

Atlantic Baptist Women's 2024 Home Mission Project

Companions on the Journey: Coming Alongside Children and Youth

“... we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD and his might and the wonders that he has done” (Psalm 78:4b, NRSVUE).

Scripture is filled with exhortations and examples of sharing faith with the next generation. Yet, adults often struggle to develop meaningful relationships with children and youth that provide opportunities to share their faith.

During his interMISSION 2023 workshop on the importance of building relationships, Rev. Dan Pyke, director of Youth and Family with the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, spoke about how youth are losing trust in authority because they often see leaders failing to engage in issues that matter to youth. Rev. Pyke offered three suggestions for adults seeking to become trusted by youth:

1. Give youth the experience of being noticed.
2. Commit to knowing the names of youth.
3. Practise nonjudgment.

Atlantic Baptist Women's 2024 Home Mission Project, “Companions on the Journey,” focuses on becoming trusted adults for children and youth. It offers stepping stones to initiating meaningful relationships and building blocks to strengthen those relationships.

There are three steps in the project:

1. Consider Look around your church and community. Ask the Lord to show you the children/youth nearby. Consult with children's ministry

and youth leaders, parents, teachers, and community program leaders to find out the needs of their children/youth. Ask: how can I/we invest in the lives of your children/youth?

Look at what you have to offer. Ask the Lord to show you what skills, gifts, and talents you have that you can pass on. Write them down. No offering is too small.

Look at what children/youth have to offer. Ask yourself what they can teach or help you with that may facilitate connection.

2. Connect Start small. Say hello and acknowledge children/youth when in their presence, whether at church, the grocery store or mall, or walking down the road. Offer a compliment the next time you see them. Learn their names.

Prayerfully turn initial connections into invitations. It is important to communicate with parents and other adults already involved in the lives of children/youth. Match the needs of the children/youth with what you have to offer, either as an individual or as a group. Remember to include how children/youth can teach you. Make plans. Invite children/youth/families.

Here are a few of many possibilities: reading buddies (read to them or have them read to you); intergenerational ministry project—consult schools and community programs for needs (e.g., make muffins together for school breakfast programs, shop for school supplies together and donate them to local schools); offer lessons (music, sewing, cooking, woodworking, filing income tax returns); tea party; ice cream social; movie or games afternoon/night; teach one another favourite dances; art/paint projects; jewelry making; social media 101; creation

care (e.g., plant and tend a garden together, pick up litter); make cards for others; visit museums/libraries; walking buddies; do jigsaw puzzles together; build something together; help child/youth learn lines for a play; family fun day event; bake birthday cakes together for family members; school's out party.

3. Cultivate Start with one event or opportunity and build from there. Take the next step in strengthening existing relationships. Continue to ask the Lord for guidance as you pray for children/youth. Followup is key.

Be their cheerleader: go to their game, recital, play, etc. Check in with children/youth and their families to see how they are doing by making occasional short phone calls. Send encouragement, birthday, and holiday cards or care packages.

Connect or plan events throughout the year: World Poetry Day (Mar. 21); Earth Day (Apr. 22); International Tea Day (May 21); International Day of Friendship (July 30); International Youth Day (Aug. 12); National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Sept. 30); International Day of the Girl Child (Oct. 11).

Becoming a trusted adult is for the long term. As children and youth enter different seasons of life, they still need to know that you are there for them.

Be a companion on the journey. It matters.

