

## NOT ME, NOT ANYMORE

I received an email from an amazing mother of two preschool children, pregnant with her third child. When her oldest daughter was two and sad that there wasn't Sunday school for her, she started a birth to three-year old class for parents and their young children in her congregation. As they participated in ECFE in their school district, she saw how many families did not attend church and how great the need was for support, information, opportunity, and encouragement in faith formation for very young children. She writes, "I do believe it is the congregation's ministry to not only support these young children, but their families to build the faith. Often parents are young or young in faith and need the support, including validation of the effort they have made to get to church."

Currently, she is trying to enlist volunteers to help this fall, since she will be very pregnant and have a newborn, as well as two other children. Several times, she has heard the objection, "I'm past that stage of life. I'm not helping with that." Clearly, the message is "Not me. Not anymore." "I did that when my kids were young." "Now it is someone else's turn." "Ministry to children has nothing to do with me." She wrote, asking for advice on how to respond.

I loved the request, and I am persuaded that the responses lie in scripture and in living our baptismal promises. Here is how I replied:

- God has no retirement plan from passing on faith to the next generations. Read the bible cover to cover, and you'll find no permission to stop doing this for God's children.
- Jesus' last words to disciples then and now were to "Go, make disciples." And he wasn't kidding!
- Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."
- Jesus was also clear that God sent children into our lives to teach us lessons. Responding to his disciples' question about who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus, placing a child into the midst of his disciples, said, "Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."
- Psalm 78 is clear that God's plan is for us to tell the story of God: "[W]e will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done ... which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."
- Research in faith maturity tells us that it is our older adults who are statistically more likely to have a mature Christian faith, one they can pass on to the children AND to their parents!
- We all make promises when babies are baptized, to support the child's faith formation and the child's family. We need to keep those promises!
- Each and every adult Christian is called to be a faith parent for God's children.

Now ... and every day of our lives, it is our turn. Ready, set, go, make disciples!

#### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. If you are an adult whose children are raised and launched or who has never lived with children, find a family in your congregation and learn their names, greet them by name, and get to know them.
2. If they are members or visitors in your congregation, offer to sit with them in worship, volunteer to help keep kids engaged in worship.
3. If you are a family with young children, look for older adults and introduce yourselves. Don't begin by assuming that they will find your children a distraction or a bother. Get to know one another, intentionally.
4. If you do not currently live with young children, volunteer to help in ministries for them. Do a story hour. Help with VBS. Teach Sunday school. Donate a bible for a child.
5. Encourage parents with young children to worship together. Smile at kids in worship. With the parent's permission, have sugarless gum or a little pad of paper and pencil to offer the child during worship. Thank their parents for keeping their baptismal promise to bring their child to worship in God's house. Tell them that this is what your church family is supposed to look and sound like.