

CONNECTING FAMILIES, NURTURING FAITH

A resource for encouraging discipleship across households

This tool is to assist ministry leaders to connect families with resources that nurture faith formation at home. It also encourages families to connect with other families regularly. The aim is to assist ministry leaders in enabling discipleship, particularly for families with children.



STEP 1: CHOOSE A RESOURCE

Churches are encouraged to choose one of the following free resources for their church families (or the whole church community) to use. Obviously, there's a whole range of other resources available as well. The key is to choose something and then share it with your families for their use.

Suggested resources:

- [Messy Church at Home \(produced by Messy Church BRF-UK\)](#)
- [Church at Home 2 \(produced by Grow Ministries, Lutheran Church of Australia\)](#)
- [Lost Sheep You Tube \(produced by Lost Sheep –South Australia\)](#)
- [Ketchup with God and Crazy Kaz \(produced by Pulse – Synod of NSW & ACT, Uniting Church in Australia\)](#)

On the following pages are summaries of these resources, what they are, what they include, how to access them and suggestions for using them in homes.



STEP 2: CHOOSE A TIMEFRAME

Decide on a time frame for families to engage with the materials. Some of the resources are weekly but can easily be adapted for fortnightly or monthly engagement.

To reduce the risk of families feeling overwhelmed, perhaps initially encourage engagement with one session per week for three or four weeks. With all of the suggested resources there are opportunities for families to engage in additional materials as they feel able.



STEP 3: CHOOSE A WAY TO CONNECT FAMILIES TOGETHER

Connecting families is important for pastoral care in this season of social distancing. It is also important for families who regularly or occasionally connect with your church to know that you are thinking of them.

Your church could facilitate a regular catch up for families to share their stories of engaging with the chosen resource. Whilst weekly would be ideal, the reality for families is that fortnightly - or even at the conclusion of the series - might be more realistic. For those that would otherwise be meeting face-to-face (eg. at Playgroup, Kids Club, Small Group or a monthly Messy Church), such a catch-up could be scheduled for the time at which they would normally meet. Such connecting could be in family pairs, triplets or for all families together.

Your church could:

- organise (or encourage family groups to self-organise) an online catch up using a platform for video conferencing, such as Zoom, MS Teams or Skype)
- set-up family "pairs" to simply phone each other (with or without video)
- develop a "phone call chain" with a list of church families, where one family rings the following family on the list and then that family calls the next family on the list and so on.

Churches could encourage families when connecting with each other to:

- share something they have done together recently or something new they have tried, such as a recipe or a board game
- share how they engaged with the faith formation resource eg show a craft they did, talk about a story they read or a game they played
- share one or two prayer points each and pray for each other – either while connecting or after hanging up from the conversation



STEP 4: COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES

Remember to consider families from ministry programs beyond just your Sunday services. Use invitational language and be positive and encouraging about being involved.

Once you've decided on the above, perhaps after consultation with a few of the families, you need to communicate the invitation to participate to the families connected with your church community.

You need to include:

- the resources with any information or suggestions about how to use them
- an outline of the suggested time frames
- details about how and when families might connect with other families
- any appropriate permissions (eg. for sharing of contact information)

Resources could be printed and posted or sent via email, including attachments and online links.

You might also like to include or adapt the "Suggestions for leaders to share with families" provided on the following page. These aim to assist families to feel more comfortable with faith formation practices in the home, particularly if they're starting this for the first time.



STEP 5: SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US

We would love to know what your church has offered and how families are engaging with these resources and connecting with each other. Are there other resources that your church/families are using and would recommend? Please share this with us so we can share these ideas with others and encourage more families in following Jesus.

We will be praying for you, your churches and families that we may all grow in faith together as followers of Jesus, care for each other and keep connected in this season.

CHECKLIST

- Step 1: Choose a Resource
- Messy Church at Home Lost Sheep YouTube
 Church at Home 2 Ketchup with God and Crazy Kaz
- Step 2: Choose a time frame weekly fortnightly monthly
- Step 3: Choose a way to connect families together and set a date to do this
- Step 4: Send communication to families
- Step 5: Share your story and other resources or ideas for discipleship across households

Contact us if you have any questions about the 'Connecting Families, Nurturing Faith' resource.

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Uniting Church in Australia
 SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS TO SHARE WITH FAMILIES:

Families, we know that it can be tricky to prioritise faith formation opportunities in our homes. We also know that this is so important, for our children and ourselves, to share and grow together in faith. Thank you for making this time.

Please note that you can use these resources however you want, based on the shape of your household, including the ages of your children. The important thing is to encourage faith based conversations and activities in the home. There is no 'right' way to do this. There's no pressure or expectation to do everything. Choose what suits your household.

We also encourage you to try something new and give it a go. Like most things in life, it can take a number of times of doing something before it works. Begin simply. Don't stress if it doesn't go as planned. Take a break if you need to. Come back to the activity later in the day (or week). Whatever works for you.

For example, if your family isn't used to reading the Bible together then perhaps just read a key verse and everyone can take it in turns saying it or colouring it in. Turn it into something active if needed, like put in actions or jump up when it's your turn to say a word.

Perhaps try a quiet time. Find a special place in the house, light a candle, explain that we're listening for God to speak to us through the Bible, which contains God's word for us. Then read the verse.

Trust that the God of grace surrounds you – don't stress about getting something wrong, just give it a go. If you feel stuck or a tricky question is asked, don't panic. Acknowledge that it is a difficult subject and wonder together as to what might help find a solution. For example, you might decide to contact your minister, elder or ministry leader for assistance.

And remember that the Spirit of God will be at work amongst your family growing faith in each of you as you look to Jesus and seek to live life following him.

MESSY CHURCH AT HOME

(PRODUCED BY MESSY CHURCH BRF-UK)



WHAT IS IT?

Once a week, between Easter and the end of June, Messy Church-BRF are providing a “Messy Church at Home” session. Originally provided for Messy Church communities, these sessions can easily be used by any church family.

The sessions are in a variety of formats and are appropriately worded for households, rather than church leaders, to use. To assist you in your forward planning, the themes are listed on the webpage and resources will be scheduled to appear on or before the dates listed.

WHAT IT INCLUDES?

There are 3 or 4 activities, conversation questions, prayer ideas and a mealtime suggestion all based around a Bible story. It has simple instructions, links to extra resources including some video content. These sessions are easy to follow and use fairly standard materials from around the home.

HOW TO ACCESS

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/messy-church-home-april-june-downloadable-sessions>

Click on the link above and then click the link for the selected session

WAYS TO USE THIS RESOURCE AT HOME

Your church could:

- download and send the session each week
- send the relevant link each week
- send the main link to families for them to download the relevant session each week

Families could:

- use the whole session in one go
- do different parts of the session on different days throughout a week

This could occur before, after or even in the midst of a meal.

CHURCH AT HOME 2

(PRODUCED BY GROW MINISTRIES,
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA)



WHAT IS IT?

For this current season of not being able to meet together Grow Ministries has developed “Church at Home” resources. Their first series led up to Easter and the current series is “Church at Home 2 – on the road to Pentecost”.

From the Grow Ministries website...“There has never been a better time in the life of the church to help equip and encourage faith at home. With our church buildings closed, children’s ministry, youth groups and adult faith formation either suspended or online, households have the opportunity to bring faith alive in their homes. Church at Home 2 is for use from Sunday 19 April through to 31 May (Pentecost) 2020.”

This series is for specific dates and follows the Lectionary but you could very easily choose sessions to use or pick which week to start with and just begin at that point.

WHAT IT INCLUDES?

- Growing Faith at Home devotions – This section provides ideas, activities, conversation starters and Bible readings to be used at home. It is a one page, A3 landscape document with lots of ideas to use across a week. Alternatively, a few ideas could be selected to use in one session.
- Dwelling in the Word – This is a pro-forma/journaling type sheet that provides an opportunity to work through the Bible verses included in the Growing Faith at Home devotions page. This tool could be used to share each other’s favourite Bible verses. Households could print off one per person or complete this as a family. One sheet could be used per Bible reading or for the whole week, whatever works for a particular family.
- Children’s Chats – While these are worded for use within a worship context, the stories are easy to share with your younger children. All ages can be engaged in thinking about how the message for the week applies personally to their life.
- GIFT (Growing in Faith Together) activities – Activities for families to do together.
- Other Resources – Equipping sheets that share tips and ideas for sharing faith at home. One in particular that we would like to draw your attention to is Encouraging Home Devotions.

This looks like a lot but is quite simple once you open the documents.

HOW TO ACCESS

<https://www.growministries.org.au/product/church-at-home-2/>

Click add to cart, click view cart and proceed to checkout and complete the billing details (even though this is a free resource). A zip file will then be provided which you can save to your computer.

In the Zip file are multiple folders including: one folder dated for each week, an “other helpful resources” folder and a document titled “AA PLEASE READ FIRST”. It is helpful to read this first to understand the documents provided and how to use them.

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WAYS TO USE THIS RESOURCE AT HOME

Your church could:

- download the zip file and decide how many sessions/weeks to do. Choose which sessions to use and send them – in printed form or via email - to your families either weekly or as a block.
- encourage families to go online and download the resource for themselves. Explain which sessions you're encouraging all families to do and the timeframes, obviously they can do more if they like.

Families could:

Start with the Growing Faith at Home devotional page. This probably works best when printed, one per household but it can also be used and adapted off a screen. They could begin by saying the theme (top left), sharing the caring conversations (far left side), then read the Devotions (Bible reading) for that day and ask the discussion question under the Devotions box.

Use the Dwelling in the Word tool for the Bible readings (probably best for families with children who can read/write but adults could do the writing for everyone, either as a family group or in pairs/smaller groups). These will also need to be printed off, at least one per household per session but could be per person and per Bible reading.

Engage with the Children's Chat resource as a different way to explore the Bible theme, particularly for pre-readers or more active families. Just read it as is and join in the activities.

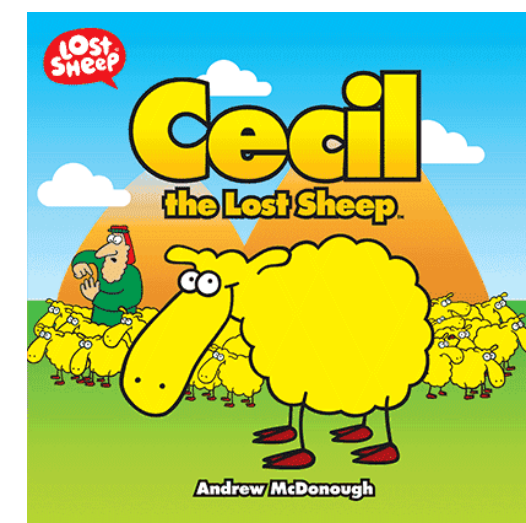
Return to the Growing Faith at Home devotional page and the prayer (middle right side of the Growing Faith at Home document.) This might be enough for one session. There's been a faith based conversation, engagement with a Bible story and prayer. There's no one way or right way for families to do this.

Families could then choose to engage with this session at another time in the week (or just continue from above and complete it all in one session). They could again do the Caring Conversations (far left side), the Devotions with or without the Dwelling in the Word tool. They could then do the Creative response (middle right side) and have a conversation based on the Service section (bottom right side). To finish they might say the blessing (middle left side) and perhaps make the sign of the cross on each other's forehead or hands.

Before each meal or at least for one meal, they could share the mealtime prayer (bottom right).

LOST SHEEP YOUTUBE

(PRODUCED BY LOST SHEEP SOUTH AUSTRALIA)



WHAT IS IT?

For something a little different! The YouTube description says: "Oh No! Andrew McDonough the bloke who draws Cecil the Lost Sheep and other Bible stories for kids is stuck in 14 days 'Stay At Home' isolation. To stop himself going bonkers, Andrew's going to post a story, drawings and other stuff every day. If he gets any views, he might even do some more videos once they let him out."

WHAT IT INCLUDES?

Each video has Andrew reading one of his stories and showing how to do one of the drawings. A number of them focus on the stories of and around Easter given that was the season of Andrew's self-isolation. These could be a fun way to hear a faith story together and perhaps inspire some budding artists on rainy afternoons. Videos are between 6 and 13 minutes long.

HOW TO ACCESS

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY96nuNwNEJpE8ABog9tLyQ>

WAYS TO USE THIS RESOURCE AT HOME

Your church could:

- choose a particular video for families to watch each week or simply encourage families to watch any of the videos
- depending on the number of families and the church budget, churches could purchase the selected storybooks and share them around the families (books are available at Koorong for \$7)
- take out a Lost Sheep subscription (see the Lost Sheep website) and share the selected story via Zoom (or similar) at a set time each week

Families could:

Gather around a device. Say an opening prayer, like: Thank you God for being with us today and for fresh ways to hear your stories. Help us to learn more about you. Amen.

Watch one of the videos. Join in with any actions that Andrew leads.

After hearing the story, the video can be paused and one or two of these questions, as appropriate, can be asked:

- What did you like best in the story? What didn't you like?
- What did you learn about God or Jesus in the story?
- What do you think this means for you or our family?

Nb. If they have the Lost Sheep storybooks, there are great ideas in the inside front or back covers for conversations before and after the story is read.

Provide pieces of paper and drawing tools (pencils, textas etc) and everyone could have a go at the drawing. You could add extra elements or try different variations of the drawing.

The videos could be extended by accessing some of the great free resources on the Lost Sheep website here: <https://www.lostsheep.com.au/>. Families could have a look around or click on Kids – Characters – then click on a character. Scrolling down they will find free downloads, such as crosswords, mazes, bookmark designs, colouring pages and more! (Churches might like to download these and email or post them to families.)

KATCHUP WITH GOD AND KRAZY KAZ

(PRODUCED BY PULSE - SYNOD OF NSW & ACT,
UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA)



WHAT IS IT?

A weekly video series for families based on the Lectionary that began as a way to help congregations to connect with families during this time of social distancing.

WHAT IT INCLUDES?

It includes a game, a Bible reading (told with Krazy Kaz's garden knomes), discussion questions, reflection, prayer ideas and some Kraziness! Karen Mitchell-Lambert (aka Krazy Kaz) leads participants through each video - creating space to pause for conversation or prayer, encouraging reflection, prompting discussion around application of the theme and encouraging prayer or a spiritual practice throughout the coming week.

HOW TO ACCESS

<https://vimeo.com/ucapulse>

WAYS TO USE THIS RESOURCE AT HOME

Your church could:

- encourage families to start with the current week, simply clicking on the video (in vimeo)
- churches could choose which sessions to use and send the individual links to families each week or as a whole block

Families could:

Gather around a device, watch a video, follow Karen's instructions for games, activities, pause and discuss the Bible reading and to pray. It's really quite straightforward.

Families could also take a look at any of the earlier videos too. These were started a couple of weeks before Easter so there are a number around the Easter story.

For extra resources the Pulse team are also producing weekly activity sheets based on the Lectionary for pre-schoolers, primary age children and high schoolers. Families can download and print these or sign up and receive these in the post!

Find them here: <https://www.ucapulse.org.au/2020/04/pulse-mail-is-reaching-our-young-hearts/>