel Books, 2014.

*Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown. Aladdin Picture Books, 1997.

*Children and Prayer: A Shared Pilgrimage* by Betty Shannon Cloyd. Upper Room Books, 1997.

*Let the Whole Earth Sing Praise* by Tomie dePaola. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2011.

*Does God Hear My Prayer?* by August Gold. Skylight Paths Publishing, 2005.

*Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too* by Jennifer Grant. Beaming Books, 2019.

*Writing to God: Kid's Edition* by Rachel G Hackenberg. Paraclete Press, 2012.

*Let the Children Give: Time, Talents, Love and Money* by Delia Halverson. Discipleship Resources, 2007.

*Who is My Neighbor?* by Amy Levin & Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. Flyaway Books, 2019.

*Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn. Paulist Press, 1995.

*Praying in Color, Kids Edition* by Sybil MacBeth. Paraclete Press, 2009.

*Crocodile's Crossing: A Search for Home* by Yoeri Slegers. Flyaway Books, 2020.

*Prayers for Faithful Families: Everyday Prayers for Everyday Life* by Traci Smith. Beaming Books, 2020.

*For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World* by Michael W. Waters and Keisha Morris. Flyaway Books, 2020.

*A Quiet Place* by Douglas Wood. Simon & Shuster Books for Young Readers, 2002.

*Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* by Douglas Wood. Candlewick, 2009.

### Curriculum

[Abraham and Sarah's Big Family](#). Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum. Congregational Ministries Publishing, 2020.



[\*A Joyful Path, Year 1, Lesson 14: Service.\*](#) Progressive Christianity: Spiritual Networking and Resources for an Evolving Faith.

[\*All God's Children: The Church Family Gathers for Retreat.\*](#) GenOn Ministries.

[\*An Illustrated Invitation for Families: Joining God at Work in the World.\*](#) Illustrated Ministry.

[\*Faith Practices: Giving and Receiving Hospitality.\*](#) The Pilgrim Press.

[\*FaithTalk with Children.\*](#) FaithWell MT. Vibrant Faith Ministries, 1998.

[\*Feed My Sheep: Care for Others.\*](#) Faith4Families: Passing on Faith to the Next Generation.

[\*Lessons from the Table.\*](#) Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Presbyterian Mission Agency.

[\*One Great Hour of Sharing Children's Resources.\*](#) PCUSA Special Offerings.

[\*Peace & Global Witness Children's Resources.\*](#) PCUSA Special Offerings.

[\*People Jesus Met.\*](#) Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum. Congregational Ministries Publishing, 2020.

### **Online Resources**

["10 Ways to Pray with Kids."](#) Illustrated Ministry.

["Anti-Racism Resources."](#) Forming Faithful Families. First Presbyterian Church, Stillwater, OK.

["Prayer Stations."](#) by Theresa Cho. Still Waters: Creative Worship and Prayer Station Ideas.

["Creative Prayer."](#) Flame: Creative Children's Ministry.

["Creative Storytelling."](#) Flame: Creative Children's Ministry.

["Faith5."](#) Faith Inkubators.

["Families: Resources for the Home."](#) Illustrated Ministry.

["Gifts of the Heart Kits."](#) Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

["God's Love Around the World."](#) PC(USA) World Mission Vacation Bible School Resource.

["Home Practices."](#) Building Faith, Virginia Theological Seminary.

[Storypath: Connecting children's literature with our faith story.](#) Union Presbyterian Seminary.

["We're on a Mission."](#) Association of Presbyterian Church Educators.