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STAY CLOSE TO YOUR CHILDREN

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(The coming messiah) will turn the hearts of parents to their children and children to their parents ...
- Malachi 4:6

This very last verse of the Hebrew Scriptures points to the coming of the Messiah. We will know this One is coming when we see hearts of parents turned to their kids and kids are turned to their parents. In Luke 1:17, the angel who announces to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth, well beyond childbearing years, will have a son, the one we call John the Baptist, says that he will "turn the hearts of parents to their children ,,," to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Clearly, God intends for parents and kids and all adults who love and support children to follow Jesus to stay close to their children. So, where did I spot the sign that is the title of this e-news? My church? Your church?

No, the sign that declared "Stay Close to Your Children" was not one that I saw in a church. It was right inside the Walker Art Center. Yes, I understand that it was an injunction to parents and teachers to closely supervise the children in their care. However, it stopped me in my tracks. It is the distillation of God's announcement of how we will recognize the coming of the one God is sending to us.

So, what can we do in our homes and in our congregations to live God's plan? Here are some easy, daily ideas for you, wherever you are:

IDEAS FOR HOUSEHOLDS

- **DEDICATED TIME:** Set aside time every single day to spend time with each child in your care. Yes, even just a very few minutes a day makes all the difference. Consider doing this as you are tucking your child into bed. In the dark, children of all ages will often share what is really on their mind and in their hearts.
- **UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** Put away your smart phone, turn away from other screens, don't plan what you need to accomplish before your day is over.
- **LISTEN,** listen, listen - with your ears and eyes and heart. Help your child find words to express their issues and their emotional response to it.
- **WHEN YOUR CHILD IS DISTRAUGHT,** notice that your child is struggling and, putting everything else aside, lean in and touch gently, explore what is wrong, offer confidence that together you can manage this, and share hope for the future.
- **FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S PASSIONS AND GIFTS,** even and especially if they are not your interests or accomplishments.
- **GO OUT OF YOUR WAY:** If you are driving the carpool, when you drop off the last child not related to you, if your child begins to talk, keep driving. Sometimes this is the time our child will open up to us. I give you permission to add to your carbon footprint, if you are building a close and life-giving relationship with your child.
- **PLAN DATES** with each child. It can be a walk for just the two of you, reading a book that engages just the two of you, going to a movie together, go out for dessert, just the two of you. (Don't be tempted to take all the kids. It could be a fun outing, but not an intimate one!)
- **PLAY OUTSIDE OR GO TO THE PARK** and follow your child's lead.
- **TELL STORIES** that open your family's stories, your history, and things you have cherished about life with your child.
- **LOOK AT PICTURES** of your child as a baby or toddler ... or of you. Use them to tell those stories!
- **CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND IMPROVEMENTS:** Make sure you note especially the subjects or skills that are hard for your child. In the future, when they are struggling, assure them they are resilient and tell a story of a time they mastered something hard.
- **LET YOUR CHILD OVERHEAR** you telling others about their accomplishments! Go ahead and brag a little!
- **DON'T COMPARE** your children to one another or to other kids you know well. Know them uniquely and celebrate those differences.

FOR CONGREGATIONS

- **ARRIVE EARLY** for Sunday school classes, choir, or any gatherings with children and youth. Make yourself available to listen deeply to each one who comes.
- **CALL THEM BY NAME.** Use their name early and often. If it is hard to pronounce, keep working at it. If you have forgotten a name, tell them it is important to you to learn their name. Wear nametags.

- **LEARN UNIQUE** things about each child. Ask about it. Let the child be your teacher. Invite them to share these things with the other kids.
- **CALL PARENTS** to share good experiences with their child. Be really specific and affirm, affirm, affirm. Do this especially for those kids who are hard to affirm.
- **CREATE ROLES** for each child to make contributions to the group.
- **FIND ROLES IN WORSHIP** that children can do, knowing they are essential to all of us and thanking them for leading us in worship.
- **CELEBRATE** the unique gifts each child brings to your group and to your congregation.
- **INVOLVE** kids in serving others in the congregation and caring for others. All of us of every age need to feel needed.
- **CONNECT THE GENERATIONS** and give them a chance to tell their stories. Have each bring a picture of their family and tell about it.
- **CREATE CROSS+GENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES** to serve, to worship, to learn, and to get to know one another.
- **INVITE CLERGY** to tell stories of real children in their sermons, showing that, indeed, sometime "a little child shall lead us."

KEEP EYES OPEN FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES!

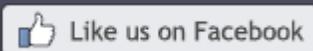
Links to learn more!

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This is the perfect opportunity to call or email Marilyn

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