

Ways to Support Grandparents

As we place our own handprints on the role of grandparent, there are dozens of ongoing factors that shape it. Peter Morrison, a demographer, believes that there is almost a “recasting of obligations among the generations” as mobility-proximity, health, employment, family transitions or configurations and more viable opportunities for retirement affect a grandparent’s level of support and involvement in a child’s life.

Divorce and remarriage among parents and grandparents seem to add layers of opportunity, challenge and uncertainty as occasions for step-grandparenting, legally defined visitation and custodial grandparenting arise. Even so, the old phrase, “If Mom says ‘no,’ ask Grandma!” still finds credence in the unique role a grandparent can play whether near or faraway.

How Your Congregation can Help

Here are a few ways your congregation might uphold and support—and celebrate—this stage of life.

- Provide a special time annually during a worship service for recognizing and blessing grandparents and the unique roles they play. Even consider providing a commissioning service for those just entering into this stage of life.
- Designate times for grandparents without Internet access to utilize a church computer to communicate with their grandchildren on a weekly or monthly basis. Establish mentoring relationships with junior- and senior-high students to help them send and receive e-mail.
- Make age-appropriate Bibles available for loan or purchase through your church library. You might also provide resources for grandparents to read and record Bible stories to share with their grandchildren. Invite them to include personal comments about the stories they choose.
- When a child is baptized, suggest making a faith chest to hold faith-nurturing resources and faith-milestone mementos. The Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College has blueprints for making a faith chest, along with a variety of resources for passing on the faith. For a free copy of the *FaithLife in the Home Resource Guide*, call 877/239-2492 or go to www.youthfamilyinstitute.com
- Recognize the births or adoptions of grandchildren in your bulletin or newsletter. Include the child and the grandparents in your prayers during worship.
- Provide birthday and baptismal birthday postcards for grandparents and others to purchase and encourage them to send notes of their ongoing prayers on special occasions—or any other day. Augsburg Fortress provides postcards and other gifts and resources. Scan through the Augsburg Fortress online store at www.augsburgfortress.org/store/
- Encourage grandparents to plan opportunities for their grandchildren to share a special book, meal, event or adventure, along with conversations about faith and life. Planning annual age-appropriate vacations, without parents, also enhances the relationship and the memories they share. One particularly helpful book is *That Reminds Me*, by Jean Brown Eittrich, a grandmother, it has easy, practical story-starters to help grandparents pass on their faith. (ISBN 0-8066-3623-8; \$10.99 plus shipping and handling; to order call 800/328-4648).
- Plan an annual grandparent-grandkid retreat for a day or weekend at a nearby park, Bible camp or retreat center, or plan opportunities for children, youth and older adults to share events and “Now-n-Then” stories together, such as an annual fishing opener, bread-making, cookie baking events or quilting “bees,” sponsored by men’s or women’s groups.

- Provide opportunities for grandparents with families far away to develop relationships with parents of young children nearby. Encourage them to provide child care for “date” night. You might even consider an adopt-a-grandkid or -grandparent program to encourage fellowship and creative prayer partnerships.
- Plan an occasion for children, youth and adults to make homemade “hugs” to send to people they love. (Cut long strips of cloth and attach individual handprints to each end.) Encourage them to place it around their shoulders as they say prayers of thanks for God’s great love and the gift of relationships with friends and family.

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