

PARTNERING HOME & CONGREGATION

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The Youth and Family Institute states that the Four Keys of ↻caring conversation, ↻devotional life, ↻service, and ↻rituals and traditions are tools for the work of the Holy Spirit, avenues to create faith and build the church, the body of Christ. The congregation of Bethlehem recognizes this and adds that the Four Keys can nurture healthy relationships and faith at the same time, both in the home and in the congregation. Last month, this article focused on ↻devotional life. This month my focus is on ↻caring conversations.

↻Caring Conversations

"Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise."
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

"My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you." Proverbs 6:20-22

What is meant by caring conversation?

Faith is passed on from generation to generation through personal, trusted relationships that share the stories of the family, the faith, and the Bible. At the heart of caring conversation is the sharing of faith, values, and the care of others. When we stop to have a caring conversation with another person, we are making ourselves available not only to speak but also to listen. In doing so, we indicate an interest in others – their hurts, their joys, their concerns and dreams, their values and faith.

Where to begin???

*Identify the "holy ground" in your life.

Where do you have those special conversations where memorable, intimate dialogue takes place – the kind of dialogue that seems to convey the peace, hope, and faith that God gives to our lives? (examples – in the car, at the dinner table, tucking a child in bed, doing chores, on vacation.)

*Reclaim this holy ground. Caring conversations require time!!!!

Don't let the business of your day deprive you of the chance to communicate with your family and

other special people in your life. Parents, your children want time for meaningful conversation with you! (Yes, this includes teenagers who give every outward appearance that they don't care.) Also, children don't distinguish between "quality" and "quantity" when it comes to time. Like teachable moments, "conversational moments," those times when both parent and child or friends find themselves engaged in meaningful dialogue, can happen at any time and in any place.

*Allow this time to be a safe time to talk about anything!

Don't be afraid to include God in your conversations. Embrace happenings of your day as times to reaffirm your values. The media is highly influencing the decisions our children are making. Now is not the time to be silent about faith and how our faith forms our lives and decisions! These conversations don't have to be lectures. Offering affirming comments will work. (ex. I think it was great how you made sure to include Taylor in your group.)

*Remember conversations are two-way streets. It is important to listen more than you speak.

*Need ways to begin conversations?

Try personal notes. One father had to go to work before his high school daughter got out of bed so he got in the habit of posting a note for her each morning on her mirror. On the evenings and weekends, they had a little more time to talk. One mother began e-mailing her son who responded with lengthy messages. As a consequence, the two began speaking more regularly with each other face to face. Finding it hard to talk to the family all at once, schedule a regular family meeting time.

The practice of having times and places set aside to give others undivided attention and to practice the art of conversation is a special gift. Praise God for those who this comes easily. If this is a struggle for you and your family, ask God for help. (Prayer is having a caring conversation with God.) Pray for others who might be struggling. Visit with friends to get ideas of how they are able to find time for caring conversations. Support each other! God is with you.