

Faith Imprints— Right from the Start



Orientation and Training Guide for Congregations

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An Orientation and Training Guide for Congregations

This guide has been authored by—
Rev. Nancy Windels and Sue Devich, Faith Imprints Director
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Normandale Lutheran Church
Attention: Faith Imprints
6100 Normandale Road
Edina, MN 55436

Scripture Quotations unless otherwise noted are from the Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, World Publishing, 1997.

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Orientation and Training Guide
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Overview

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:1-5)

In the Beginning—History of Faith Imprints

Normandale Lutheran Church began this journey with simple vision of supporting parents in fulfilling their baptismal promises. The common practice was to clap for parents promising to raise their children in the faith and then say “infants we will see you in three years for Sunday School”. It seemed that there could be more done to support parents in their Christian vocation of parenting. In exploring ways to do this, there was a literature review as well as a review of current ministry resources in Christian congregations in the United States. The literature reflected a growing awareness in brain research naming the power of imprinting experiences in the first three years of life and the importance of parents as primary guides during this time. The early years of parenting are known to be stressful and isolating times, and at the same time, issues of identity and role responsibilities are being redefined. The friendships established during these early years of wonder and vulnerability often leads to deep and life long relationships. Given this awareness it was surprising to find that existing resources in the church for this age group consisted of prayer lists for Cradle roll babies, books for individual parents to read to guide them in raising their child in the faith, classes for toddlers to play and grow together away from parents, and support groups for parents to discuss raising their children in the faith, while their children were off in childcare. Lacking was an intentional community of parents and children gathering to learn and practice spiritual disciplines—parents worshipping with their infants, praying with their toddlers, and celebrating how God is present and at work in each child and family right from the start.

In 2001, Normandale Lutheran Church of Edina, MN began the process of developing a ministry that would engage families and children prenatally through age three in intentional faith reflection. Through focus groups, surveys, committee meetings, and conversations with respected authors and theologians, the concept of Faith Imprints was born. Two pilot groups, Birth-12 months and 12-24 months began in 2003.

Present

Throughout the five years of developing and implementing this ministry, the power, presence and participation of young families in the life and breath of a congregation was discovered. As families set aside intentional time in their busy lives to connect with their children, their faith, and their church community, amazing things happened. Families grew in their faith, deepened their connections to congregational life and formed lasting bonds with the other families in their small groups.

Future

The hope for the future is that this transformative ministry for families of young children will be a blessing to many congregations. God is leading and invites us to listen, learn and

envision new ways for families to discover the power of raising their children in faith—right from the start.