



From Generation to Generation

As a concerned grandparent, how do I talk to my children & grandchildren about their faith/spiritual life?

Area pastors recently asked this important question when meeting with Shirley Carpenter, former ALOA Board President and long-term older adult champion in the New Jersey District (LCMS). Here's how Dr. Mary Manz Simon helped frame the answer to this vital question:

Many older adults whose grandchildren are not growing up with Jesus ask this same question. Two of our grandchildren are not yet baptized, so my response to Shirley's group of pastors had personal overtones.



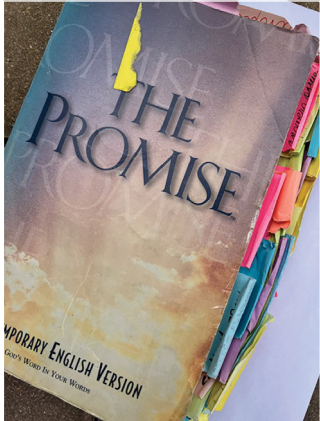
The Bible offers numerous passages that answer this question, but my preference is Psalm 78:1-4:

My friends, I beg you to listen as I teach. I will give instruction and explain the mystery of what happened long ago. These are things we learned from our ancestors, and we will tell them to the next generation. We won't keep secret the glorious deeds and the mighty miracles of the LORD. (CEV)

My response to Shirley shared how I apply that text in everyday life.

Model Faith

The bookmark moves in my Bible. You can see that my favorite Bible (at right), a paperback CEV, is littered with post it notes sticking out everywhere! A grandchild sees how we respond to the plumber who names an outrageous fee. A grandchild watches when we let a shopper with one item go in front of the check-out line. Our lifetime Christianity – going to worship, saying mealtime prayers, etc. – attempts to mirror the words of the psalmist.



Equip for Faith Growth

I vividly remember a situation with our daughter, Angie. As a child, she loved collecting different Bibles. By the time she packed for college, she had an entire row of various translations on her headboard. Yet when I went to help her pack for school, there were only two Bibles. When



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I asked what had happened to all those Bibles we bought she said, "I gave them away." At that moment, I thought, "At least I've done one thing right." Our children grew up knowing that we would buy them anything they found in a Christian bookstore. Although those retail outlets have mostly disappeared, that's how we ended up with a plastic Sword of the Spirit and many other pieces of holy hardware! But surrounding children with signs and symbols of our faith only reinforces the Holy Spirit's actions that power us. Perhaps someday, a grandchild will even ask, "Why do you have a palm branch hanging on the living room wall?"

Share Your Faith Story

Our children and grandchildren grow up listening to us read books. We can so naturally transition into sharing our Faith Story. I printed out my ten-page Faith Story and gave it to our grandson, Josh, before his confirmation. Then we sat down and talked about it. Although 14-year-old boys think more about basketball than God, at least Josh has read and listened to my story. He knows faith in Jesus Christ is important to me. He has heard me speak passionately about what matters in life. I don't know if I 'got through' to Josh, but in November, before our next grandson, Nate, is confirmed, I will sit down with him. I pray God will use our time together.



Be Available

Some use the descriptive term, "ministry of presence," which is characterized by having an open ear and open heart. Today's time-stressed parents don't always have time to "click pause." At this point in life, we do that for ourselves, so we can certainly do that for those whom we love. We have a message that matters.

Pray

Although my mind tends to wander during prayer, when I pray about a character virtue for a grandson, the Holy Spirit keeps me focused. Being very specific and considering how the boys might encounter a certain virtue at their level of development, contributes to more effective petitions. I pray for our five grandsons by name. I ask



God to support building a Christian value system. That's why topics like humility, judgment, wisdom and respect enter my prayers for the boys. Every petition ends with the same sentence: "Most of all, I pray that my grandson will know Jesus as His Savior." I also ask God to lead them to Christian wives, even though our youngest grandson is only seven years old! You can never start too early with prayer.

Connecting across generations is not always easy. Pathways are sometimes complicated, but we aren't alone on this journey. After all, when we look around, that's God's hand on our shoulder.

We are grateful to Dr. Mary Manz Simon for sharing her response to this vital question. We encourage the sharing of these ideas in church newsletters or by making copies, with credit to the author and ALOA.