



# + Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone: An Intentional Invitation

## **Desired Outcomes**

- Teach children that they are valued, loved and supported as members of the worshipping faith community.
- Encourage children to feel at home in the worship space.
- Support parents and caregivers in worshipping with their child.
- Reinforce the importance of a child's presence in worship as a critical aspect of faith formation for the entire congregation.
- Equip families to nurture a child's faith in daily life—because home is church, too.



# Introduction



## Milestones Ministry





Milestones Ministry brings an awareness of the presence of God to individuals of all generations through a vital partnership between home and congregation. Milestones Ministry provides a clear and usable model for congregations, homes, and community to connect faith formation resources with daily life experiences. The rich variety of Milestones Ministry does the essential ministry of the church: promoting Christian faith formation and outreach into the larger community. The outreach element is accentuated when the celebration of milestones is offered for the entire community and not just congregational members.

Milestones Ministry provides a clear and usable model. Individuals and larger households can participate in a way of life that marks special moments and honors them as important to the journey of faith. This model provides the means to implement Vibrant Faith Ministries' vision for passing on faith—a vision that places children of all ages in the center of the church's concern and sees God's redeeming work at play through home, congregation, community, culture, and creation.

Milestones incorporate a simple structure that includes naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing so that the Milestones Ministry event has a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation.

At the heart of equipping people for their lifelong faith formation are the Four Keys. These faith practices are central to every milestone and integrated into people's daily lives as well as the life of the local congregation.

### The Four Keys:

-  Caring Conversations
-  Devotions
-  Service
-  Rituals and Traditions

These four daily faith practices are simple, doable, and practical. The Four Keys are used to open the imagination of individuals, families, small groups, and congregations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They provide ways to nurture the Christian faith and reach out to others with the love of God in Christ. They serve as a catalyst for people to wonder about and play with a variety of ways to celebrate and practice the Christian faith in their daily lives.

To maximize its effectiveness, Milestones Ministry includes role modeling of the Four Keys in the congregational setting and incorporates opportunities for a follow-up gathering. The benefits of Milestones Ministry are more deeply rooted in the lives of people when they are able to gather again for a faith formation checkup. Therefore, each Milestones Ministry event offers a follow-up gathering that includes a Four Keys outline.

*Milestones Ministry provides a faith milestone as a marker along life's journey that says, "This is something important and God is here, too." It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in everyday life.*



## Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

Welcoming Young Children to Worship is about a congregation intentionally inviting children, their parents, and other caregivers to worship by saying, “You and your child are welcome here. Your child is a full member of the faith community. God speaks to both children and adults as we gather and support one another in our faith in worship.” This Milestones Ministry event introduces young children, and the adults who care for them, to worship and the worship space.

In the words of Shirley Morgenthauer, a respected researcher and expert in early childhood education, “The dance of the liturgy is best learned from the lap of a loving parent (or caring adult).” Research consistently shows us that a child’s faith is nurtured by being present in worship. But, as anyone who has children or has worshiped alongside a family with young children knows, this is not always a smooth journey. This event takes the unconditional support and the hospitality of the entire faith community. Worship is a critical part of what the body of Christ does routinely.

We bring children, parents and other adults together to recognize this time in the lives of families with young children by incorporating a simple structure that includes:

**Naming** – It is important to recognize worship and the worship space as a place where children are welcome.

**Equipping** – Children, parents and others are given the opportunity to gather for caring conversations about the importance of children being present in worship.

**Blessing** – The blessing of this special time in the lives of young children places an emphasis on being part of the worship experience with the entire faith community.

**Gifting** – You may give a visible item as a physical reminder of this meaningful moment. (See Appendix 1 for ideas.)

**Reinforcing** – Follow up the Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone by having this group meet one more time to discuss their worship experience with the children. The Worship Milestone Follow Up is on page 8.



Caring  
Conversations



Devotions

Four Keys  
for  
Practicing Faith



Service



Rituals and  
Traditions







## For the Leader

Parents and other adults sometimes wonder why children need to be in worship. Bringing children into the worship space is like allowing children to eat at the dinner table. Even though their manners are far from elegant, it's done because our children are full members of the family—and they need to be fed!

Children giggle, they poke, and they swing their legs because they are children. They also pray, sing and give their offerings. Bringing a child into worship can be a real exercise of patience. But, the rewards are well worth the effort. While we do not want our children to be disruptive or hamper the worship experience, we also need to remind one another that children are members of the congregation and full members of God's family.

Children need to participate, in their own way, to grow in their understanding of God's love and to affirm their place in God's family.



## Planning for this Milestone

- Meet with congregational leaders to talk about policy and practices regarding young children's presence in worship. Are practices spoken or unspoken? What messages are conveyed to the congregation? Is your worship space and worship service child- and family-friendly?
- Schedule this milestone event on the church calendar.
- Send a letter to the parents or guardians of all preschool-aged children. (See Appendix 2 for invitation.)
- Place announcements in the bulletin and newsletter as a way to inform the entire congregation and visitors about your congregation's hospitality to children and families.
- Arrange with worship planners to have a special blessing during worship sometime following the event. (See Worship and Blessing on page 6.)
- Consider creating a "Welcome to Worship" brochure for parents and caregivers that shares how your congregation welcomes, includes and supports children in worship. Place the brochure in the worship bulletin the Sunday of this Milestones Ministry event.
- Decide on what gift you will give as a reminder of the occasion, allowing enough time to order. (Gift ideas are listed in Appendix 1.)
- Encourage faith talk at home with the suggested resources found in Appendix 1.
- Use this tool as a faith formation resource to reach outside your congregation into the general community. (See Appendix 4 for ideas for outreach.)

# + A Cross+Generational Event

Greet the children and parents at the entrance to the worship space. It might be helpful to use a puppet or “helping character” as an assistant to welcome children. Explain that you are going to be exploring the space where you worship, God’s “living room,” which is the most important thing we do when we come together as a church family. Have fun and literally lead the children in crawling from place to place! Allow the children to stand at each place (use a stool if necessary) so that they can see what it’s like to look out into the room from those places.

Take time to talk about each place: Baptismal Font, Lectern, Pulpit, etc.

After the sanctuary tour, invite parents and children to sit down. Follow this outline:

## Four Keys for Practicing Faith Outline:



### Caring Conversations

Take some time to talk and get to know one another. Answer these questions:

- Can you name the places we visited in the sanctuary just now?
- We read Bible stories here. Where do you read Bible stories at home?



### Devotions

Following the sanctuary tour, invite the children, parents and others to sit on the floor or the pews for the very brief “Welcoming the Elephant” drama for young children (see Appendix 3). After the drama, explore other aspects of the worship space that are important to your congregation, especially those that intrigue young children. You may wish to have musicians present to demonstrate the instruments used in worship and explain how Scripture tells us to “make a joyful noise.” Serve a small snack and allow time for families to talk with one another or address questions parents and children may have about the sanctuary.

Activity: see “Making an Altar Cloth” in Appendix 2.



### Service

- Name the ways others serve you and how you can help serve one another during a worship service in your congregation. How can your family serve during worship?



### Rituals and Traditions

Say a prayer: *Thank you, God, for loving us and making us part of your family. Help us to always feel welcomed. Amen.*

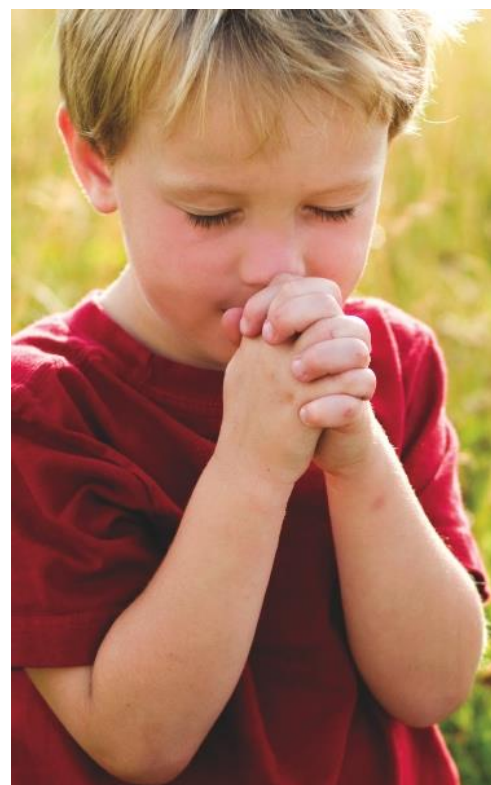
Bless one another: *“May you know God’s family always welcomes you in this place.”*

Questions will come up along the way. Make time and space for silliness and wandering. Be prepared for unexpected questions and surprising insights. At the end of your time together, give each child a gift as a reminder of this occasion if one will not be given during worship.

## Preparation

This milestone event is designed for the curiosity and imagination of young children. It will help them begin to understand the nature and purpose of various aspects of the worship space.

- Recruit leaders for this event who have the gift of relating to young children.
- A safe, small step stool may be needed to help children see from various points, such as the font, pulpit and behind the altar.
- The drama in this milestone event (see Appendix 3) introduces WT Bear and his friends. You will need three stuffed bears and one stuffed animal that is not a bear. Assign parts to helpers.



## + Worship and Blessing

Choose a time during a worship service to present the chosen gifts and bless the child for this Milestone (see Appendix 1 for gift ideas). Invite all the families and others who participated in the Cross+Generational Event to come forward for the blessing.

**Leader:** At this time, we are delighted to invite forward those who participated in the Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone. We encourage them and all of us to continue the faith practices of caring conversations, devotions and service to build rituals and traditions in all our homes as a way of life. It is important to have your children present at worship. Worshiping together is a valuable way to pass faith from generation to generation. We welcome these young children and their families to worship. *(Distribute the gift chosen for all as a reminder of this milestone.)*

**Leader:** May God's peace, the love of Jesus who showed his love for children, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**People:** And also with you.

**Leader:** Jesus came into this world as a child and grew in grace and wisdom surrounded by caring adults. Jesus welcomed children, believed in their dignity, and even held them up as a model for all who seek the kingdom of God. Our children, to grow in faith, need the guidance of adults who love and care for them and the support of this entire faith community.

Let us pray.

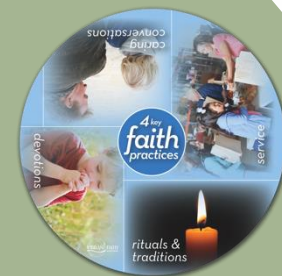
Dear Jesus, we pray that through the loving touch of these parents and caring adults, these children will know the tenderness and depth of your love. Help all in this congregation to be your faithful servants and to be like you as we welcome and affirm our children in worship and in this congregation. Lord, send your blessing upon our children so they will grow in faith and love for you and by the power of the Holy Spirit grow in wisdom and grace to serve you.

**People:** Amen.

*Resources and tools to encourage faith talk and faith practices in the home are helpful and remind us that home is church, too!*

A suggestion for building rituals and traditions in the home:

### Four Keys Faith Practices Mat



Place a candle in the center

Place the Milestones Blessing Bowl in the center



Add a milestone to the bowl to encourage caring conversations



# + Milestone Event for Small Groups or Home

There are times when celebrating a milestone can be done in a small group setting, or more intimately, in homes. Gather with your child(ren) and find a cozy place to sit next to one another—on the sofa, beside one another on the bed, around the kitchen table, or in your child’s favorite cozy corner. If your child likes to be held, this is a good time to make room on your lap as you talk about the importance of worship in your lives.



## **Caring Conversations**

- Do you know where the sanctuary is in our church? What do we do there?
- What is something we always do during worship?
- For children, include crayons/markers and paper and invite them to draw a picture of the altar.



## **Devotions**

Read Scripture: Mark 10:13-16 (CEV) – Jesus Blesses Little Children

*Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his disciples told the people to stop bothering him. When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, “Let the children come to me! Don’t try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God. I promise you that you cannot get into God’s kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does.” Then, Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.*

- Why do you think Jesus got angry?
- Do you think Jesus would want children to go to worship? Why or why not?



## **Service**

Suggestions for service and outreach:

- Name all the people who serve you in daily life. Choose a way to serve others as a family.
- Name something about each person in your family that makes him or her special.



## **Rituals and Traditions**

*Dear Jesus, I pray that (name of child) will know the tenderness and depth of your love. Please send your blessing upon (name of child) so he/she will grow in faith and love for you. Amen.*

Parents bless the child(ren): “Jesus loves you and so do I.”

# + Welcoming Children to Worship Milestone Follow-Up

## *Encouraging a time to check-in*



## Leadership Tip

*An important step after role modeling the Four Keys in a cross-generational or small group setting is to bless and equip families to continue practicing faith by using the Four Keys in their homes.*

*Approximately one month after the initial event, bring children and families back together for a follow up to continue building relationships and facilitating the Four Keys. This is an important step to encourage faith traditions in the congregation and at home.*



### Caring Conversations

Take time to talk about what you have experienced during the worship service in your congregation.

Sing a favorite hymn or song that children would recognize.

Invite children to pretend they are the pastor and practice sitting and standing or using hand and arm gestures they have seen during worship.

Use dolls or stuffed animals to reenact worship with children.



### Devotions

While you're at home or away, lying down or rising, in the car or bathtub, having mealtime or naptime, you can help your child understand worship more fully.

Read Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (CEV)

*Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only true God! So love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. Memorize his laws and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning.*

- Light a candle and talk about times when candles are lit at worship.
- Talk about ways you show God's love at home and when you are with your friends.



### Service

Ask your child to help set the table, or put dishes in the dishwasher, or do a similar task. Thank your child for serving and making a difference in your and your family's life. Designate a special container at home to collect spare change/coins during the week. Give your child the special responsibility to carry the offering to worship each week.



### Rituals and Traditions

Say the Lord's Prayer together.

End the time together with a blessing:

*"May you know Jesus loves you and show His love to your friends."*





## Appendix & Gift Ideas



# 5

### FIVE PRINCIPLES

*for living and passing on faith*

1. Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal trusted relationships – often in our own homes.
2. The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and ministry of the home.
3. Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church, too.
4. Faith is caught more than it is taught.
5. If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.

# 4

### FOUR KEYS

*for practicing faith*

1. Caring Conversations
2. Devotions
3. Service
4. Rituals and Traditions

# 3

### THREE CHARACTERISTICS

*for Christians*

1. Authentic
2. Available
3. Affirming

# + Appendix 1 – Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

Underlined  
resources  
are active  
links

## *Ideas for “Gifting:”*



**Welcoming Young Children to Worship Stone** – Individual stone to use with a Blessing Bowl.

Suggested use: Parents and children walk to the baptismal font and find a stone for each child. Parents take a stone out of the baptismal font, give it to their child, and with a wet finger make the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead, saying the child’s name and the words “You are a loved child of God.”

**Prayer Cubes** – Mealtime, Bedtime and Friendship Prayer Cubes are a wonderful tool for small groups and for the home to establish and practice a prayer life. They are a fun way to get children interested in prayer and can really help get things rolling! Toss the wooden cube and whatever it lands on is the prayer you’ll pray. Using the prayer cubes is a creative way to teach children how to express their gratitude to God, to end their day in prayer and to pray for their friends!

**Beginners Bible** – The perfect Bible for any preschooler! With more than 90 Old and New Testament Bible stories, you can easily introduce your child (ages six and under) to the most wondrous stories and characters of the Bible. In addition, under each story title, the authors have written the biblical reference, helping parents quickly find and follow along with the story in their Bibles as well.

**God Loves Me Bible** – It’s never too early to start teaching your children (ages two-to-four) the Bible basics. The God Loves Me Bible is the perfect way to introduce all of the most popular Bible stories and characters to your child—while instilling the most important message of all, “God loves me!” To make it more personal, slip your child’s photo into the front cover.

**Jesus Storybook Bible** – Take your children on a wonderful journey through all of the important biblical events from creation to Revelation. Best of all, through these adventures, children discover how Jesus is at the center of God’s great story—and at the center of their story, too! Although the Bible is designed for ages four and up, it is a perfect book for all generations to share.

## *Additional Resources from Milestones Ministry:*

**For Everything a Season** – Rituals are an important part of a vibrant family life. Make both the ordinary and extraordinary events in your family more intentionally sacred by honoring them with the simple blessing rituals featured in this book. This wonderful resource provides you with a blessing for life’s most meaningful moments!

**Blessing Bowl and Mat for Meaningful Moments** – This beautiful, handcrafted bowl not only adds a lovely decorative touch to any home, but also holds special meaning to the family that owns it. Milestones Blessing Bowls are designed to remind us of those meaningful moments that make up our lives.

**Blessing Bowl for Congregational Milestones** – The Congregational Milestones Blessing Bowl is a great way to celebrate each important milestone in the congregation. The hand-painted stones help visually remind congregations of the significance of a child’s faith milestones, such as baptism, entering Sunday school, first communion, confirmation, graduation and pre-marriage.

**Blessing Bowl** – Use this bowl to place each stone as a special life event happens.

**Individual Milestones** – A faith milestone is a marker along life’s journey that says, “This is something important and God is here, too.” Marking a milestone is a biblically-based spiritual practice in both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God’s presence in all of life.

# + Appendix 1 (cont.) – Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

## *Additional Resources from Milestones Ministry:*

**FaithTalk® Cards** – Are designed as a tool to provide meaningful conversations. There are 192 cards divided in to 4 categories of 48 cards each. The categories are: Memories, Etchings, Values, and Actions.

**Additional Stones** – The bowls and stones for Milestones Ministry, LLC are designed, handcrafted, and painted by artist Dawn Deines-Christensen of Prairie Patterns. These stones make wonderful gifts as reminders of special, meaningful moments in our lives.

**Taking Faith Home Bulletin Inserts** – Spark interesting conversations using this lectionary-based Four Keys tool for the home.

**Four Key Mat** – Let this Four Key Mat adorn your table with a candle or blessing bowl as you engage in caring conversations, household devotions, ideas and stories for serving and create meaningful rituals and traditions.

Go to **Milestones Ministry, LLC** website and look under the Toolbox tab for more ideas. [www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)



## + Appendix 2 – Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

### *Sample Invitation:*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and Family,

[name of congregation] welcomes you. We are all part of God's family, and we would like you to join us for a special event to learn more about your family at [name of congregation] and about the place we gather to praise God and worship.

What: A Welcome to Worship for Young Children

When: [date, beginning and ending times]

Where: [exact place]

Who should come: [parents, caregiver, grandparents, brothers, sisters]

We also invite you to attend the worship service at [church name] on [date] at [time], where a special blessing will be offered.

[Give instructions where families should meet before the worship service or where they should sit during the worship service.]

In Christ,

[Your name]

### *Making an Altar Cloth or Placemat for use at Home*

During the Cross+Generational Event, plan to have each family make placemats or an altar (table) cloth to take home.

Match the color of cloth or paper to the church year and colors displayed in church.

Provide cloth and markers for family members to use. You may also invite a group of adults to design an altar cloth to be presented to each child to use at home.



## + Appendix 3 – Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

### *Drama: Welcoming the Elephant*

**Characters:** WT, Scootch and Johann (bears) and Pinchas (elephant)

*WT makes the case for the prosecution while Scootch and Johann push for inclusion in Jesus' name! But, WT protests. They argue about whether or not Pinchas, an elephant, can join them at the table. The volunteer puppeteers show the various characters' nonverbal responses to the conversation. WT, Scootch and Johann are sitting around a table set for a fancy meal. There are scripts (like menus) in front of them.*

**Narrator:** Hey, guys, I see you have an open seat. Mind if my friend Pinchas joins you?

**Scootch:** Not at all! We're happy to have him!

**Johann:** Absolutely! Hi, Pinchas!

*(Pinchas nods, smiling, delighted to be included.)*

**WT:** Well...

**Scootch:** Be nice, WT!

**WT:** But, I don't think he belongs here.

*(Pinchas looks sad, fearful.)*

**Johann:** Why not? We have room for him!

**WT:** He's different. He's not like us.

*(Pinchas frowns.)*

**Scootch:** God created us to be different! That's a *good* thing!

*(Pinchas smiles.)*

**WT:** But, he's an elephant; this table is for *bears*.

*(Pinchas frowns.)*

**Johann:** So, he's an elephant. Jesus tells us to love *everyone*, just like God does.

*(Pinchas smiles, feeling hopeful.)*

**WT:** He's a funny color.

**Scootch:** I think it's pretty. God created that pretty color.

*(Pinchas puffs up his chest, looking proud.)*

**WT:** He can't even talk.

*(Pinchas looks sad.)*

**Johann:** Jesus loves everyone, whether they can talk or not, whether they can walk or not, whether they can see or not. My left arm used to fall off a lot, and my ear is coming loose, but that doesn't stop God from loving me!

*(Pinchas smiles broadly.)*

**WT:** He's not dressed right! He's not even *dressed*! You have to be wearing cool clothes to sit at our table.

**Scootch:** God doesn't care whether we have nice clothes. *You* get hung up on that, but it doesn't matter to God.

*(Pinchas smiles again with hope.)*

**WT:** I don't know about this. He makes me nervous. I'd better ask the kids what they think. *(WT turns to the children who are watching.)* What do you think? Should we let Pinchas sit at our table?

*(Pinchas nods to encourage the kids to say "Yes.")*

**WT:** Are you sure?

*(Pinchas gets more enthusiastic and the kids get louder.)*

**WT:** Are you absolutely positive?

*(Pinchas is all but jumping up and down and the kids are wild.)*

**WT:** Do you think that's what Jesus would do?

*(Pinchas is dancing. Kids are calling out answers.)*

**WT:** Well, okay, I guess we'll let him stay.

*(Pinchas encourages the crowd to go wild!)*

**Johann:** That's the spirit, WT!

**Scootch:** Yeah! You're finally starting to understand. There is *no limit* to God's love! All are welcome in God's house.

# + Appendix 4 – Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone

## *A Tool for Outreach:*

Milestones Ministry provides a clear and usable model for congregations, homes, and communities to connect faith formation resources with daily life experience. Outreach into the community is a major gift of Milestones Ministry. This Milestone is written with the larger community in mind and is part of a lifelong faith formation ministry that can serve and bless other people besides the immediate congregational members. As your congregational leaders make plans to implement this milestone celebration, please consider the outreach ideas presented below as ways to reach out to those in the surrounding neighborhood and bless them with the life and faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Ways to Support Faith Formation:**

- **Start early in life**  
(cross+generational and including all ages is the goal)
- **Involve faith practices**  
(the Four Keys model for practicing faith is embedded in all the resources)
- **Be relational**  
(faith is formed through personal interactions)
- **Promote Christian hospitality**  
(welcome all with food, warm greetings, and smiles)
- **Have fun, fun, fun!**  
(people thirst to return to joyful settings)
- **Involve everyone**  
(all ages doing ministry grows faith lives)

### **Using this Module as Outreach...**

- **Leads** the church to include those not immediately considered as the ones who benefit from the ministry of a local congregation
- **Adds** creative and compassionate imagination about how to reach a larger audience
- **Includes** surrounding neighborhoods and larger communities
- **Uses** social media to reach more people including family and friends living in another state or country
- **Uses** the Milestone event to reach out to those who are not present at a larger group event by providing an outline for the home

## *Suggestions for Using Within the Congregation and Beyond:*

- Invite children and their parents who have been baptized in the congregation or who have recently joined the congregation. Encourage grandparents and babysitters/caregivers to come also.
- Ask adults and teens from the congregation to serve as guides for the children and parents who are the focal point of this Milestone.
- Many congregations extend the use of their building to outside organizations during the week. Is there another congregation meeting in your building or a preschool, after-school activity, or exercise group? Invite children and their families from these organizations to participate in this Milestone. Send special invitations to them.
- Put together a newspaper article promoting the importance of children in worship (something not all church bodies endorse) and invite the larger community to come and explore the possibility of valuing children in worship.
- Identify people in the congregation who are parents, grandparents or baptismal sponsors/godparents of children not connected with the life of the congregation. Invite them to come and learn how to support the children they care for through this Milestone event.
- If your congregation has a preschool program in your building, extend an invitation to families of the preschool including grandparents and caregivers to come together and experience this Milestone event.
- If you'd like your children's friends who worship in different places (or maybe not at all) to get involved, invite families to use the Milestone Event for the Home to provide a good way to connect, stimulate conversations, and build relationships. Or place the Home piece in the hands of grandparents to do in their homes with grandchildren.