

**BIRTH–36 MONTHS**

**PRESCHOOL**

**EARLY ELEMENTARY**

**OLDER ELEMENTARY**

**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**HIGH SCHOOL**

**ADULT/PARENT**



# **FAMILY FAITH FORMATION GUIDE**

# **Family Faith Formation Guide**

**Birth-36 months; Preschool; Early Elementary K-2;**

**Older Elementary 3-5; Middle School, High School; Adult/Parent**

**Dear Families,**

**Whether you are a parent rocking your baby or watching your “baby” prepare for college, I hope this guide will help you in your role as the spiritual and religious leaders of your family. If that sounds a little scary to you, don't worry. You are not alone. The best thing you can do is let your children see you live your faith; if it's important to you, it becomes important to them.**

**Most faith formation happens in the home. Certainly faith formation is sharing Bible stories with your children, saying grace before meals and praying before bed. But faith formation also includes how children learn to play with the other kids at the playground or deal with conflict with a brother or sister. It's about children choosing what to do in their free time, or where to spend their allowance. And it's about families deciding how to celebrate holidays, keep the Sabbath and help others.**

**This guide articulates goals and characteristics for children of all ages - what we, as a church, hope they will understand about their faith. We also recommend books that they might enjoy, as well as books for you. This is not a comprehensive list, so please send us the names of additional resources your family has found helpful, and we will include them.**

**The church is here to help you. Worship is the foundation of our faith— it is in worship that we praise God, form ourselves as a community, nourish ourselves in the Lord's Supper, claim our identity as God's child and prepare to go out into the world to serve others. Children are welcome in worship at all times. Faith Formation also occurs in the nursery, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Youth Group and in all the ministries and mission of the church. You will find that as you and your family experience the church, you will experience God and this caring community more fully.**

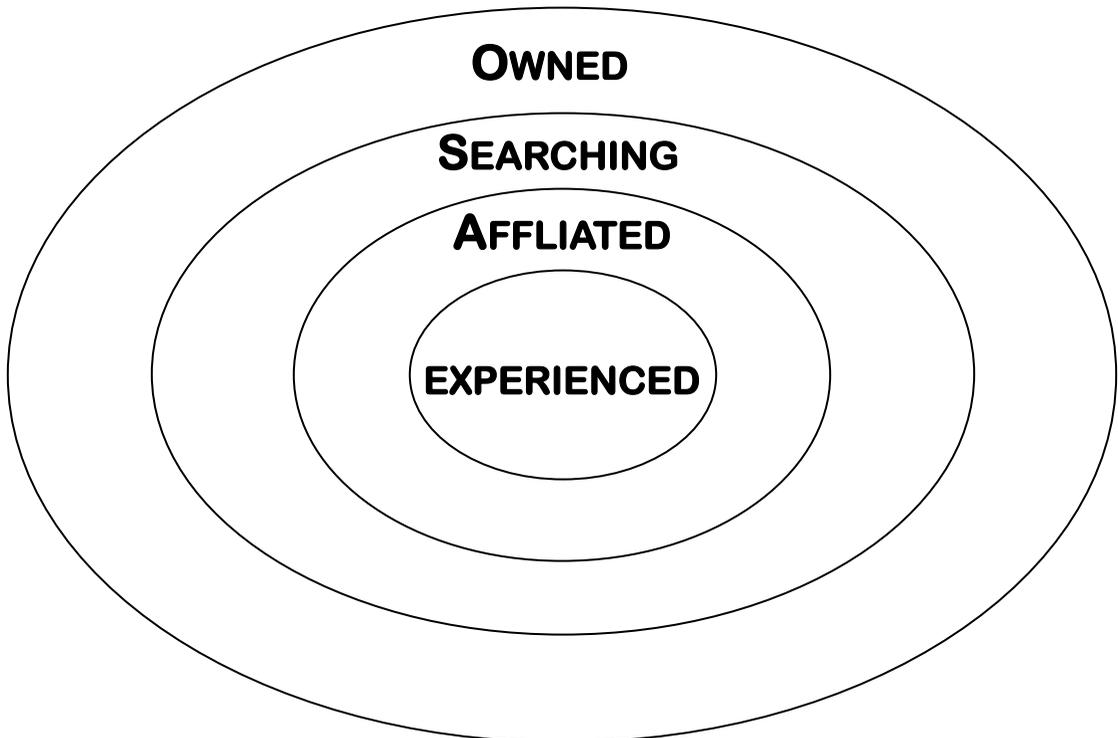
**Blessings to you and your family!**

# A Note About the Stages of Faith

The stages of faith expressed in this guide are adapted from Reverend John Westerhoff. Our lives as people of faith can best be understood as a pilgrimage that moves slowly and gradually through ever-expanding expressions. As we go through life, we may grow into the needs and elements of the later stages, as the needs of the earlier stages are met.

The stages of faith are like rings of a tree. Just like a tree adds one ring on top of another, we do not leave the needs of the earlier stages behind after we expand into the next stage. We continue to need the faith experiences of the earlier stages throughout our lives.

It is important to remember that the individuals in any of these stages have a legitimate faith. When we have an owned or mature faith we are moving among all the stages at different times in our lives. We must never neglect our experienced, affiliated or searching faith components. Actually, having a mature faith means we can draw from all of our past developmental stages as we are always changing and redesigning our lives as Christians.



*Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Beginning to express selves verbally, through imagination and exploration
- ◆ Enjoys hearing familiar stories and songs repeated (again and again!)
- ◆ Learns more words, first nouns and then verbs
- ◆ Begins to understand that other people have different perspectives; the ability to show empathy is growing!

*Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Early faith formation is **experienced**
- ◆ Faith is nurtured through feelings or sensory experiences in the form of interactions with others and our world
- ◆ The love, security and trust experienced is equated with God
- ◆ Rituals are not understood but are experienced in meaningful ways

*To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Sing hymns/praise songs and tell stories while rocking a baby
- ◆ Say prayers together before bed and grace before meals
- ◆ Remind children of their baptism by saying "you are a child of God and God loves you" as you bathe them
- ◆ Sing church songs with simple movements or rhythm instruments
- ◆ Tell Bible stories in your own words and ask children about the stories

*Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

We hope children will know:

- ◆ God is good
- ◆ God made me and all things
- ◆ The church is a safe place

We hope children will learn to:

- ◆ Share with others
- ◆ Look forward to coming to church

We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship
- ◆ Offering loving nursery care on Sunday mornings and church events
- ◆ Celebrations of Baptisms

*Recommended Reading:*

**Baby's First Bible Readers Digest**

**My Good Night Bible Susan Lingo**

**Do Animals Pray? Deborah Ann Lamson**

**Where Does God Live? Holly Bea**

**You Are Special and others by Max Lucado**

**Board books of Bible stories, especially stories of Jesus**

*Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Learn by imitation (especially their parents!)
- ◆ Self esteem is developing
- ◆ Clear boundaries and rules are needed
- ◆ Learning to express all kinds of feelings

*Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Early faith formation is **experienced**
- ◆ Faith is nurtured through feelings or sensory experiences in the form of interactions with others and our world
- ◆ The love, security and trust experienced is equated with God
- ◆ Rituals are experienced in meaningful ways with limited understanding

*To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Bring them to worship and Sunday School to help them know they belong
- ◆ Engage in “sacred play” by acting out or using toys to tell Biblical stories
- ◆ Encourage them to offer their own prayers or to lead grace
- ◆ Seek out opportunities to be in service as a family (see our [ABC of Blessing](#) pamphlet)

*Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

We hope children will know:

- ◆ Jesus is my friend
- ◆ I am part of the church
- ◆ The Bible is my special book
- ◆ I can talk to God anytime
- ◆ God is always with me

We hope children will learn to:

- ◆ Talk to God through prayer
- ◆ Connect Bible stories with their life

We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship and Sunday School
- ◆ CrossRoads Children’s Center
- ◆ Vacation Bible School

*Recommended Reading:*

**The Beginner's Bible for Toddlers** published by Zonderkidz

**God Loves Me Bible** published by Zonderkidz

**Where is God?, What Does God Look Like?** Lawrence and Karen Kushner

**The Day The Animals Came,** Frances Ward Weller and Loren Long

**Thank You God for Loving Me** Max Lucado

*Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Interested in working with hands - art, building or creating
- ◆ A strong desire to work with others and doing activities together
- ◆ Develop a sense of right and wrong
- ◆ Beginning to express themselves and their preferences

*Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Early faith formation is **experienced and affiliate (belonging)**
- ◆ The love, security and trust experienced is equated with God
- ◆ Rituals are experienced in meaningful ways with understanding
- ◆ Faith is connected to community and relationships

*To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Help them make decisions about stewardship, using their own money
- ◆ Introduce faith language into decision-making; help kids think about what God wants them to do and how they should treat others
- ◆ Model your spiritual beliefs and practices

*Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

We hope children will know:

- ◆ Trust in God
- ◆ Treat others the way I wish to be treated
- ◆ God can help me make good choices

We hope children will learn to:

- ◆ Understand the Bible is a book they can read
- ◆ Locate books/passages in the Bible
- ◆ Practice caring for others

We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship and Sunday School
- ◆ Vacation Bible School
- ◆ Faith in Action Sundays
- ◆ Children's Choir

*Recommended Reading:*

**The Family Story Bible** Ralph Milton

**Because Nothing Looks Like God** Lawrence and Karen Kushner

**God's Paintbrush** Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

**Come Worship with Me** Ruth Boling

**Water, Come Down** Walter Bruggemann

**Children Matter** Scottie May

**The Spiritual Lives of Children** Robert Coles

*Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Comfortable talking with adults
- ◆ May define self by who friends are
- ◆ Begins to internalize personal beliefs and practices, which may be similar to or different from those of peers and parents
- ◆ Can develop strong convictions regarding social and political issues
- ◆ Can find it difficult to express feelings

*Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Young faith formation is **affiliate (belonging)**
- ◆ Rituals are experienced in meaningful ways with understanding
- ◆ Faith is connected to community and relationships
- ◆ Exploring communal identity forms individual religious identity

*To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Model your spiritual beliefs and practices
- ◆ Talk about why a Christian perspective matters in decision making
- ◆ Encourage them to be a part of positive peer groups that reinforce his/her spiritual commitments

*Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

We hope children will know:

- ◆ What it means to be a Christian
- ◆ Trust in God
- ◆ We can ask God for guidance and forgiveness
- ◆ We are all children of God

We hope children will learn to:

- ◆ Claim God and their faith for themselves
- ◆ Question and search out answers
- ◆ Practice their faith and connect with others in service

We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship and Sunday School
- ◆ Vacation Bible School
- ◆ Faith in Action Sundays
- ◆ Children's Choir

*Recommended Reading:*

**Children Matter** Scottie May

**The Spiritual Lives of Children** Robert Coles

**The Bible** (The New Revised Standard Version is the one we use in worship)

**1 Minute Bible 4 Students**, Broadman & Holman Publishers

**Jesus Calling: 365 Devotionals for Kids** Sarah Young

### *Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Learn to reason generally, by age 10-12 thinking becomes more abstract
- ◆ Compare and evaluate their behavior with the behavior of their peers
- ◆ Beginning to see the point of view of others more clearly
- ◆ Have difficulty balancing high energy levels and quiet activities
- ◆ May "try on" different ideas
- ◆ Begins to identify or develop interests which he/she is passionate about

### *Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Adolescent faith formation is **searching**
- ◆ Start to see contradictions in the world and in religious and spiritual beliefs and practices
- ◆ Taught faith is questioned and internalized
- ◆ Searching faith is necessary for owned (and lived faith)

### *To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Model your own spiritual beliefs, practices and commitments
- ◆ Find faithful mentors you trust who connect with your child
- ◆ Encourage your child to be part of positive peer groups that reinforce his/her spiritual commitments
- ◆ Support and provide an open environment for them to ask questions and encourage them to explore their faith with you.

### *Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

#### We hope youth will know:

- ◆ Faith is a life-long journey
- ◆ We are all children of God
- ◆ God blessed us all with unique spiritual gifts and talents
- ◆ Their parents and church leaders are with them on this journey
- ◆ What it means to be a United Methodist Christian

#### We hope youth will learn to:

- ◆ Claim God and their faith for themselves
- ◆ Question and search out answers
- ◆ Practice their faith and connect with others in service

#### We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship and Sunday School
- ◆ United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF)
- ◆ Youth Service Projects/ Work Trips
- ◆ Youth Choir, Praise Band and Bells
- ◆ Confirmation

### *Recommended Reading:*

Student Study Bibles such as **The New NRSV Student Study Bible** or **The NRSV Harper Collins Study Bible, Serendipity Student Bible**

### *Characteristics of this age group may include....*

- ◆ Late adolescents' thinking advances and becomes more abstract—able to keep in mind several dimensions of a problem and generate more options
- ◆ Language skills improve with figurative and abstract language
- ◆ Become more comfortable talking with adults
- ◆ May define selves by who friends are
- ◆ May be indecisive
- ◆ They think of the future

### *Faith characteristic of this age group:*

- ◆ Adolescent faith formation is **searching**
- ◆ Start to see contradictions in the world and in religious and spiritual beliefs & practices
- ◆ Taught faith is questioned and internalized
- ◆ Searching faith is necessary for owned (and lived faith)

### *To nurture your children's faith:*

- ◆ Continue to model your spiritual beliefs & practices in all aspects of life
- ◆ Express your personal views
- ◆ Encourage them to articulate what it means to be Christian

### *Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

#### We hope youth will know:

- ◆ A shared vocabulary for faith
- ◆ How to live their faith in their daily lives, their schools and community
- ◆ Other adults in the church family as mentors
- ◆ Take responsibility for their faith

#### We hope youth will learn to:

- ◆ Talk about their faith with others
- ◆ Consider God's plan for their lives when making choices about school, career, etc.
- ◆ Share their unique gifts and talents

#### We will reinforce these goals through:

- ◆ Worship and Sunday School
- ◆ United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF)
- ◆ Forming healthy bonds with peers and adult mentors in UMYF
- ◆ Youth Work Trips
- ◆ Youth Choir, Praise Band and Bells

### *Recommended Reading:*

**Student Study Bibles such as The New NRSV Student Study Bible or The NRSV Harper Collins Study Bible, Serendipity Student Bible**

*To help nurture YOUR faith:*

- ◆ Read the Bible.
- ◆ Pray. Make time each day to speak with God and then to just listen
- ◆ Practice self-care. Make your faith development a priority
- ◆ Join a small group for accountability, support and growth
- ◆ Put your faith into action by volunteering and serving others

*Faith Characteristics of this age group:*

Adults may find themselves in either **searching** or **owned** faith

**Searching** Faith Characteristics

- ◆ Sees contradictions in the world and in religious and spiritual beliefs and practices
- ◆ Faith is questioned and internalized

**Owned** Faith Characteristics

- ◆ Claims personal ownership of and responsibility for beliefs
- ◆ Faith is witnessed in word and action
- ◆ Feel comfortable sharing our beliefs with others

*Here at SIMI VALLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:*

We hope everyone will know:

- ◆ That faith is a life-long journey
- ◆ A faithful life takes many forms
- ◆ The church is a place to belong and be nurtured in your faith

We hope everyone will learn to:

- ◆ Look for God in daily life
- ◆ Embrace faith in all parts of their life
- ◆ Establish relationships that support their faith journey

The church will reinforce these goals with:

- ◆ Worship
- ◆ Adult Bible and Faith formation classes
- ◆ Mission opportunities (within and beyond our community)
- ◆ Opportunities for fellowship
- ◆ Opportunities to discern God's call in your life

*Recommended reading:*

**The Bible** (The New Revised Standard Version is the one we use in worship)

**How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk** Adele Farber & Elaine Mazli  
**Sabbath** Wayne Muller

**Keep it Positive** Judy Carter, Ester Chun, Craig Brown

**Celebration of Discipleship** Richard J Foster

**Mere Christianity** C.S. Lewis

**Cost of Discipleship** Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Three Simple Rules** Rueben Job

# **FAMILY FAITH FORMATION GUIDE**

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