

2025 CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

PLANNING RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS & CONFERENCES



Families: Many Forms, Common Faith! Called to Love

The Christian Home Month resource is for family ministry leaders, ministry teams, volunteers in ministry, and council chairpersons/coordinators in local congregations. It is designed to help local congregations develop and strengthen faith in the home and to celebrate Christian Home Month. Although Christian Home Month is typically celebrated during May, congregations may choose any month of the year to focus on the Christian home and its key role as a center for faith formation.

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH QUADRENNIAL THEMES 2025-2028

2025: Families Called to Love

2026: Families Called to Peace

2027: Families Called to Justice

2028: Families Called to Hope

This is an appropriate theme for the current context of our daily lives. We continue to live in a tumultuous time; coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic still weighs heavy on many families and churches. This past year, we have seen a presidential election, continued political tensions, racism, and social unrest. We have seen natural disasters that have devastated certain parts of our world. Children, youth, and young people are concerned about the deep divisions in this country and are disappointed at the disagreements. They have witnessed the name-calling and loss of human respect. It seems, as we watch the events of society unfold, that we have forgotten to live as Jesus called us to live — a life of love for self, neighbor, and God. We know that as Christians, we are called to be a people of love. We offer love to the world so that everyone will feel and experience God's love, peace, justice, and grace.

The scriptures provide key verses about love of self, neighbor, and God. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reminds us to love God and to keep those words of love visible throughout the day. It also instructs us to demonstrate this love to our children. We are commanded to love one another through Jesus' words in John 13:34-35. Christ-followers' actions should be rooted in love, and love is essential to individual faith formation and faith formation in homes and families. When we act with love toward those in our family, we are also challenged to act in love with those in our communities and the world. Where can we begin to act with love toward those whom we are called?

We can start by sharing and modeling ways for our families to offer acts of love and compassion in the home, church, and the world. We offer love to our communities by:

- Providing clothing, food, or shelter for those in our community who are without these basics.
- Providing classes on parenting, marriage, finance management, and English as a second language.
- Offering spaces of belonging to children, youth, and adults.
- Offering intergenerational worship for ALL God's children, including those with disabilities.

This Christian Home Month resource, *Families: Called to Love*, includes worship service resources, a retreat plan that can be offered in a variety of ways, and devotional activities for families as they foster a climate of love in their homes. We trust that you will find something in this resource to inspire, encourage, and affirm you as you continue in this important work of family ministries.

CALLED TO LOVE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

Here are some suggestions that may be useful in celebrating Christian Home Month or Family Life Sunday as part of a worship service. For additional resources, see *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: We come together to praise God who is the source of our life and our love.

People: We lift our voices in praise for God, who loves us always.

Leader: We come to celebrate and support families who practice love in their homes and communities.

People: We lift our voices in thanks for the love we feel in our families.

Leader: We come praying for families who feel no love for themselves or others.

People: We lift our voices in sorrow for those who hurt because of the actions of others.

ALL: Let us worship, trusting in God's love and mercy.

Praise be to God!

ABBREVIATIONS

W&S = Worship and Song

TFWS = The Faith We Sing

UMH = United Methodist Hymnal

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • God of Grace and God of Glory | UMH 577 |
| • Let Our Earth Be Peaceful | W&S 3159 |
| • Love Divine, All Loves Excelling | UMH 384 |
| • The Gift of Love | UMH 408 |
| • Your Love, O God, Has Called Us Here | UMH 647 |
| • There's a Song | TFWS 2141 |
| • Build My Life | YouTube |
| • God Is Great | YouTube |
| • God Is Love | YouTube |
| • Head to the Heart | YouTube |

SCRIPTURE READINGS

- Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- Psalter: Psalm 85, UMH 806
- Gospel: John 13:34-35
- Epistle: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

LITURGICAL ACTS

Prayer of Commitment: 1 Corinthians 13

Lord,

Because love is patient...

**Help me to be slow to judge, but quick to listen,
hesitant to criticize, but eager to encourage,
remembering your endless patience with me.**

Because love is kind...

**Help my words to be gentle and my actions to be thoughtful.
Remind me to smile and to say "Please" and "Thank you."
because those little things still mean so much.**

Because love does not envy or boast and is not proud...

**Help me have a heart that is humble and sees the good in others.
May I celebrate and appreciate all that I have and all that I am,
as well as doing the same for those around me.**

Because love is not rude or self-seeking...

**Help me to speak words that are easy on the ear and on the heart.
When I'm tempted to get wrapped up in my own little world,
remind me there's a great big world out there full of needs and
hurts.**

Because love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs...

**Help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me.
When I want to hold onto a grudge,
gently help me release it,
so I can reach out with a hand of love instead.**

Because love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth...

**Help me stand up for what is right and good.
May I defend the defenseless and help the helpless.
Show me how I can make a difference.**

Because love always protects and always trusts...

**Help me to be a refuge for those around me.
When the world outside is harsh and cold,
may my heart be a place of acceptance and warmth.**

Finally, because love always perseveres...

**Help my heart continually beat with love for you and others.
Thank you for showing us what the word *love* means. Amen.**

Written by Holley Gerth and posted on [Taking It One Step at a Time](#).

Reposted on [re:Worship](#).

CALLED TO LOVE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

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OPENING PRAYER

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;
and the greatest of these is love (I Cor. 13:13, ESV¹)

God of Gods:

We come to worship today to hear your good news,
to hear of faith, hope, and love
ringing out from your kingdom.
We know that doubt, fear, and hatred
can shake even the strongest.
Shape us into faithful, hopeful people;
fill us with your love that passes all understanding.
We pray this together in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Written by Carol Penner and posted on [Leading in Worship](#).
Reposted on [re:Worship](#).*

REFLECTION ON LOVE

Love Is...

Love is... hugs
Love is... a pick-me-up
Love is... when two become one
Love is... friendship
Love is... sharing the last piece of pizza
Love is... hard to explain
Love is... unbelievable
Love is... unpredictable
Love is... giving away your last Rolo
Love is... endless
Love is... protection
Love is... a rollercoaster
Love is... a smile
Love is... a heartbeat
Love is... patient
Love is... kind
Love is... a never-ending story
Love is... eternal
Love is... a circle of friends
Love is... a circle of eternity
Love is... a circle called God
Love is... all you need

*Posted on the [Mucky Paws blog](#). Used by permission.
Reposted on [re:Worship](#).*

PRAYER

Encounters with Jesus

Draw me today into fresh encounters with Jesus, O God.
Make me a servant of love
so that others may know how much you love them
and I may know how much you love me.
Let me not be afraid of new pastures,
whether they be green or brown or parched.
And as I pass through whatever the day's valleys,
keep my head lifted up to the mountain,
from whence my help comes.
Never let me forget the people Jesus welcomed...
the greedy and the great,
the bad and the good,
the respected and the cheats.
Even as the world becomes more callous and chaotic,
may I never underestimate your capacity
to fashion the miraculous from the monstrous,
even to make me a choice masterpiece
from the mire and the clay.

*Written by Leonard Sweet and posted on [Preach the Story](#).
Reposted on [re:Worship](#).*

¹The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

CALLED TO LOVE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

Family Devotion: Prepare a gathering place for family worship. Create a centerpiece on the table where you eat your meals or in another area of your home where you can gather as a family. Spend time together preparing the space you will use for your family's devotional time. During your time of devotion, follow this worship sequence:

Virtue to Practice: Love

Take Time (Read and share together): Read a scripture passage that reflects upon the word "love." Suggestions for passages could include 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7-19, Romans 12:9, and Colossians 3:14. Invite each family member to select a different passage each time you gather. Take turns reading a different verse each day. Then, reflect on the passage and wonder together:

- **I Wonder...**
 - what you saw as this scripture was read.
 - what you heard as this scripture was read.
 - what actions you can take after this scripture is read.
 - what we learned about God from this passage.
 - what we learn about love from this passage.
- **How will you share love with others?**

Offer ideas/conversation around those examples of sharing/showing love with others.

God Experiences

Journal: When you feel the presence and feeling of love, write it down; or take a photo or draw a picture of your experience.

- **Pay attention:** How does your family experience the love of God?
- **Praise:** Give God praise with a song, statement of "We Praise God," or motion to represent all honor and glory to be given to God. (NBA player Steph Curry praises God each time he scores a basket by patting his heart with his hand and then pointing toward heaven. This simple yet powerful motion speaks louder than any words used in a crowded NBA arena.)
- **Prayer:** Create a family prayer, use a familiar family prayer, or say the Lord's Prayer. Hold hands as you pray.
- **Sharing:** Spend time sharing joys, concerns, and prayer requests you have encountered as individuals and as a family.
- **Blessing:** End the time together with a blessing. Use a hymn such as the "Doxology," or offer a blessing to each family member by saying phrases such as, "God be with you." Using a small Chapstick, create the shape of a cross on a family member's hand while saying these words:

God loves you.

Christ is with you.

The Holy Spirit moves through you.

As you share God's love with the world.

Family Night: Set aside a regular time to share fun family activities. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who live different lives from yours). Another idea is for each family night to be planned by a different family member, with an activity agreed upon by all.

DO HOLY WORK TOGETHER

Love God

Remember your blessings, individually and as a family. Eat dinner together as a family. Create opportunities for deep meaning and growth in relationships during mealtimes. Make dinnertime worth the effort and spend time together offering and receiving love. Go around the table and ask family members to share when they demonstrated or witnessed an act of love that day. Encourage noticing those daily experiences and name them before the meal.

Show God's Love

Time Together (Read and pray together): Read Matthew 22:37-40 from *The Message* translation:

Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them."²

We tend to use one word to describe the concept or idea of "love." The writer of *The Message* compares... heart to passion, soul to prayer, and mind to intelligence.

Use some of the following questions to discuss understanding love.

- Do you think you have a heart to love God passionately? What does that look like?
- How often do you pray?
- When you pray, do you need to use special words or go to a special place?
- What do you think God says about prayer?
- How can we love God with our mind or intelligence?

Love Neighbor

Wonder together as a family what Jesus meant by saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like *struggle*. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now." — Fred Rogers.

Name a time you accepted a person exactly the way he or she was. Discuss that as an act of love.

² *The Message* (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.

CALLED TO LOVE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

Identify people in your community who need to know God's love (someone who has just lost a family member, someone struggling in school, someone new to your community, someone who can no longer drive a car, someone who is sick, someone who just lost a job).

Come up with a plan to show love for those neighbors that you named. Transform the idea of *love of neighbor* into action! Make cards together as a family to send to those who need to know God's love, or visit someone from your church or your community who is alone and needs to know there are those who care about him or her.

Come up with other creative ways to express God's love to your neighbors. How can you show and tell others about the powerful love that God has for them?

Feel the Love of God

What is one of your first memories of being loved?

Were you alone or with someone else when you experienced love for the first time? Share your feelings about that moment.

Talk about a time when you did not feel loved.

Talk about an experience that made you realize that God loves you.

What loving experiences have you had at church — small group, worship, on retreat, during a special program?

To find love, we must learn to love. Find ways to enhance learning to love one another.

- **Journal:** Place a spiral notebook somewhere readily available for the entire family. When you see a sign of God's love in your daily life or see an example of learning to love one another, write it down or draw a picture in the notebook. Place a Bible verse that demonstrates an example of love next to the entry in the journal. How many verses of scripture reflect love?

Spend time in prayer and discussion about the entries in the journal.
- **Heartbeat of Love:** Create a small familiar shaped Valentine's Day heart out of construction paper or make a tiny stuffed heart out of fabric. You may already have an eraser or heart from a Build-a-Bear visit that you could use. Use this symbol to reflect acts of love you witness another family member perform. Place it somewhere in the house (or vehicle) where that family member might find it. Once the family member has seen the item, tell that person about the act of love that you witnessed that person providing. This will create an energetic way of offering affirmation that will become contagious. Then, it's that family member's turn to hide the symbol, witness someone's actions, and tell.

Finish This Sentence

Another way to create a conversation is to play a simple game of finishing the sentence. Complete one of these sentences or spend time creating your own:

I know God is with me when...

I would like to share stories of Jesus to...

The best church service ever was when...

My favorite memory about church is...

If I preached a sermon, it would be about...

I love to be with my family when we...

A person that I have seen share God's love is...

My favorite scripture from the Bible about love is...

Love Comes with Forgiveness

This past year, there have been multiple examples of hatred in our society by groups or individuals. To love one another also means forgiving those who do not accept us as we are or do harm to others. Spend time talking about these hard issues found in the daily news. Together, read stories from the media; then ask, "How would God want us to act in this situation? What would 'loving God and loving others' look like in this situation?" As a family, decide what actions you might take to offer love and forgiveness to others.

The familial discussion around love and forgiveness can lead to a powerful conversation about social justice issues in the news. Spend time with the recommended books and have meaningful family discussions about issues of violence, race relations, and traumatic events in the world.

Family Prayer

God, we give you thanks because you have done and continue to do amazing things! Thank you for offering so many examples of **love** from the Bible for a better world during these difficult days. There is no greater example than Jesus. Help each member of our family follow you and offer love and forgiveness to ourselves and our neighbors in our daily lives. Amen.

CALLED TO LOVE: RETREAT MODEL FOR FAMILIES

Planning for the Retreat

1. The congregation prays for the retreat, the participating families, and the coordinating team.
2. A retreat planning team is created that is made up of six to eight people from the congregation. This team should be equally knowledgeable in online technology (just in case you need to shift the retreat to that format) and in-person leadership.
3. The retreat team meets and plans the retreat and
 - Chooses a weekend to offer the retreat. If the location is not the church, the venue should be secured. Locate the closest United Methodist camping and retreat center and inquire about their facilities. See umcrm.camp.
 - Decides on the retreat schedule, including times for prayer and worship.
 - Prepares a budget.
 - Designs a flyer that includes a registration form and information about fees, dates, and location.
 - Recruits leaders. Provides Safer Sanctuary training for all leaders involved with the event.
 - Plans all food menus and suggestions while adhering to guidelines about food allergies.
 - Creates an offering opportunity for an organization in the community that helps families in need.
 - Promotes the retreat using social media, including the church website and Facebook page.
4. Someone from the team prepares information and distributes it through the church newsletter, e-newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and other avenues in the congregation. Registration for the location may be needed and completed for those families attending the retreat.
5. The team encourages families to collect the following supplies: Hymnals or online access, Bibles, children's books on love, board games, sports equipment, one posterboard per family, magazines, scissors, glue, modeling clay or Play-Doh, Legos®, paper, markers for each small group, various props for skits.

Friday

4:00–6:00 P.M. — Registration

6:00–7:00 P.M. — Dinner (Potluck). Have dinner together at the retreat location. As each family brings their own food item to the potluck, encourage each family member to select one food item they “love.” Ask families to explain why they love that food item.

7:15–7:30 P.M. — Gathering time after dinner. Share announcements and opening prayer. Sing familiar camp songs, favorite hymns, and praise chorus. Teach the group “Love Lifted Me” (W&S, 3101). Sing the familiar “Jesus Loves Me” (UMH, 191).

7:30–8:30 P.M. — Divide participants into “family” groups of four to six people (mixing up actual family members with others in the congregation. This will encourage an intergenerational approach). Ask each group to come up with stories that illustrate love for God and love for neighbor. Categories for stories include (1) Old Testament, (2) New Testament, (3) a story about the church, and (4) a favorite story from a book or movie. After the “families” agree on the four stories, have them share three clues or pieces of information and have the larger group guess the stories. For example, if the group’s story from the Old Testament is “Noah and the Ark,” the three pieces of information could be: (1) A dove is important in this story; (2) An extended family was involved in this story; (3) The rainbow is a sign of a promise in this story.

When the total group gathers, each family group can lead in getting the other family groups to guess the stories.

9:00–9:30 P.M. — Read a few selections from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* by Elizabeth Caldwell. After reading, ask several people to share their thoughts and feelings about the Bible story and what it says about love. Lead the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns, then sing together.

Discuss the questions within your family groups using the three reflection questions—“Hear, See, Act”—at the end of each story as a guide.

Encourage participants to locate a scripture passage that mentions “love” and make it their verse throughout the retreat. Inform them that these verses will play a part in retreat worship.

9:30–10:00 P.M. — Think about a time you experienced the love of God. Write about that experience in your journal and explain how you felt. Share the scripture passage you selected that mentions “love.” Share snacks and responses with your small-group family during this time. If your retreat location allows, have a firepit fire or take a flashlight walk on the grounds.

Close by leading the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns, then singing together.

Saturday

8:00–9:00 A.M. — Breakfast

9:00–9:30 A.M. — Morning Worship. Lead the group in singing, scripture, and prayer. Begin a responsive prayer by inviting each participant to recite a verse regarding “love” that was selected the night before. Encourage participants to memorize those verses. Each time a participant recites a verse, the group responds, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). This encourages everyone to reflect on each verse recited.

9:30–10:30 A.M. — Re-create “families” from the previous night for those gathering in person. Ask the families to read 1 John 4:7–21 from the *Common English Bible*. Encourage different readers to read the passage.

Love and God

⁷ Dear friends, let’s love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. ⁸ The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. ¹³ This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. ¹⁴ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. ¹⁵ If any of us confess that Jesus is God’s Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. ¹⁶ We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. ¹⁷ This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because God first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, “I love God” and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! ²¹ This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.

Common English Bible (CEB) Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

Invite each family to imagine ways of living that reflect this passage from 1 John. Ask each team to create a skit showing how people could live, sharing this understanding of love with others. Advise each family to discuss what members will do, what they understand as love in the scripture, and their situation before creating the skit.

10:30–10:45 A.M. — Break

10:45–NOON — Ask the families to present their skits. After each skit, ask the total group to name what imagery of love resonated with the entire group.

NOON–1:00 P.M. — Lunch

1:00–2:30 P.M. — Distribute hymnals or songbooks to each group. Give them fifteen minutes to locate a hymn or song that describes “love.” Ask them to rehearse the song so that they can teach it to the total group. (Find someone from each group who can help with “reading” music.) Call the groups together and invite the family groups to teach their song to everyone.

2:30–5:30 P.M. — Play “I Spy on Campgrounds.”

Take a walk on the grounds of the retreat location with your “family.” If the location is your church, pay particular attention to the area nearby. Point out things you notice for the first time. Spice it up with a game of “I Spy.” While groups are walking, have them look for items from the list below. Ask them to take photos with a smartphone to share with the retreat families later in the evening.

I Spy Checklist:

- ☐ Something flying in the sky
- ☐ A nut
- ☐ An insect with wings
- ☐ Something blue
- ☐ A clover
- ☐ Something that crawls
- ☐ A smooth stone
- ☐ Something orange
- ☐ Another person with the same brand of shoes as you
- ☐ Something with a wheel
- ☐ A bird
- ☐ A telephone line/pole
- ☐ Something white
- ☐ A critter with four legs
- ☐ Flowers blooming
- ☐ A sign other than a stop sign
- ☐ Someone riding a bike
- ☐ Something that reminds you of God’s love

Alternative Activity:

Afternoon Fun. Encourage naps, renewal time, or nature time. Provide walking/hiking trail maps, recreational/sports equipment, and arts and crafts materials. Suggest outdoor activities such as corn hole, volleyball, croquet, or sidewalk chalk art.

5:30–6:30 P.M. — Dinner

6:30–7:30 P.M. — Ask the participants to reassemble in their family groups. Ask the groups to reflect upon the story of love they discussed earlier in the retreat. Ask each family group to use modeling clay, LEGO®, paper, and markers to create a piece of art that illustrates those stories of love found in the church. Invite group members to reflect on what God’s love looks like in their

creations. Stress being creative in the artwork and discussing how the pieces make individuals feel the love of God.

7:30–8:15 P.M. — Gather the full group together and allow each family to share the created art, group members' thoughts, and feelings of love. Discuss how to execute a plan to share the love of God with others.

8:15–8:30 P.M. — Break

8:30–9:00 P.M. — Lead the group in sharing and praying about their joys and concerns. Ask for volunteers to name a song, a scripture verse, or something they have seen this day (share the photos from the "I Spy" activity earlier in the afternoon) that brought them to experience love.

9:00–10:00 P.M. — Individual devotion activity: Think about a time you have experienced the love of neighbor. Journal, giving an example of how you felt.

Snack and game time. If the weather permits, go outside for stargazing or s'mores around a firepit.

Sunday

8:00–9:00 A.M. — Breakfast together as a family before worship

9:00–10:00 A.M. — Closing Worship

The retreat leadership team can lead a planned worship service or use experiences from the weekend for music, prayer, and praise.

10:00–11:00 A.M. — Clean up and journey home.

Prayer for Christian Home Month Families

Gracious God, who created all of humankind and showed us the importance of relationships with one another, we commend to your care all the families of this congregation, community, and world. We pray that each home may be a home where love is felt. We pray for homes where, instead of love, hurt, abuse, and suffering abide. We pray for children, youth, and adults, recognizing the importance of and the gift of every age as we grow. May your grace be present to all. Grant us wisdom to know where there is no love, courage to act out of love for others, and peace to trust in your grace. Help us live so that the commandments of love for you and love for others are shown in the ways we live together. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

- Reprint the "Family Devotional Times" material from this resource in your church newsletter and place it on your website. List one suggestion a month to ensure continuity. Ask families who followed the suggestions to write about their experience (or tell you about it). Create a "What is Love?" column in your newsletter or on your website and feature what these families did in following through with the suggestions.
- Each month, invite families to practice one activity of love listed in the Christian Home Month Planning Calendar.
- Plan a "family fun time" at church. Include a meal and use this time to make "heartbeat" reminders or Scripture and prayer cards. Leave the "heartbeat" reminders throughout locations in the church, sharing love with one another. Use this event to promote next year's Christian Home Month participation.
- Encourage families to adopt the "Family Covenant for Love" and carry out the practices for at least a month. Suggest a starting day for all in the congregation who want to participate. As part of worship, ask those who intend to live with the covenant to stand. Pray for the families. On the ending date, ask all families who lived with the covenant to stand. Recognize each family by name and join in singing the Doxology to voice thanks to God for their efforts. You could establish the tradition used on the retreat by saying "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105.)
- Collect stories from families about how they have demonstrated loving their neighbor. Share these stories (with their permission) in your church newsletter, on your website, or during worship services. Be consistent in promotion throughout the year.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: RECOMMENDED READING

Children's Books

- **Baby Faith (Baby Virtues)** by Maria Marianayagam (Author), Kat Uno (Illustrator) (Worthykids, 2025).
- **Baby Love (Baby Virtues)** by Maria Marianayagam (Author), Kat Uno (Illustrator) (Worthykids, 2024).
- **The Boy and the Ocean** by Max Lucado; paintings by T. Lively Fluharty (Crossway, 2013).
- **Climate Hero Handbook: How Kids Can Defend, Protect, and Restore the Planet** by Jessica Gamache and Jennifer Manley Rogers (General Board of Higher Education & Ministry, 2022).
- **The Day You Begin** by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López. (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018).

This book has captured the hearts and minds of thousands of children. It teaches children how to be confident with who they are as they explore the world around them and meet people who may be different from them. This book is also available in Spanish, "El Día en Que Descubres Quiénes Eres."

- **God Loves Me More Than That (Dandelion Rhymes)** Picture Book, by Dandi Daley Mackall (Waterbrook, 2008).
- **Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible** by Elizabeth Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Westminster John Knox, 2018).

Help nurture the faith of the children in your life with Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible. This engaging resource features 150 popular Bible stories that are organized by thirteen themes, including "Strong Women and Men," "Listening for God," "Parables," "Healings and Miracles," and more. Each story is built on the latest in biblical scholarship and learning theory and helps children begin to understand the Bible and apply its teachings to the world around them. Three reflection questions—"Hear, See, Act"—are included at the end of each story to help children further ponder the message of the story.
- **How Big Is Love? (Faith, Hope, Love)** Board book by Amy Parker (B&H Kids, 2016).
- **I Love You This Much (Songs of God's Love)** Board book by Lynn Hodges (Zonderkidz, 2005).
- **Love Letters from God: Bible Stories** by Glenys Nellist (Author), Sophie Allsopp (Illustrator). (Zonderkidz, 2023).
- **Love Letters from God for Girls: Bible Stories for a Girl's Heart** by Glenys Nellist (Author), Sophie Allsopp (Illustrator). (Zonderkidz, 2023).
- **Love Looks Like This** by Sherri Lynn Shumate (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

- **Mostly What God Does Is Love You** by Savannah Guthrie (Author), Morgan Huff (Illustrator) (Zonderkidz, 2025).
- **Something Happened in Our Town** by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin (Magination Press, 2019).

This book is also available in Spanish, "Algo pasa en mi ciudad: Un relato sobre la injusticia y el racismo" (Spanish Edition) by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin (Magination Press, 2020)

The companion book, "Something Happened in Our Park: Standing Together After Gun Violence" by Ann Hazzard, Marianne Celano, and Marietta Collins, illustrated by Keith Henry Brown (Magination Press, 2021) is also available.

Youth Books

- **Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth** by Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

Adult Books

- **Children and Family Ministry Handbook** by Sarah Flannery (Abingdon Press, 2020).
- **Children's Ministry and the Spiritual Child: Practical, Formation-Focused Ministry** by Robin Turner and Trevecca Okholm, editors (Abilene Christian University Press, 2023).
- **Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups and Class Leaders** by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016).
- **A Gift of Love, Sermons from "Strength to Love" and Other Preachings** by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., forward by Coretta Scott King, new forward by the Reverend Dr. Raphael G. Warlock (Beacon Press, 2012)
- **Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future** by Kara Powell (Baker Books, 2019).
- **It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent: Creating a Culture Where Parenting for Faith can Flourish** by Rachel Turner (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2018).
- **Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids** by Kara Powell and Chap Clark (Zondervan, 2011).
- **Wondering About the Bible with Children** by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (Abingdon Press, 2020).

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH: PLANNING CALENDAR

2025

MAY: Conduct plans for celebrating the Christian home. Recognize women in the congregation who are mothers in families and mothers in faith. Be creative and use online and social media platforms to create virtual ways of recognition.

JUNE: Recognize men in the congregation who are fathers in families and fathers in faith. Publish either an online devotional guide or a print version for families to use on vacation or at home throughout the summer months. Include scripture, meditation, and prayers. On June 8, Pentecost Sunday, have a “wear red” day and recognize those in the congregation who model the love of God. Allow church members to contribute by sharing stories and God-sightings from their faith journeys. Have one of the children create artwork for the cover of the devotional guide.

JULY: Plan a service project that allows families to help a school in the neighborhood near the church. Ask church members to bring school supplies

that can be donated to schools to be distributed to families that struggle buying supplies for their children. Fill backpacks with the school supplies and have school administrators hand them out to the children who need them. Provide other intentional acts of love in your community.

AUGUST: Have an “end of summer” ice cream social. Have a “Blessing of the Backpacks” that were filled last month as part of one worship service before school begins. Recruit a leader and set up a parent book study using the book, *Wondering About the Bible with Children* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (available from Cokesbury and Amazon). Reinforce this study group by registering for the Discipleship Ministries teachable course with the same book during the fall months.

SEPTEMBER: Hold a parenting class on *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent* by Rachel Turner (available on Amazon) to help parents and grandparents reflect on their spiritual lives and how the church can help equip and empower them on their parenting journey.

OCTOBER: Celebrate the Children’s Sabbath (for more information see <https://www.childrensdefense.org>). Sponsor a “trunk or treat” in your community. Invite church members to decorate their cars, park in the church parking lot, and distribute treats. Offer a free hot dog or chili dinner beforehand. Host a chili cookoff to find out who makes the best tasting chili. Have an intergenerational-aged panel of judges.

NOVEMBER: Provide a bulletin insert with prayers for families to use in celebrating Thanksgiving. Plan needed resources for celebrating Advent and Christmas in the home. Participate in the daily family devotional offered at <https://pictureadvent.weebly.com>. Provide a list of places needing volunteers that would welcome families volunteering together to help those without food and shelter during the holiday. Participate in Samaritan’s Purse Operation Christmas Child. Fill a shoebox (or two) with love to neighbors around the world. National Collection Week is November 16-23. See <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child> for more information.

FAMILY COVENANT FOR LIVING TOGETHER IN LOVE

Create a covenant together as you promise to grow in love for God and others. Every month, take time to ask, “How have we lived into our covenant?” Celebrate how you have shown God’s love for one another. Then, make any changes that might be needed for the next month.

This covenant will be in effect from _____ (start date) to _____ (end date).

So that our family may promote love for one another, we promise one another to:

1. Spend time eating, playing, and praying together.
2. Look for ways family members show love to one another and praise one another for loving acts.
3. Learn about organizations that address the hurts and needs of families, such as programs addressing abuse in the family, food pantries or home-building projects that show love to those who are without, hospitals and hospice care that provide for families when a loved one is ill. As a family, choose a way to offer service to one of these places.
4. Seek stories of love at church, in the news, at school, and at work and tell these stories to one another.

Signed by: _____

(All family members sign the covenant.)

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH: PLANNING CALENDAR

DECEMBER: Offer an intergenerational Advent workshop for the entire church family. Invite individuals to bring to church an Advent/Christmas decoration they use in their home and talk about why it is meaningful to them (during children's moments in worship). Provide a devotional guide for lighting the Advent wreath and praying together at home. Invite families to create Chrismons for the Hanging of the Greens service or at home. Reinforce the meaning of the Chrismons by creating an informational/study guide to help educate the families. See "What Are Chrismons," <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-are-chrismons>.

2026

JANUARY: If you haven't yet used the Covenant of Hope, invite families to do so as a New Year's resolution. Publish a list of "beat the winter doldrums" ideas. Include such ideas as playing a board game with the family, storytelling about family ancestors, having a stargazing night, or picking a favorite Bible story and acting it out. Use *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* by Elizabeth Caldwell as a daily family devotional guide. After reading, encourage family reflection and share thoughts and feelings about the Bible story and what it has to say about love.

FEBRUARY: Have a daddy-daughter dance the Friday before Valentine's Day

for the entire community. Celebrate marriage ministries on the Sunday nearest Valentine's Day. Encourage families to have pancakes the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (February 18), remembering that with Ash Wednesday, we begin Lent and a time of study and self-denial. Use the Lent resources found at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>. Recognize anniversaries, engagements, and milestones in the lives of couples in the congregation. Recruit a leader and set up a brief adult study of *A Gift of Love: Sermons from "Strength to Love" and Other Preachings* by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

MARCH: Begin plans for celebrating Christian Home Month in May. Host a mother-son coffee/tea get-together for the community. Plan a family spring break retreat at one of the United Methodist church camps and retreat centers. For more information and a list of locations, visit the UMCrm website, <http://umcrm>. Ask families to post photos to social media about how they practice love for God and love for one another at home and in their communities.

APRIL: Easter is April 5. Promote Discipleship Ministries' Holy Week House Party resource for families to use during Holy Week. This resource includes family prayers, meditations, activities, and conversations that help focus on Jesus'

resurrection. Celebrate Easter in creative ways, such as creating a flower cross. Make a large cross covered with chicken wire. Invite families to bring Easter flowers from their yards or gardens to church (or provide flowers at church). Encourage everyone to place the flowers on the cross, using the chicken wire to hold the flowers in place. Place the flowered cross outside for the community to see as a sign of God's love celebrated at Easter.

Welcome spring. Hold a family workday and spring cleaning at church. Invite those of all ages to come and clean areas of the church that might not have been cleaned for a while. Sort through toys and supplies from the nursery, removing those that are broken or no longer useable. Observe Earth Day on April 22. Join with others in your community to demonstrate God's love with creation care. Creation care is an essential part of discipleship. Raise your family's awareness of our responsibility to care for God's creation. Use the book, *Climate Hero Handbook: How Kids Can Defend, Protect, and Restore the Planet*, by Jessica Gamache and Jennifer Manley Rogers to learn more about creation care. Being good stewards of God's creation is an excellent way to demonstrate the love of God.

Begin preparation for observing Christian Home Month 2026: Families Called to Peace.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT MINISTRIES WITH FAMILIES

The Christian Home Month Resource, published annually by Discipleship Ministries, is a manual designed for use by leaders with families. Additional resources, ideas, and suggestions for Christian Home Month and family faith formation can be found online at:

<http://www.UMCdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>

Website: UMCdiscipleship.org | Toll Free: (877) 899-2780 | Email: info@UMCdiscipleship.org