



## Children and Spirituality

Live as Children of Light

## Editor's Reflections

If it is true that our baptism by the Spirit comes long before water, then it should come as no surprise that we can practice spiritual disciplines long before we can affix names or rationales to them. Children surely don't need the theological grounding of Jonathan Edwards to experience the same attentiveness to the world around them. Moreover, their freedom in using their bodies or engaging in the artistic without embarrassment is something many an adult could stand to learn.

If you will pardon the joy of a parent hopeful that his children's relationship with God will only deepen and grow with the years, then allow me to share the wonder I experienced over the course of several weeks last year. In that short span, my wife, daughter, and son had their first two trips to the nearby Abbey of Gethsemane, the Cistercian monastery made famous by Thomas Merton (see *Hungryhearts* Fall 2002). The second visit included lunch and a long conversation with one of the monks, and inspired one child to write a first grade report on the trip, and the other to consider interviewing the monk for another assignment. Shortly thereafter I acquired a palm-sized labyrinth, leading my children and their friends to try it out (see the cover and photograph on page eight), providing an opportunity to discuss pilgrimage and the love of God in a very participatory way.

I will not deny the blessing that comes in witnessing such things, but I also cannot deny the reality that children are, and have historically been, marginalized from the life of Christian faith. I recently heard a lecture in which it was suggested that while labyrinths had once been relatively common on cathedral floors, many of them were removed because of children trodding upon them. In our day, younger children are frequently shuffled off to "children's church," often no more than a well-titled playtime. To be fair, a growing number of churches seem to be making children's church somehow more connected to "adult church" through common Scripture and a related liturgy. But even these are no substitute for common song and prayer, or the witnessing and participating in the Sacraments that in our tradition are to take place when *all* the people are gathered. As so many young adults leave the church, the message being sent may not be going over the heads of our small ones after all.

This issue of *Hungryhearts* is an opportunity for each of us, as adults, elders, and church professionals, to consider Jesus' words about being a stumbling block to any who would come to him, and to embrace the opportunity to share in the Spirit's shaping of the church that is and is yet to be. It may be trite, but it's true: children are not the future of the church; they are its present.

I have no doubt that the love of God, love of church, and love of children are present in our congregations. Consider this issue of *Hungryhearts* as one tie that binds these loves together in the service of the One who is love itself.

**"Men and women, young and old, Raise the anthem manifold;  
Join with children's songs of praise, Worship God through length of days."**

from "Let the Whole Creation Cry" Brooke and Hintze,  
*Presbyterian Hymnal* © Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

Peace,  
Steve

*The photographs on the cover and page eight are courtesy of Alicia W. Shussett.*

Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.

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# Spirituality and Children

by Carol A. Wehrheim

When children in the third grade must have complex organizers and calendars rather than folders for each subject, something is out of whack. When sixth graders are too busy to “hang out” with friends at least one day after school, something has gone wrong. When parents rush frantically to get children from soccer to Italian lessons and back home for homework, with supper in the car on the way, life has gotten out of hand. Yet, stories of schedules gone haywire are told over and over again in suburbia, in cities, and in small towns, for children as well as for adults. When communities have to declare a “stay at home with your family” night once a year, it is time to examine our priorities.

At the same time, children in North America are pushed to mature earlier and earlier, long before many of them are emotionally and cognitively ready to do so. They are expected to be at ease with adults and to act self-assured before groups of peers. Decisions are pressed upon them before their brains have developed the capacity to comprehend the consequences of their actions. Some observers claim they are children without a childhood. Others call them “hurried children.” Surely no one doubts that we need to help them and the adults in their lives cry, “Stop!”

What better place to start than to explore spirituality and children, allowing children to lead us, even as we seek to nurture them. Not to do so is to continue at our own risk. Jesus’ words to his followers are harsh, “If any one of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the seas” (Matt. 18:6). If we do not introduce and help children use the spiritual practices of the ages, have we not put stumbling blocks before them? Or at the very least have we not taken the steppingstones from their path?

## Spirituality in Children

From the hours of conversations recorded by Robert Coles in *The Spiritual Life of Children* to the anecdotes in every parent’s memory, we can be assured that children connect with God on many levels. Our task as parents or adults in their lives is not to manufacture this connection. Rather it is to help children keep that connection alive. As Betty Shannon Cloyd says in *Children and Prayer*, “If we as people of faith value our children, we will recognize that one of our most significant responsibilities is to help them stay in touch with their spiritual selves” (p. 12). And if you are worried about your capacity for doing this, take the advice of Thomas Merton to heart: “If you want a life of prayer, the way to get it is by praying... You start where you are and you deepen what you already have.” \*

If the only  
prayer we say  
in our lifetime is  
“thank you” to God,  
that will suffice.  
Meister Eckhart

In *Beach Music* by Pat Conroy, one of the main characters muses, “As a child I spoke easily with [God], but I had a gentler gift for small talk then and took myself less seriously” (p. 232). To put yourself in touch with the spirituality of children, try recalling your earliest memories of prayer or of God. Or perhaps you remember questions and comments by children in your life that revealed their spirituality.

As we think about children and spirituality, we are helped to remember that the natural curiosity and imagination of children plays an important part in their relationship with God. Being with a child can spark or renew our own curiosity and imagination, too often buried under layers of reality and years of disuse. Their questions regularly send us to deeper levels in our own thinking, and the best answer is often “What do you think?” Their fresh ideas push us to a new realization of the God who created and loves us.



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\*Quoted in M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image Books, 1982, pp. 56-57.

The awe and wonder of the young child in the world is a natural setting for prayers to the Creator. Taking advantage of such moments as when a child watches an ant carry that enormous crumb of bread across the picnic table is mystical. Putting that awe and wonder into the setting of faith is as important and natural as helping a child connect the number one with one ant. We move then from the recognition of the spirituality of children, all children, to the people who have the privilege of traveling the faith journey with them.

### Who nurtures the spirituality of children?

Each time a congregation baptizes an infant or child, the entire church accepts the responsibility of nurturing that child's spirituality or relationship with God. We are all, individually and together, either stumbling blocks or steppingstones along that child's journey of faith. How we welcome that child in worship and how that child observes the faithful life in us is the way that we fulfill the promises made at baptism.

Those who are leaders for the child, in the nursery, the church school setting, or in other ministries of the congregation, have the privilege of a personal relationship with the child, one through which we can be mentors for their spiritual journey. In those relationships, we journey together as we learn and use spiritual practices to be more present to God. Perhaps Jesus' words strike our ears even more sharply.

When we consider the place of the congregation, the role of pastors must not be overlooked. The ways they plan and lead worship can help children connect their spiritual lives and practices with the congregational life of worship and prayer. Because pastors represent not only the church but also God for young children, how they interact with and nurture children is of utmost importance.

Parents, of course, have the primary role as nurturers of their children's faith. This begins from the moment the child enters their home, if not before. Not only do parents have the opportunity to model spiritual practices for their children, they are usually the adults present when important questions are asked about God, Jesus, heaven, death, life — all the questions that point to a growing faith.

And let us not forget grandparents and other family members. They too exert far more influence than is sometimes recognized. More than one grandmother has been named when an adult has been asked about the people who led them to God both through action and words.

All of these people play important roles in developing a child's spirituality. However, none can compare to the nurturing role of the Holy Spirit. Only through the work of God's Spirit do any of us grow, or help others to grow, in our relationship with God. Whatever we might do is done in spite of us and through the work of the Spirit. With that assurance firmly in mind, let us consider what it is that we might do to nurture the spirituality of the children in our midst, whether at home or in church.

Do you,  
as members of  
the church of Jesus Christ,  
promise to guide  
and nurture these children  
by word and deed,  
with love and prayer,  
encouraging them to  
know and follow Christ  
and to be faithful  
members of his church?

The people respond:

**We do.**

Liturgy for Baptism  
*Book of Common Worship*

### Spiritual Practices for Children

The list of spiritual practices varies from expert to expert, but certainly the ones highlighted here are on everyone's list. These practices were chosen specifically because they can be incorporated into the family life and/or into church school sessions or other planned education time for children by the church. If you are a parent, some will appeal to you more because of the existing interests of your child and the routines of your family life. If you are a leader of children, you may find particular practices more intriguing because of the circumstances and content of your teaching. Children need not learn all the spiritual practices described here, and certainly not all at one time. However, children deserve to be introduced to several practices appropriate to their development so they can select those practices that are most appealing to them.

**Prayers of thanksgiving.** The first prayer a baby ought to hear is a prayer of thanksgiving prayed aloud by a parent standing over the child's crib. Having such prayers in their earliest memory prepares young children to give thanks on their own. Prayers of thanksgiving need no formal setting, and can be a single sentence giving thanks for a beautiful sunset or the colors of a butterfly. The wonder of children in the early years is a natural occasion for prayers of thanksgiving. The simplicity of those prayers can play an important part in one's prayer life at

every age. As children reach elementary school age, they can learn memorized graces. Families often have several favorite mealtime prayers, but introducing new prayers from time to time can create an occasion to talk about why and how we give thanks to God, not only at meal-times.

**Music of the faith.** The words of faith and the music of faith can be a part of a child's environment from infancy on. According to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the musical intelligence is the first one to be observed in an infant. The infant shakes an arm or leg to the rhythm of the music she or he hears. As you select music for the home nursery or the church crib room, include songs and hymns of the faith. They will become a part of the child's consciousness and memory long before the ability to understand the lyrics or mimic the melody develops. Recordings of hymns, both instrumental and with words, as well as recordings of children's songs of faith should be available in every church nursery. Some congregations give an infant being baptized a recording of music by the children's choir. This recording of music of the faith through the centuries can be played as a parent would play any music for his or her child at home or in the car. Familiarity with these songs and hymns will lead to singing them.

#### **Stories of the faith and the faithful.**

Whether parent or grandparent, pastor or church school teacher, we tell the stories of the faith (Bible stories) and of the faithful (those who have been disciples throughout the centuries) to children. From the time a child is willing to sit in your lap and listen or look at a book, a story can be told. Stories of the faith and the faithful should be as familiar to children as the stories of their family. (In the family stories, include the story of the child's baptism.) Begin telling or reading simple versions of Bible stories as soon as you begin looking at books with your toddler and continue to read the Bible together throughout childhood (and beyond). Board books with simple Bible stories should grace the shelves of the nursery and the children's library at church as well. Put Bible storybooks on a table or small bookcase outside the sanctuary for children to borrow as they enter for worship. If you are an educator or pastor, provide a list of well-done children's Bibles and Bible storybooks for parents and grandparents to purchase for Christmas or birthday presents. Every child should have easy access to books of Bible stories that are appropriate to each stage throughout childhood.

**Prayers of supplication.** The lives of young children

revolve around themselves, thus prayers of supplication naturally come as they see things and conditions that they want. These prayers, while they may change in content, never leave us. As children grow older their prayers include others, such as friends, relatives, and situations they know firsthand. As their world expands, so does the outreach of their prayer life. They pray for children in warring nations, for families without homes or food, or for someone who is sick. When these prayers seem to go unanswered, they need the adults in their lives to help them sort out the many ways that God answers prayers.

One way to encourage children to pray for others is to pray simple sentence prayers when you see someone in need. For example, if you are driving with your child and must pull over for an ambulance, pray aloud something like this: "May God bring healing to the person in the ambulance." When you are watching the news together or your child is telling you about some disaster in the world, pause for a moment to pray together for the people affected by the disaster. This recognition that God surrounds creation and that we are in God's hands is reassuring and comforting to children of all ages.

**Breath prayers.** Children at a very early age can learn about breath prayers. These prayers are whispered or said silently as you consciously breathe in and out slowly and deliberately. A simple phrase, such as "Be with me, Jesus" or "Come, Holy Spirit," accompany the breathing. For example, as you inhale, say or think the first part of the

prayer ("Be with me") and as you exhale, say or think the rest of the prayer ("Jesus"). Do this over and over as your mind clears and your body becomes peaceful. The simplicity of this prayer is the beauty of it. It can be prayed in a crowd with no one else aware that you are praying. It can be prayed to prepare for another spiritual practice. For example, you might introduce it to a child as a prelude to the mealtime grace or before a bedtime prayer.

Children of all ages, from the time they can remember the words and understand what it means to breathe in and to breathe out, can use the breath prayer. It is a spiritual practice they can take with them into any setting.

**Meditation.** Adults are often reluctant to encourage meditation with children for fear, I think, that the child's mind will drift to other topics. (As though an adult's mind never does that!) However, silence or a time of quiet reflection may be exactly what many children need and crave in their rushed and over-scheduled world. The

To sing once  
is to pray twice.  
St. Augustine

length of the meditation surely must be varied, depending upon the age of the child, and not be used as a punishment.

Begin with just a minute when you open the church school session or before the mealtime grace at your dinner table. Read a psalm or a brief passage of scripture and pause for a time of quiet reflection. Posing a simple question to ponder may help, especially when you introduce this spiritual practice. In working with groups of children, plan a guided meditation from time to time. A guided meditation gives structure to the silence while still allowing the children to imagine themselves in another setting where they meet God or Jesus. Everyone needs some time and experience to accommodate to this spiritual practice, but the most active children are the ones who frequently find meditation the most helpful.

When a situation seems overwhelming, a time of meditation may be all we, young or old, can pray. Introduce children to meditative prayer early on.

**Listening for God.** Chances are children can teach us the spiritual practice of listening for God more easily than we can teach them. Stories of hearing God's voice permeates the voices of children in Coles' *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Here is what eleven-year-old Avram said: "After I pray, I listen, and I hear God letting me know what's important and what doesn't matter half as much as I might have thought five minutes earlier.

It's not God's voice — I mean, I'm not a religious freak. It's my voice, but it's not my usual voice: it's different, it says different things, and it even sounds different! My voice is beginning to change — it cracks every once in a while, and boy, can it be embarrassing. But you know what: my voice changed years ago, going back to when I was eight or nine, and I first started thinking of God and what *He* wants, not only about me and what I want" (p. 79).

This inner voice, whether it is the voice of God or the conscience, must be nurtured. Encourage children to include silence at the end of their prayers so prayer becomes a time of speaking and listening, a practice they can draw upon at any time and in any place.

**Hospitality within the family and with the family.** In an age when civility seems to be losing ground, the spiritual practice of hospitality is sorely needed. How

children practice hospitality is not without concern, however. We teach our children to be wary of strangers, and with good reason. Yet, we want them to treat others with respect, acknowledging that each person is a child of God. The first place children encounter this practice is at home and the young child copies what she or he observes between parents. The basic rudiments of Christian hospitality is simply good manners, so teaching them to our children is a part of nurturing their faith. The same is true in how we treat one another, which includes children, in the church. Children, whether they are two or twelve, are to be welcomed for who they are, important members of the household of faith, the congregation, the church family.

Along with practicing hospitality within the family, whether at home or at church, we can provide children with opportunities to practice hospitality outside the home or church. This hospitality is found in service or mission projects. Whether a family goes to a local soup kitchen to serve a meal or the youth group arranges to rake leaves for an elderly person, children learn about hospitality by serving others. Whether a family invites the new neighbors for dessert or the kindergarten children gather supplies for a refugee family, children learn about hospitality by welcoming others.

**Examen.** The examen is a time at the end of the day when you examine the day just finished, looking for times when you felt God's presence and times when

you moved away from God's presence. For a child, you might ask about the "glads" and "sads" of the day. Thanks is given for the "glads" and the "sads" become a time for confession and asking God's forgiveness for whatever part we had in that time of sadness. With the youngest child, you might begin with "glads," progressing to the addition of "sads" when the child appears ready to do that. As the child scrolls through the day, the parent can participate in those parts of the day when parent and child were together. Examining those moments together provides space for giving thanks and asking forgiveness of one another, on the part of parent or child.

Some "sads" lead to prayers of supplication rather than confession. Eventually children prefer to do this alone or silently. As a parent, don't jump to the conclusion that your child has done something terrible and doesn't want you to know about it. The reason is more likely that your child has reached an age where privacy is important.

A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening.

Soren Kierkegaard

Church school groups can include a request for “glads” and “sads” as a part of their opening or closing prayer. Worship leaders can include children in the prayer of confession by allowing a time of silence and using language that children will understand to introduce that time. The spiritual practice of examen also provides a time for children to acknowledge God’s presence in both the good times and the bad.

**Fasting.** Although the statistics show that as a nation we, children and adults, are becoming overweight, the spiritual discipline of fasting is generally not about food for children. It is true that a modified form of fasting is often practiced during Lent when families are encouraged to give up dessert at one meal a week and donate that money to people without adequate nourishment. However, rather than concentrate on food and fasting, children in our society can participate in the spiritual discipline of fasting by examining the goods they have and want and how they spend their time. Fasting is more successful when you have the support of others; so plan a time of fasting as a family or as a church school group.

Select a common time for fasting. For example, a family might choose to turn off the television and computer on Friday evenings. That is the one part of fasting. The second part of fasting is substituting an activity that focuses on God and one’s relationship to God. Rather than watch television, a family might decide to invite a new family in the church for dinner and to play games, thus practicing the spiritual discipline of hospitality.

**Keeping sabbath.** Setting aside a time free of work, homework, and other responsibilities is as important for children as it is for adults. When families are able to keep a sabbath time together, family life is enriched beyond words. With the schedules of most families, this is no easy task. An evening or half a day once a month is a good way to begin. Worshiping together on Sunday morning and then doing something together that afternoon is one way to keep sabbath. What works for a few months may have to be adjusted, but finding this time will help your children know and remember that God is finally in charge and through your sabbath time you acknowledge that.



## Conclusion

Children are spiritual; we do not give them spirituality. The task of the church and parents is to accept and nurture that spirituality from the earliest age. As we do that, our spiritual lives will grow and be renewed as well. While there are many spiritual practices, some fit more naturally with the lives and developmental stages of children. In the church and in the home, appropriate spiritual practices can be introduced and used. Children learn by doing and accept as important that which they see us doing. Teaching our children a mealtime grace, but never praying at a meal ourselves suggests that such prayers are for children only. Thus, through participating in spiritual practices with children, we discover the many ways to enrich our relationship with God. At the same time, we develop a keener awareness of God’s Spirit among us. ☺

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# A Developmental Perspective on Spiritual Practices

by Kris Haig

Studies of human development have much to teach us about children's readiness for different types of prayer and spiritual practices. Specifically, the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget in children's cognitive development and Erik Erikson in psycho-social development provide fascinating insights to consider in relation to nurturing the spiritual lives of children.

Although children develop at their own pace, and the stages are not inflexible, still there are predictable patterns of development in cognitive, emotional, psychological and social ability. Specific forms of prayer may be particularly relevant to one developmental stage, or inappropriate at another. For

example, the imaginative forms of praying with Scripture would not be possible for those under three years of age but would be very appealing to preschool children who are exploring their newly found capacity for imaginative play. Similarly,

older elementary school children are much concerned with rules and values, and would benefit from being exposed to spiritual practices connected with issues of justice, conscience, and "choosing for good."

Because we are all made uniquely, with different combinations of the multiple intelligences, there is no one "right way" to pray that is fruitful for everyone, and one of the tasks of adolescence and adulthood is to discover what "works" for oneself. Do more active or imaginative forms of prayer lead to greater openness to God and faithful discipleship than the classical forms of quiet, solitary prayer? What specific prayer activities are effective in

cultivating a state of interior stillness and attentiveness to God?

In exploring possibilities for the nurture of children's spiritual lives, it is important not to be limited to the traditional forms of prayer such as spoken grace at meals and bedtime prayers, but to explore spiritual practices that happen in community with others as well as in more solitary settings, practices that are active and use all the senses and capacities of our physical bodies, practices that are grounded in compassion for others, and practices that invite us to "rest in God" through contemplation and quietness.



Practices are cumulative. We never outgrow our capacity to be nurtured by being held and lovingly touched, or by wordlessly noticing the world around us as signs of the presence of the Creator, or for appreciating play as an opportunity for

encountering the sacred. As children mature, new practices should be added so that the repertoire expands, but earlier practices should continue to be valued. (And we adults would do well to let the little children teach us some of them that we have forgotten!)

Finally, we must always bear in mind that the goal of teaching the spiritual disciplines is not to raise up experts or spiritual gurus, but to help children to know God deeply as a loving and ever-present companion and guide, to delight in the unfolding of their lives in the presence of God, and to live joyful lives of service.



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**STAGE** Infancy and Toddler  
**AGE** Birth to 18 months  
**SOCIALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE** mother or primary caregiver  
**DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS** trust; belonging; learning by doing  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES and MESSAGES** “God cherishes me.”  
 Receiving love through being held, sung to, read to, and prayed over.

**STAGE** Early Childhood  
**AGE** 18 months to 3 years  
**SOCIALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE** parents  
**DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS** autonomy; self-control  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES and MESSAGES** “God is everywhere. I can use all my senses to explore and learn about God.”  
 Exercises in awareness and noticing; “lectio” on objects; active prayer such as body prayer and prayer walks; simple rituals; talking to God honestly.

**STAGE** Preschool  
**AGE** 3 to 6 years  
**SOCIALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE** basic family  
**DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS** initiative; agency  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES and MESSAGES** “I can use my imagination and my mind to understand God.”  
 Listening to stories, including family faith stories. Entering Bible stories in imagination. Beginning spiritual friendships. Corporate worship.

**STAGE** Elementary School  
**AGE** 6 to 12 years  
**SOCIALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE** school; neighborhood  
**DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS** industry; values; concrete thinking  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES and MESSAGES** “God desires the well-being of all people, and will help me use my mind and feelings to learn how to live rightly.”  
 Participating in acts of hospitality and justice. Practicing spiritual discernment through “examen” and other prayer practices.

**STAGE** Adolescence  
**AGE** 12 to 20 years  
**SOCIALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE** peers  
**DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS** identity; vocation; abstract thinking  
**SPIRITUAL PRACTICES and MESSAGES** “My deepest joy in life is to discover my True Self and be the person God has made me to be.”  
 Discernment of gifts and call through prayer and reflection. Spiritual friendships. Testing particular practices for personal meaning and fruitfulness.



# IDEAS! for Children in Worship

by Martha Moore-Keish

When we present our children for baptism, we give them up to God to be formed in the image of Christ. Worship is the primary place where all of us are formed in Christ's image and drawn into his ministry of love, peace, and justice. But how do we shape worship so that it will, in turn, shape our children in this way?

First, we need to recognize that not every element of worship will engage every worshiper equally. But every worship service should strive to engage worshipers of every age in some way, and worshipers of every age should have some sense of the whole movement of worship. Here are some concrete things to consider in planning worship to engage even the youngest members of the body of Christ:

**Sing!** Congregational singing forms children bodily into patterns of breathing together and making melody. It also forms memory so that children can recall the language of hymns in times when they are far from a church or a hymnbook. A congregation that sings with joy (or with genuine sorrow) and without self-consciousness shows a child that this is the appropriate way to express oneself to God. A congregation that is embarrassed about singing or self-conscious about not being able to do it well communicates to a child that God is more concerned about how good we sound than about our honest attempts to praise the Lord. Consider introducing new worship songs to children and letting them teach those songs to the whole congregation; in this way, you can involve children in worship leadership even as you expand the congregation's musical repertoire.

**Engage all of the senses in worship.** In preparing worship, consider how to incorporate movement for the congregation. Consider introducing simple gestures at prayer (such as raising hands or placing palms together). Plan processions on feast days such as Easter and Pentecost, or on All Saints' Day. Make use of visual imagery appropriate to your worship space, and involve the children in creating art for various times in the liturgical year. Consider how even the sense of smell might be engaged in worship: could you imagine using incense for an evening worship service? Or having bread baking during a communion service to infuse the sanctuary with its smell?

**Use biblical language as much as possible:** in calls to worship, in congregational responses, in prayers, in hymns and choral anthems, as well as in the reading of Scripture. In these ways, children learn the Bible not just as an object of study, but as the language of the people


of God. If we want them to understand the world through the lens of the Christian story, we need to use that language as our native tongue in worship.

**Repeat, repeat, repeat!** Children are able to participate more fully in worship if there are some repeated elements from week to week. For instance, regular recitation of the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer teaches children the language of faith before they understand it fully. This gives children vocabulary that will later inform their questions and give them support in times of crisis. It also enables them to be full members of the body of Christ, joining the rest of the body in offering prayer and praise to God.

**Connect church worship with worship in the home.** Encourage families to read the Scripture lessons and sing hymns that will be sung in worship during the week so that when they come to worship, children recognize the stories and the songs and can participate more fully. Worship leaders can assist families by listing readings and hymns for the upcoming week in the Sunday bulletin or in a weekly newsletter.

Here are some new resources to help as you prepare worship that engages people of all ages:

*Belonging to God: Catechism Resources for Worship.* Produced by the Office of Theology and Worship and published by Geneva Press, 2003. ISBN 0-664-50236-9. Drawing from the language of the Belonging to God catechism, this book includes suggestions for involving all the children of God fully in worship. It includes liturgical texts, stories for sermons that appeal to children, art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson, and a new musical setting of the Lord's Prayer by John Horman that can be sung by the congregation or children's choir.

*Children in the Sanctuary: Involving Children Fully in the Worship Life of a Congregation.* \$29.95. Six one-hour study sessions. Video and study guide: 70-250-02-923; DVD and study guide: 70-250-02-924 To order call 800-524-2612. 

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Martha Moore-Keish is currently teaching liturgical studies at Yale Divinity School and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. In the summer of 2004, she will become Assistant Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. She has also appeared in the Spring and Winter 2003 issues of *Hungryhearts*. For more information on this subject, contact Paul Galbreath, Associate for Worship, at (888) 728-7228, ext. 5311, or pgalbrea@ctr.pcusa.org. This article is reprinted by permission of *Ideas! for Church Leaders*. (3:1 Fall 2003), published by Congregational Ministries Publishing/Marketing, a division of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

## Give us a Word

by Bill Mangrum



*Getting It Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family and Work.*  
Carol A. Wehrheim, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

*The Family Cloister: Benedictine Wisdom for the Home.*  
David Robinson, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

*The Christian Family Toolbox: 52 Benedictine Activities for the Home.*  
David Robinson, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001.

Readers of *HungryHearts* will already know that spirituality, in the Christian tradition, is a gift, even as we are formed into the image of Christ. Spirituality isn't a commodity to be purchased and stored, but rather the fruit of our daily living into the call of God coming through Jesus Christ. In response — by taking up habitual practices, specific disciplines and regular routines — our souls are shaped such that we become more and more like Jesus. The Apostle Paul says it nicely, “we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

These two authors, Carol Wehrheim, a noted Presbyterian Educator living in Princeton, NJ, and David Robinson, a Presbyterian pastor serving a small church on the Oregon coast, offer two different schedules for our transformation. Their differences are many as they draw upon varied Christian streams of thought, embody different life experiences, and write from opposite coasts for different audiences. Let's listen to each in turn as they describe their own books.

In *Getting It Together*, Carol Wehrheim states,

**This book is written specifically for Christians and begins with the assumption that, whatever our situation, we must begin by building a firm foundation of faith. The struggle to maintain a balanced life, a life of creative rather than destructive tension, will always be with us. To live with that tension, we are wise to make time for growing with God our priority. This book is designed to help you make time with God productive through Bible study and specific spiritual disciplines** (page 3).

In *The Family Cloister*, David Robinson writes,

**This book is a practical guide to spiritual parenting intended to encourage you in your holy calling as a parent. In our family we are striving to live life together within the family cloister. Like a walled garden, the family cloister is an enclosure, within which family life can grow and mature. God, the Master Gardener, invites us to come into this garden and take up residence there with our family** (page 14).

Wehrheim writes with the hope that families with children will use her book, but she isn't writing specifically for families. As she writes she imagines two fictional groups: a family of four in a mid-size city, and three older women drawn together through participation in a large congregation. Each chapter begins with little vignettes sketching their struggles and modest successes at *Getting It Together*. Through them we see the author's intentions for our families and our circle of friends. As they work to assimilate the author's presentation from chapter to chapter so are we given hints of what *Getting It Together* might mean for us.

Wehrheim is an accomplished curriculum writer and *Getting It Together* reveals why. In five successive chapters of modest length she explores (1) the foundations we lay, (2) the choices we make, (3) the actions we take, (4) the problems we face, and (5) the perseverance we need. Each chapter begins with a brief Scripture study, then develops a central theme and recommends a particular exercise designed to bring the lesson home. Wehrheim concludes each chapter with a succinct summary and a specific spiritual discipline chosen to complement the chapter. Spiritual disciplines, she adds, “are essential to a vibrant faith, a faith that will sustain us in this tense, hurried world” (page 3).

Of particular interest to readers of *HungryHearts* is the author's thoughtful inclusion of a 65 page Leader's Guide, making it longer than the body of the text. Thus the book really works best as a curriculum for a retreat, a weekly small group for parents, or a five-week Sunday School class. Wehrheim includes overhead masters, charts and study questions, materials list, activities and worship litanies. She wants you to work her book through in community, and has given you all

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the tips and tools you need to do so. She makes it possible for any church member to lead *Getting It Together*.

*The Family Cloister* and *The Christian Family Toolbox* are wholly different books as Robinson works specifically out of his immersion in Benedictine spirituality. As a frequent pilgrim on retreat at monasteries, Robinson observed that *The Rule of Benedict*, written to guide a community of monks, could be adapted to provide “spiritual guidance for our family.” He writes, “Life together in a family is hard work. There are no shortcuts to true community. The only way into true community is through the daily tools and tasks of living together, being real before one another and before God. Benedictine monks have been living this way for the better part of fifteen hundred years. Benedictine families are families of compassion, spiritual maturity and growth” (*Toolbox*, page 13).

Robinson’s books for our families are inspired by this ancient rule and the “monastic families” shaped by it. *The Family Cloister* is the primary text of the two, and each of its seven chapters is nicely matched by chapters identically titled in *The Christian Family Toolbox*. The former work provides the substance of Benedictine spirituality “on behalf of the modern family” while the latter work provides one activity per week for bringing the family together around a specific theme (for example, reconciliation, trust, and silence) or task (kitchen duty, cleaning the closet, and washing clothes, among others). In both books the author moves successively from inward to outward living, guiding his readers through different facets of family life, ranging from spirituality, discipline, health, service and growth. Robinson provides plenty of activities, examples and inspirational thoughts to bring us along. I especially appreciated his faithfulness to St. Benedict and his careful, insightful re-working of the rule for *The Family Cloister*. If monks, *The Rule of Benedict*, and a passion for the church year appeal to you, and you desire to share these spiritually formative interests with your children, these two books are for you.

As in *Getting It Together*, so it is in *The Family Cloister*: the emphasis falls on doing, and doing in community. What we fail to practice together, we fail to learn together. This is especially true with regard to nurturing our Christian commitments as families and equally true with regard to “traditioning” the Christian faith to our children. These authors know that a child’s soul is precious and we ought not to simply abandon them to the world until they are old enough to make up their own minds. By then their souls will be severely damaged.

Mentoring our children’s faith, shaping their spirituality, forming them as living disciples of Jesus and not merely as automatons of doctrine, will take courage. As Robinson says, “If we are courageous enough to walk in the wisdom-way... we will find rest, renewal, and refreshment for our souls, our families and our world.” ❧

## A Note to Parents

The Bible is a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. For Christians, the Bible is the story of God’s people, but its plot development may also be experienced as the story of each one of us. God makes us; we are alienated from him; he tirelessly pursues us, choosing us, loving us, helping us, disciplining us, calling us into the wilderness and then into the promised land. We experience betrayal, exile, loss and pain; God comes, in person, into our lives, bringing judgment, grace, and new life; he asks us to carry that grace into the world; and, at last, he comes again, finishing his work in us and bringing us home to himself in glory.

Rarely, however, do we convey the wholeness of this story to our children. We treat the Bible as a jumble of little stories, which we package as “lessons.” We belabor them; we ask children to apply them intellectually to their own lives and experiences, and to do this for our approval. They learn that what we want is for them to draw some nugget of meaning from the story: “This is what the Bible tells me about God,” or more often, “This is how God wants me to behave (which is also how the grownups want me to behave, though they don’t behave that way very often themselves).” Bibles and Sunday School materials for children today rarely include the end of the story: the end of the world, the end of our own lives. Yet all children crave endings—especially happy endings, where the prince marries the princess and everyone lives happily ever after. The Bible has such an ending, and we celebrate it in our worship, as we speak of Christ’s coming again in glory; but with children, we act as if it did not exist.

Suppose we treated other stories the way we treat the Bible? Suppose we told the story of Cinderella in separate installments, in the wrong order, without the ending, and then asked our children to tell us what it meant for them—what they learned about life from this story? Would we be surprised if they were first baffled, then bored, and finally scornful? We need to stop being so solemn about the Bible, and let ourselves and our children meet it as the powerful story it is—beginning, middle, and happily ever after. ❧

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By Gretchen Wolff Pritchard. ©1988 All rights reserved. THE SUNDAY PAPER [www.the-sunday-paper.com](http://www.the-sunday-paper.com) She is also the author of *Offering the Gospel to Children*, published in 1992 by Cowley Publications. *The Sunday Paper* is a weekly lectionary supplement currently based on the Episcopal schedule, with a version based on the Revised Common Lectionary in progress.



For more ideas on praying with children,  
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## A Time to Pray

Watch for the **2004 Lenten devotional** by

the Rev. Chris Moore-Keish of Hamden, Connecticut. This year it is structured around the Heidelberg Catechism. It can be downloaded for free from our website:

[www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation)

It's also not too late to begin a daily devotional for this year. Particularly relevant to children and spirituality is

*Making Time for God: Daily Devotions for Children and Families to Share* by Susan R. Garrett & Amy Platinga Pauw. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2002.

"Rarely do we find a piece so sensitive to children, evangelical in the best sense, and theologically engaging yet approachable by non-theologians.... It's a must!"

- The Rev. Bill Mangrum, Mendocino Presbyterian Church in Mendocino, California.

### Others worth a look:

Bernard Bangley, *Rooted in Faith: Meditations from the Reformers*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003.

John Calvin, *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms*. Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.

Thomas P. McDonnell, *Through the Year with Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations from His Writings*. Garden City, NY: 1985.

Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. ☞



## Oblates of St. Benedict

*Living the monastic life insofar as one is able*

The Protestant critique of monasticism was a necessary corrective to excesses of the day. The many reforms that took place within the monastic community itself are evidence of that. Yet one must wonder if, even as Luther and Calvin sought not a break with the established church but a reformation of it, whether a modified monasticism might have been acceptable. Despite the reformers' rejection of the monastic way of life, it has been preserved, with adaptations, within Roman Catholicism, and to some extent by the Anglican (Episcopalian) and the Orthodox Churches.

Monasteries represent a commitment to living in community, to work, and to daily scripture and prayer. Life in a monastery is highly regulated and structured, and to some may seem restrictive, escapist and inactive. For a growing number of Protestants, however, the monastic lifestyle represents a discipline leading to personal spiritual growth and devotion. There is a renewed appreciation for these basic building blocks to the practice and dissemination of peace, justice, and non-violence. As such, a monastic life style emerges as altogether relevant as a valid Christian response to our contemporary world situation.

While the number of monks is declining, church members and ministers are affiliating themselves with monasteries while remaining in the world. Such people are known as oblates, from the word "oblation" or sacrifice [see the Summer 2003 issue of *Hungryhearts*, "Daily Prayer"].

In my particular case, it is through a local Benedictine monastery that I have chosen to make my formal association. I have been accepted for a one-year trial period prior to my final commitment. I have dedicated myself to study and to follow the *Rule* of Saint Benedict, which in addition to its clear regulations for communal living also sets a standard for daily reading of Scripture and prayer. It invites followers to "not live as everyone else does" as evidence of God's continuing sanctification of our lives.

The motivation to associate with a monastery comes from a renewal of the contemplative lifestyle of personal devotion and spiritual growth. Serious intent to live the Christian life, to growth and to a Christ-centered perspective in all of life are characteristics of the contemplative Christian. This devotion has led some into the spirit of the monastery as an oblate.

I suspect that many readers of *Hungryhearts* have become oblates, or find themselves drawn to the possibility. I would like to propose the development of a support system among oblates or those considering affiliation with a religious order to identify, encourage, and share our practice with each other, or simply to share information with those who are interested. If you have ideas as to the nature of such an association, the form you would like to see it take, and the functions you believe would be of value to you, please let me know. This association of Presbyterian oblates is in the most formative stages of development and all input will be valuable.

The Rev. Robert H. Barnes  
bobb@pcusa.org

## Summer Sabbaths

Led by Kris Haig

July 19 – 25; Ghost Ranch, NM

and

August 15 – 20; Lake Tahoe, NV

### A Companions on the Inner Way Conference

This summer offers two opportunities to “come away and rest awhile” in some of the most gorgeous spiritual landscapes in North America – Ghost Ranch Presbyterian conference center in Abiquiu, New Mexico, and Zephyr Point Presbyterian conference center on Lake Tahoe on the Nevada-California border.

Both conferences will both provide a chance to explore together how we can recover God’s gift of sabbath rest despite the cultural and psychological forces that foster a lifestyle of workaholism and drivenness. Bible study and theological reflection will be accompanied by creative worship experiences, ample time for personal sabbath, and small group sharing.

The Companions on the Inner Way conference continues the tradition of over twenty years of spiritual retreats originally sponsored by San Francisco Theological Seminary and led formerly by Morton Kelsey and Howard Rice. The conference includes time each morning spent in *lectio divina* groups, and daily Eucharist led by Jeff Gaines and a marvelous team of musicians and liturgists. This summer marks the first Companions conference being co-sponsored by Seventh Avenue Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, the Office of Spiritual Formation of the PC(USA), and San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Keynote speaker for both conferences will be Kris Haig, associate for spiritual formation and former editor of *Hungryhearts*.

For more information about the Ghost Ranch conference see their web site at [www.ghost ranch.org](http://www.ghost ranch.org).

For information about Companions on the Inner Way contact Joan Currey at [jcurrey@sfts.edu](mailto:jcurrey@sfts.edu).

### Special Invitation for Members of the Spiritual Formation Leadership Network

Members of the Spiritual Formation Leadership Network are especially encouraged to attend one (or both!) of these conferences, and will be offered a chance to meet with other Presbyterians who are engaged in ministries of spiritual formation such as retreat leadership or offering spiritual direction, as well as to learn about the “big picture” of spiritual formation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and what is happening nationwide.

As a special enticement, scholarship assistance is available to members of the Leadership Network who wish to attend either the Ghost Ranch or the Companions on the Inner Way conference.

For more information on the Leadership Network check our web site at:

[www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/sfln.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/sfln.htm)

Or contact Cathy Duncan at 888-728-7228 ext 5306 or by e-mail to [cduncan@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:cduncan@ctr.pcusa.org), or Kris Haig at (888) 728-7228 x5305 or by e-mail to [khaig@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:khaig@ctr.pcusa.org).