LENTEN FAMILY ACTIVITIES 2020

Sandy Prouty, Minister of Children and Families
Dear Parents,

As we move through these days impacted by the coronavirus, so much is being written and shared and quickly. I assume you have received as least as much information as I have from many, many sources. I’m writing to add my voice to the chorus and I hope this email is helpful in a couple of ways. I hope the suggestions themselves are of value and I hope that sharing these will inspire your own and new thoughts about the way forward with your children.

First, I think it is very important to keep talking with your children about the virus, the changes it is causing, and the emotions they may be feeling. This could be a good time to again realize how smart our children are and how much they absorb from watching us. Even the very young often act out the emotions we think we are hiding from them. How then should you prepare for conversations with your capable and sensitive children about hard subjects including this virus? First you need to take care of yourself, find ways to process your emotions and develop a spiritual practice. You might find it helpful to set aside even a small amount of time each day to be alone with your thoughts. This could be time enough to say a prayer releasing your concerns and fears to God. Your prayer could be as simple as “Help me,” and “Thank you.” As many of you may know, these are the prayers that Anne Lamott, a well-known author, deems the only ones ever necessary. You could do a simple breath prayer by saying the same few words on each breath in and other words on each breath out. An example is “Be with me now” on each breath in and “God of grace” on each out breath. You can make this prayer your own with words that touch your heart and connect you to God. You could do a version of this with your children.

Another key to our conversations with our children is to be honest and age-appropriate. Asking your children questions and using their answers to guide you is one way to be sure you are sharing the right amount of both general and specific information. It is important not to get ahead of their developmental capacity or curiosity. You might ask if they know why people are staying home more now; why church is on the computer; or if they have noticed everyone standing farther apart.

Beyond these questions and answers be sure to use accurate vocabulary in age-appropriate amounts. Younger children could learn the meaning of virus and the name coronavirus. Older children could be given the meaning of novel virus, community spread, social distancing, flattening the curve, pandemic, epidemiology. You and your older, interested children could find out more about related careers, research institutions, scientific methods used. Try to stay in tune with your children and their interest all along the way.

In terms of frequency, you are the best person to know how often to have these conversations. The use of questions can help you know if your children are interested, curious, upset, needing more facts or not. Body language can be helpful too!

Beyond conversation there are many implications of the social distancing requirement that will be part of the new normal for your family. As we distance to protect others, we are very fortunate to have many ways to connect with friends and relatives. Skyping grandparents and friends will help when in- person visits and play dates are being discouraged. Involve your children in sending emails and making phone calls also.

Family activities will help with the new togetherness! Mapping out daily schedules for parents’ virtual work and children’s needs is a new equation to solve. It also provides many opportunities to
be creative! I can imagine story times, family art projects, family dance parties, family prayers built into your life together in new times and places. Our Montview @Home services could be another focus for family creativity!

In closing, I’d like to suggest reading from the Bible with your children often now. Most children’s Bibles have wonderful artwork and familiar language. The Family Story Bible by Ralph Milton and The Usborne Children’s Bible are two I would recommend. There are also many beautiful picture books related to scripture. On Morning Wings by Reeve Lindbergh and To Every Thing There is a Season by Leo and Diane Dillon are two that seem quite appropriate for these times.

As I’ve been writing this email, I’ve been holding all of you in my mind and heart. I admire you and your children. I believe in you as we face these challenging times. I give thanks that you are part of the Montview faith community. You are in my prayers for peace, joy, good health and hope. I will write again soon.

Trusting in God,

[Signature]
Dear Parents,

I would like to share some resources that I hope are helpful. These are sources of coloring sheets and coloring/story sheets that you can use at home during these weeks when the church is closed. My caution is to always preview these before you pass them along to your children. Older children might still enjoy coloring or reading the story to younger siblings. Older children could look up the story in the Bible and compare the language.

Dltk-Bible.com has Bible coloring pages available for printing. There is a category for Apostles and one for Jesus’ Parables. These are good categories for the Lenten season.

Gospellight.com has images to color with the Bible story on the back. These are the sheets we use during childcare. There are some pages from The Bible Story Coloring Pages book available to print online and The Bible Story Coloring Pages book is available to order from Amazon. The Bible Story Coloring Pages #2 is also available from Amazon but many stories are repeated. The pictures are a bit different so you may want both collections. You can focus on the New Testament with these pages also.

Another recommendation would be this beautifully written and illustrated book: Parables: Stories Jesus Told by Mary Hoffman and Jackie Morris.

I hope you are doing well and making your way through all the adjustments of these times. It seems that we need to re-think and re-center several times a day. Please take care of yourselves and your precious children. We are all joined in faith, hope and love even though we are not sharing time here at the church. Please remember that God is as near as your next breath, your next thought, your next prayer. Here is a verse of Psalm 121 that I turn to often.

I lift up my eyes to the hills –
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
Psalm 121: 1-2

I’ll write again soon. In the meantime, if you have books, websites, activities or any other resources you would like to share, email me and I’ll include them!

Peace and grace to all of you!

Kandy Drouty
Let’s Take a Walk – Suggestion #1

Each week during the season of Lent you will receive an email from me with a “ambulatio divina” or sacred walking suggestion. I actually made up the name for these simple family walks as a spiritual practice. Each suggestion includes a setting and things on which to focus. The sacredness will flow from your family being together; your awareness of the setting; your ambling, unrushed pace; and your conversation about beauty and love. Although the suggestions will be weekly, the experiences need not be done exactly as suggested or in any particular order. The hope is to make time for this spiritual practice each week while keeping these suggestions in mind.

The first suggestion is a walk in an open space. Pastor Clover spoke of a space in eastern Washington in her sermon last Sunday. Open spaces in Stapleton come to mind as similar places of few trees and huge skies. I know there are several you could choose. As Pastor Clover mentioned, these environments can bring a space to our minds and hearts and taking a walk there can make spaces in our schedules; our to do lists; our goal-driven lives for greater awareness of nature and God’s countless blessings.

This walk gives your family time in nature without games or imposed activities, without scoring or skiing. The benefits of this free time in nature have been well-documented for all ages. This can be space and time filled with values we want for our children.

So take a walk in an open space. Take deep breaths and do some careful noticing. Maybe your family will see a particular plant or animal to talk about. Maybe there will be clouds to notice. Maybe there will be pictures to imagine in the clouds or weather changes to predict from them.

This sacred walking calls us to slow down and be grateful for the beauty around us. Walking together calls us to say the things to each other we may not have had time to mention in the rush of our days and weeks. “I love you.” “I’m really glad you are part of my life.” “You are one of my favorite people in the whole world.” “I’m so happy that we can share the good times and any hard times that might come.” “I admire you and learn from you every day.” “I thank God for you!”

A related scripture: We give thanks to you, O God;
We give thanks; your name is near.
People tell of your wondrous deeds.
Psalm 75: 1

A related prayer: Dear God,
We thank you for this time to be together. We thank you for the beauty of your creation. Please help us to show our love for each other and our love for the earth in many ways in the week ahead.
We pray in the name of Jesus, your son.
Amen.

Enjoy and be glad together!

Kandy Frody
Let’s Take a Walk – Suggestion #2

Each week during the season of Lent you will receive an email from me with a “ambulatio divina” or sacred walking suggestion. I actually made up the name for these simple family walks as a spiritual practice. Each suggestion includes a setting and things on which to focus. The sacredness will flow from your family being together; your awareness of the setting; your ambling, unrushed pace; and your conversation about beauty and love. Although the suggestions will be weekly, the experiences need not be done exactly as suggested or in any particular order. The hope is to make time for this spiritual practice each week while keeping these suggestions in mind.

This week the suggestion is a walk in a place with evergreen and deciduous trees. I know there are many you could choose. A walk among the trees is a spiritual practice of wonder and gratitude. Noting the height of the trees; the texture of the bark and needles; the deciduous leave buds hinting of spring. The deciduous trees go through an annual cycle of loss and new life. The buds and tiny new leaves of spring, the green leaves of summer, the colored leaves of fall and the bare branches of winter are icons for the life stages of all nature and the many changes of our own lives. The life of these trees can remind us of the beauty and interesting details of God's creation and the reality of many dyads in our own lived experience: good days and bad ones; easy times and challenging ones; crises and adjustment; sickness and healing; beginnings and endings; birth and death as our extended families grow and change. A beautiful book entitled Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen uses precise illustrations and simple words to normalize this cycle for all living things. It can be a good resource for grief work with children also.

This walk again gives your family time in nature without games or imposed activities, without scoring or skiing. The benefits of this free time in nature have been well-documented for all ages. This can be space and time filled with values we want for our children.

So take a walk in a wooded place. Take deep breaths and do some careful noticing. Maybe your family could collect pinecones or fallen bark for a family nature sculpture. All you would need to add is glue, lots of glue, and more together time!

This Lenten walking practice calls us each week to slow down and be grateful for the beauty around us. Walking together calls us to say the things to each other we may not have had time to mention in the rush of our days and weeks. “I love you.” “I’m really glad you are part of my life.” “You are one of my favorite people in the whole world.” “I’m so happy that we can share the good times and any hard times that might come.” “I admire you and learn from you every day.” “I thank God for you!” This practice can also give us time to talk about our family’s plan to live more sustainably. You could make a list of goals for the beauty of the earth together when you get home after a walk.

A related scripture: Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, . . .

1 Chronicles 16:33

A related prayer: Have every family member name one thing for which they are thankful. You can add trees, parks, time together, if not mentioned by others. End with: “Our family says, Amen!”

Lenten Blessings,

[Signature]
Let’s Take a Walk – Suggestion #3

In the course of our “Let’s Take a Walk” series so much has changed. I am sending this third suggestion and know that you will tailor it to our social distancing reality as we now protect our neighbors and ourselves.

Again here is the background for this Lenten practice. Each week during the season of Lent you will receive an email from me with an “ambulatio divina” or sacred walking suggestion. I actually made up the name for these simple family walks as a spiritual practice. Each suggestion includes a setting and things on which to focus. The sacredness will flow from your family being together; your awareness of the setting; your ambling, unrushed pace; and your conversation about beauty and love. Although the suggestions will be weekly, the experiences need not be done exactly as suggested or in any particular order. The hope is to make time for this spiritual practice each week while keeping these suggestions in mind.

This week the suggestion is a walk near water like the lake at City Park. I know there are many places you could choose. A walk near water is a walk near its mystery. This fluid that is so necessary is also so beautiful. It is beautiful in its own color and in the reflections it provides. It can be beautiful with the textures of ripples and waves and their accompanying melody. Walking near water inspires listening and seeing and maybe even splashing in gratitude!

So take a family walk near water. Enjoy the way it looks and maybe the way it feels. Enjoy finding what floats and what sinks in water. You could talk about where the water you are near came from - mountain snow or metro rain. You could talk about how important it is to have clean water and how grateful we are for it. You could talk about the helpers who keep track of the water supply and provide and maintain pipes for it to travel through to the faucets at our houses. You could talk as a family about ways to conserve this important resource.

You could also talk about water as an important part of our baptism sacrament. Baptism is one of the two sacraments of the Presbyterian Church. Communion is the other. Sacraments are actions taken as Jesus did during his time here on earth. We repeat his baptism and we repeat his last meal with the ordinary substances of water, juice and bread and a traditional liturgy with ancient words from the New Testament of our Bible. Sacraments are ways we make some of the invisible things of our faith visible. We can see God’s love and grace when Pastor Clover and Pastor Ian baptize someone. We can see the love and faith of our congregation during baptisms. Repeating words and actions that date back thousands of years connect us with the faithful of the past and of the future.

Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22 describe the baptism of Jesus. Older children might be interested in comparing these passages. Children may have questions about why we don’t have baptisms at a river or lake. Some churches do but the sanctuary is our place. The water in the baptism font represents the water of the Jordan River.


After your walk, your family could do an art project with water. Watercolor paints are fun and illustrate the movement of water, even movement you would not choose when you are painting. Watercolor pencils are another great way to explore what water and color can do. Your artwork
could be a thank you to God for water. Maybe you could make a refrigerator art gallery to display your pictures. In these times it might be valuable to share photos of your walk, your art making, your art gallery with those you love. You could also FaceTime people important to your family and share all of this with them.

As with our other Lenten walk suggestions, this walk gives your family time in nature without games or imposed activities, without scoring or skiing. The benefits of this free time in nature have been well-documented for all ages. This can be space and time filled with values we want for our children. This can be a space and time to tell your children how much you love them and love being with them. You can all give thanks for the unchanging beauty of nature. You can share a “normal” experience in these times of so much that is not.

A related prayer:

Have every family member name one thing for which they are thankful. You can add water and time together, if not mentioned by others. End with: “Our family says, Thank you, God, and Amen!”

Lenten Blessings,

[Signature]
Let’s Take a Walk – Suggestion #4

During these weeks of Lent and our “Let’s Take a Walk” series so much continues to change. I am sending this fourth suggestion knowing you will make adjustments for our social distancing reality as we now protect our neighbors and ourselves.

Again here is the background for this Lenten practice. Each week during the season of Lent you will receive an email from me with an “ambulatio divina” or sacred walking suggestion. I actually made up the name for these simple family walks as a spiritual practice. Each suggestion includes a setting and things on which to focus. The sacredness will flow from your family being together; your awareness of the setting; your ambling, unrushed pace; and your conversation about beauty and love. Although the suggestions will be weekly, the experiences need not be done exactly as suggested or in any particular order. The hope is to make time for this spiritual practice each week while keeping these suggestions in mind.

This week the suggestion is a walk near a garden. At this writing it could be your own garden at home or a community garden you feel comfortable visiting while maintaining distance from others. This is a walk to focus on the earth and signs of spring. It could a game of noticing signs of spring and hopefully could be a much fun as our Easter tradition without the eggs. You could count the signs of spring you see and have a family total to celebrate! You could also talk about the colors you see. The colors of crocuses and other perennials can be exceptionally bright and dramatic against the remaining winter background. The colors of buds on trees and bushes are interesting also. You could check to see if the flowers, trees and bushes have a fragrance or if the earth does. You could talk about all things in nature being part of God’s creation.

After your walk, your family could do a project. You could draw a garden and color it with markers. You could find things in your yard and glue a nature collage. Or, saving the best for last, you could make some mud and create with it together. You could make a mud finger painting. This could be on paper, tagboard, or just the patio. The art teacher adage that the process is more important than the product will be more true than ever for this one! This time in the dirt and mud could be a great sensory experience for the whole family. It may bring back some great memories of mud pies or mischief. You could make pies again or make some sort of structure with mud and other natural things. I hope this time together includes a lot of laughter and maybe some photos for the family archive.

I hope this walk might add some structure to these days of social distancing. It could be a focused time of togetherness out of the house. It could be a time to notice and give thanks for the unchanging beauty of nature, the colors of spring, the smell and texture of dirt and mud. This could be a time to share a real experience when right now so much does not seem real.

A related scripture: And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called the Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seeds, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so.

Genesis 1:9-11
Older children could read more of the creation narrative in Genesis Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: 1-3.
Related picture books for younger children: *First He Made the Sun* by Harriet Ziefert, *In Our Image: God’s First Creatures* by Nancy Sohn Swartz

A related prayer: Have every family member name one thing for which they are thankful. You can add some of the things from your walk or projects, if not mentioned by others. End with: “Our family says, Thank you, God, and Amen!”

Lenten Blessings,
Let’s Take a Walk – Suggestion #5

During these weeks of Lent and our “Let’s Take a Walk” series so much continues to change. I hope you and your children are doing well with finding a routine of being together and finding joy in creative, frequent ways!

Again here is the background for this Lenten practice. Each week during the season of Lent you will receive an email from me with an “ambulatio divina” or sacred walking suggestion. I actually made up the name for these simple family walks as a spiritual practice. Each suggestion includes a setting and things on which to focus. The sacredness will flow from your family being together; your awareness of the setting; your ambling, unrushed pace; and your conversation about beauty and love, gratitude and grace. Although the suggestions will be weekly, the experiences need not be done exactly as suggested or in any particular order. The hope is to make time for this spiritual practice each week while keeping these suggestions in mind.

This fifth suggestion is a walk around the rooms of your house. (I know you have probably spent a lot of time together at home in these last weeks. This walk might be a new and fresh way of looking at these rooms you are sharing each hour of the day.) In each room, pick one thing for which you are thankful. In the kitchen, pick one thing. In the living room, pick one thing. Each child can pick one thing from his or her bedroom. When everyone has at least one item and maybe many more than one, put all these items together on a table or counter and have a family discussion about them. You could discuss why we are thankful for these things. You could talk about how we came to have these items. Maybe they were gifts from a special person you are thankful for. You could tell the story of all the people you probably don't know who made these items and who helped get these items to the store where they were purchased or who delivered these items to you as online purchases. You could mention people from seamstresses to factory workers to warehouse workers, to truck drivers, to cargo plane crews, to retail clerks. This is a family discussion to expand thankfulness in our interconnected world. We give God thanks for all the people of the world and all they add to our lives!

If health care professionals do not come up in this discussion of your items you can add them in a general, heartfelt way here or in the final prayer.

After this discussion, your family could make a poster to thank all the people who help your family and all of us in so many ways. You might find a way to hang this poster from your front porch or make it into a sign for your front yard. You could also make a sidewalk chalk thank you design. Be sure to practice social distancing if you use your driveway or sidewalk. Practicing social distancing is a way we become helpers too!

Related scriptures: Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.  
for his steadfast love endures forever.
Psalm 106:1

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.
Colossians 4:2
A related prayer: Say a prayer of gratitude. Every family member could name a person who helps them. It could be a person they know or a person they do not know. Each member could name many of both categories. End with: “Our family says, Thank you, God, for all the people of the world and for all the helpers and Amen!”

Lenten Blessings,

[Signature]