



faith
markers

Marking each child's faith journey



**Faith & Life
Resources**

A division of MennoMedia
Mennonite Church USA and
Mennonite Church Canada

Faith Markers

What is it?

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Congregations often mark significant events that take place in the lives of their members, such as the birth of children, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Some congregations recognize other special times that may be less prominent in the lives of their children and youth, yet can be very significant. When children begin Sunday school, reach a certain age, or graduate from high school, these congregations will mark such transitions with a blessing or ritual.

All such faith celebrations with children and youth can be intentionally developed and planned through a ministry called **Faith Markers Ministry**. The plan engages the whole congregation in celebrations of faith growth. While the **Faith Markers** focus on children or youth, they also help to shape and nurture the faith of all persons throughout life.

Why a Faith Markers Ministry?

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Through **Faith Markers Ministry**, we honor a child's steps along the pathway toward believers baptism and church membership. We acknowledge that children are already in relationship with God and capable of growing in faith.

Faith Markers are significant for the children and youth, their families, and the church community. A ritual of blessing reminds children that they are an integral part of the faith community. Faith recognition reminds parents of their role in shaping faith in their children at home. And the church community affirms its promise to be partners in forming faith in all ages.

What happens in a Faith Marker celebration?

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Rituals are important in faith formation. They remind us to pay attention to the changes and transitions in life. Children will remember “the way we always do things” for birthdays, Christmas, family gatherings, and even Sunday school.

Rituals have a way of transforming the ordinary into the holy so that the recipients are aware of God's presence. Faith rituals affirm children and youth as valued people within the congregation, even though they are not baptized members.

Each occasion can be a simple, short part of a worship service or expanded into a longer event.



How to begin a Faith Markers Ministry

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Create a **Faith Markers** team to oversee this ministry. This group can determine which **Faith Markers** you will celebrate, when these events will take place, who will be involved, and what resources you will need.

Educate the congregation and the parents about the importance of marking and celebrating faith transitions.

Keep good records of the **Faith Markers** that you choose to celebrate; the children, youth, and families who participated; and the resources that you presented.

What is needed for this ministry?

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1. An overview **chart** suggests opportunities for marking faith milestones in the church's children from birth up to age 18.
2. **Simple worship resources** serve as a guideline for pastors and leaders who will plan these occasions. These include Scripture texts, blessing litanies or readings, words to accompany the presentation, and closing words. Adapt these resources to fit your congregation's needs.
3. For each event we suggest one or more **Faith Marker gifts** from the congregation as a faith symbol or reminder of this important occasion. These gifts have been chosen for their age-appropriateness and symbolic significance, and the congregation is free to determine which resources to choose. Check out our website at www.MennoMedia.org for more resources, and feel free to substitute.
4. **Parent/caregiver resources** are listed to help the church equip parents in their primary role in forming faith in their children at home. Congregational leaders are encouraged to spend time before each occasion with the parents of the celebrants. This is a good opportunity to teach parents how to talk about faith and plan faith-expanding experiences at home. Spend an evening together or plan for a brief meeting prior to the worship service. Give parents the resources listed in the chart to help them grow their own faith.
5. **A list of resources** that can be used to teach parents and the congregation and to guide you in selecting faith symbols for the children and youth.

Books and resources

Order from MennoMedia at www.MennoMedia.org

Books for children and youth

101 Devotionals with Children,
by June Galle Krehbiel

Children's Illustrated Bible,
adapted by Eve B. MacMaster

*Claiming Faith: Youth Discover
the Confession of Faith*

*Dive: Devotions for Deeper Liv-
ing*, by Cynthia Massanari
Breeze

God's Story, Our Story, by
Michele Hershberger

Hymnal: A Worship Book

Living More with Less, by Doris
Janzen Longacre

Peace DVD

Plant a Seed of Peace, by Rebecca
Seiling

Quills, by Aaron Ratzlaff

Radical Jesus, Sandra Sauder and
Paul Buhle, eds.

Rejoice! daily devotional readings

Rhythms of Peace DVD

Sensing Peace, by Suzanna Yoder

Simply in Season cookbook,
Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen
Hockman-Wert, eds.

*Simply in Season Children's
Cookbook*, Mark Beach and
Julie Kauffman, eds.

Sing the Journey

Sing the Story

Sleep in Peace, by Ingrid Hess

Tent of Meeting, by Julie Ellison
White

Walk in Peace, by Ingrid Hess

Walking with Jesus, by Mary
Clemens Meyer

Books for parents and caregivers

*Growing Together: Understand-
ing and Nurturing Your
Child's Faith Journey*, by Anne
Neufeld Rupp

Let the Children Come, by
Jeanette Harder

*Parent Trek: Nurturing Creativ-
ity and Care in Our Children*,
Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, ed.

Seven Things Children Need, by
John Drescher

*Thank You for Asking: Convers-
ing with Young Adults about
the Future Church*, by Sara
Wenger Shenk

Whatever Happened to Dinner?,
by Melodie Davis

Youth Ministry at a Crossroads,
Andy Brubacher Kaethler and
Bob Yoder, eds.

Bible reading charts

My Bible Reading Chart (100
selected verses for children
ages 6–9)

Dig into the Bible (350 selected
texts for children ages 10–13)

Read the Book (entire Bible for
youth)

Encounter the Word (entire Bible
for adults)

Certificates

Parent/Child Dedication
Baptism and Church Membership
Church Membership

Faith Markers Ministry overview chart

Use the blank chart on page 15 to record the Faith Markers that you celebrate.

Age	Occasion	Scripture reference	Faith Marker/ gift suggestion	Parent/Caregiver resources
0-1	Parent-child dedication	Luke 2:21-40 Psalm 139:13-14a	Parent-Child Dedication Certificate	<i>Growing Together</i>
3	Beginning Sunday school	Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Psalm 78:4	<i>Sleep In Peace</i> <i>Walk In Peace</i>	<i>Seven Things Children Need</i> <i>101 Devotionals with Children</i>
6	Entering first grade	Matthew 18:1-6	<i>My Bible Reading Chart</i> <i>Plant a Seed of Peace</i> <i>Quills</i> <i>Sensing Peace</i>	<i>Parent Trek</i> <i>Whatever Happened to Dinner?</i>
9	Bible presentation	Psalm 1	<i>Bible</i> <i>Dig into the Bible</i> reading chart	<i>Encounter the Word</i> reading record for the whole Bible
12/13	Teen entry	Luke 2:40-52 1 Timothy 4:12	<i>Read the Book</i> reading record for the whole Bible <i>Tent of Meeting</i> <i>Peace DVD</i> <i>Radical Jesus</i>	<i>Youth Ministry at a Crossroads</i>
18	Entering adulthood	Proverbs 4:1-13	<i>Simply in Season</i> <i>Hymnal: A Worship Book</i> <i>Sing the Journey</i> <i>Sing the Story</i> <i>Living More with Less</i>	<i>Thank You for Asking</i>
	Baptism (youth and young adult)	Isaiah 43:1b-3 Matthew 28:19-20	Baptism and Church Membership Certificate <i>God's Story, Our Story</i> <i>Rejoice!</i> daily devotional readings <i>Dive: Devotions for Deeper Living</i> <i>Claiming Faith</i>	

Worship resources

Worship resources written by Mike Bogard

Age 0–1: Parent-child dedication

Age 0–1: Parent-child dedication

Purpose: Each new life is a miracle, a unique expression of the handiwork of our loving Creator. In this service of dedication, the congregation welcomes the child into a relationship with the body of Christ and commits to share in the privilege and responsibility of nurturing this new child in a relationship with God.

Scripture basis: Luke 2:21-40

Suggested setting: Parents and child or children come to the front.

Worship resource: The pastor and congregation direct this litany to the parents and the children. Insert the name of the child where the reference is for “this child.” Adapt this litany for more than one child.

Pastor: The time has come, the day has arrived.
This child, _____, is born into the world
and has a name.
We now present _____ to the Lord.

Congregation: This child comes to us with holiness.
He/she comes to us with innocence.
He/she comes to us with promise.

Pastor: We praise God for the gift of this child and all that
he/she represents to this family and to our church
family.

Congregation: We wish for peace.

Pastor: This child announces the promise of peace.

Congregation: We long for salvation.

Pastor: This child whispers the hope of salvation.

Congregation: We search for light.

Pastor: This child reflects the presence of light.

Congregation: We dream of glory.

Pastor: This child reveals the glory of God.

Congregation: As this child grows in strength and wisdom, we will
live in wonder at what God will do.

Pastor: May God bless this child;
may God bless his/her parents;
may God bless our congregation;
may God bless our world.

Congregation: May it be so. Amen.



Presentation of Faith Marker gift: (given by pastor, nursery coordinator, or another member of the congregation)

As a symbol of the partnership of the home and congregation in nurturing faith in this child, we present you with this gift. Let this be a reminder that this child, who comes from God, belongs to God, and has been entrusted into our care.

Closing word: With the psalmist we affirm that we are all “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14 NRSV)! We praise you, O God, for wonderful are your works!

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation and to offer resources to equip them in their faith formation responsibilities.)

Remind the parents that the home is the primary setting for faith formation to happen. The congregation is a partner in nurturing faith in children and their parents. Talk about ways that the congregation can encourage and support parents in their own faith formation. Present them with a resource such as *Growing Together*, which will guide them on their parenting journey.

Age 3: Beginning Sunday school

Age 3: Beginning Sunday school

Purpose: When children begin Sunday school they embark on a journey of learning to know God in the context of the congregation. As they relate to adult teachers and other children, they learn what it means to belong. For many young children Sunday school is “church.”

Scripture basis: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, known in Hebrew as the Shema. This text should be the basis of the worship service, read in the service and used as the textual basis for the sermon.

Suggested setting: Children stand or sit center stage with parents beside them or surrounding them in a semicircle.

Worship resource: Pastor directs this blessing to parents/caregivers with congregation overhearing. The blessing is derived from the Shema and reflects the teaching in the Shema.

Dear parents, dear congregation,

This Word is given this day to these children;
let us impress this Word upon their hearts.

Teach this Word with care to these children;
sit down together and read this Word as a family;
go for walks, sing, and memorize this Word;

read a story from this Word at bedtime;
and read the story again from this Word at breakfast.

At home and at church,

this Word will teach children to use their hands in service;
this Word will teach children how to see with compassion;
this Word will teach children how to walk as a witness.

In these ways, they will learn to love the Lord their God
with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might.

Amen.



Presentation of Faith Marker gift:

(given by children's Sunday school teacher)

Welcome to Sunday school where you will learn stories about Jesus with your new friends from this church. This (book, CD) will help you and your families grow with God together.

Closing word: The Word of the Lord to the psalmist is this: "Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth." And the people's response to the Lord was this: "We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord . . . and the wonders that he has done" (Psalm 78:1, 4 NRSV).

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation and to offer resources to equip them in their faith formation responsibilities.)

Encourage parents to take seriously the role of Sunday school in nurturing their child's faith. This means regular attendance in the worship and education of the congregation, taking time to review Bible stories with their children, and listening carefully as they express their faith experiences. When parents practice their faith in visible ways at home, children will notice and follow their lead.

Present the parents with resources such as *Whatever Happened to Dinner?*, *Seven Things Children Need*, and *101 Devotionals with Children*.

Age 6: Entering first grade

Age 6: Entering first grade

Purpose: At age 6 children begin to develop and expand abilities and interests beyond themselves and their families. They are learning to balance self-interest with the interests and needs of friends. They are learning to read, which opens a whole new world for them. They can participate more fully in the worship life of the church, and understand that they are part of a much bigger church community.

Scripture basis: Matthew 18:1-6. This text should be the basis of the worship service, read in the service, and used as the textual basis for the sermon. It emphasizes the importance of the church community in faith formation.

Suggested setting: Children stand or sit center stage with parents surrounding them in a semicircle and church educators and church leaders standing in a semicircle around the parents.

Worship resource

Pastor: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Teachers/

Parents: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

All: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?



Pastor: See the children before us. See the children among us.
(Pause)

Here is the truth; we must be like these children.

All: Our children are curious. Our children wonder.
Our children ask questions.

Pastor: Our children are innocent. Our children are simple.
Our children are humble.

Parents: Our children love to play.
Our children love to explore.
Our children love to learn.

Pastor: Here is the truth; we must be like these children. If we are like them, the question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” doesn’t matter because in the kingdom, if we are all like children, we are all the greatest.

All: We shall embrace these children of our congregation.

Teachers: We shall teach these children of our congregation.

Parents: We shall love these children of our congregation.

Pastor: We shall learn from these children of our congregation. In the name of Jesus we receive them, and through them, we receive him! Amen.

Presentation of Faith Marker gift: (by Sunday school teacher)

This book (resource) tells about people who loved God and showed their love by helping others. As you read these stories all by yourself or with your family, you will discover that you are part of a great big family of God, with sisters and brothers from all over the world, all who love God with heart and mind and strength.

Closing word: The word of Jesus to his disciples holds true for us today: “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37 NIV).

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation and to offer resources to equip them in their faith formation responsibilities.)

With children this age, it is a good time for families to create a tradition by sharing their faith, singing their faith, praying their faith, and living out their faith. Encourage the parents to involve their early readers in a regular family faith time. Read from the Bible using *My Bible Reading Chart* and other appropriate devotional materials.

Children this age can participate in worship by finding the hymn and pointing to words they recognize, listening to the Scripture, sharing in the children’s time, giving an offering, and learning how to worship by watching the people around them.

Age 9: Bible presentation

Age 9: Bible presentation

Purpose: When a congregation presents Bibles to children or youth, it invites them to join with others in a personal habit of lifelong reading, study, and conversation centered in the Word of God. A Bible given to children tells them that this is an important book to read from a young age up. A Bible given to youth tells them that this is a book to be studied in depth.

Scripture basis: Psalm 1

Suggested setting: Children gather around the communion table where the Bibles to be presented are placed. A larger Bible could be the centerpiece. A blue cloth can be draped over the table with a small potted tree beside the cloth.

Worship resource: (based on Psalm 1)

Happiness will come to you,

 If you refuse to listen to those who ask you to ignore God,

 If you refuse to stand by those who disobey God,

If you refuse to sit with those who make fun of God.

Happiness will come to you,

 If you choose to find joy in the Word of the Lord,

 If you choose to let the Word of the Lord be on your mind
and in your heart day and night.

Do this and you will be like a tree planted by a stream of water;

 When the time comes, it has bushels of fruit,

 And its leaves never dry up.

Do this and you will become the person God created you to be! Amen.

Presentation of Bible and appropriate Bible reading record chart:
(given by a teacher, pastor or representative of the congregation)

The psalmist has written, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119:103 NRSV). This Bible is the living word of the living God. It tells us how God loved God's people for many generations. It shows us how we can know God and how God wants us to live. The church wants you to know God through regular Bible reading and studying. May this book become a sweet companion throughout your whole life.

Closing word: Remember that Paul wrote to young Timothy, "Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and for helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds" (2 Timothy 3:16 CEV).

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation and to offer resources to equip them in their faith formation responsibilities.)

Ahead of time invite the parents to underline or highlight their favorite Bible verses in the Bible that will be presented. If possible ask grandparents, godparents, mentors, Sunday school teachers, and other significant friends and family members to do the same. When the Bibles are presented, the recipients can see that the Bible is important to the adults.

Parents can be asked to write words of encouragement to be spoken when the Bibles are presented.

Encourage families to read from their Bibles at home, using a daily reading guide or Bible reading charts.

Age 12/13: Teen entry (growing in wisdom)

Age 12/13: Teen entry (growing in wisdom)

Purpose: As children become teenagers, they enter a new stage in life, which includes taking more responsibility for their actions and decisions about their future. They are beginning to ask important questions about the faith they have been taught, and to claim it as their own.

Scripture basis: Luke 2:40-52

Suggested setting: Twelve- or thirteen-year-olds stand in a semicircle facing the congregation. The pastor faces the youth.

Worship resource: The pastor and congregation direct this litany to the adolescents. Use alternate lines in cases where adolescents have not been life-long participants in the congregation.

Pastor: For some time (*ALT: Year after year*), you have been brought to this church for worship and teaching; welcomed into this community of faith.

Congregation: We welcomed you when you were born;
We taught you when you started to learn;
We encouraged you when you began to understand;
We listened to you when you wondered about the Word.
(*ALT: We taught you, encouraged you, and listened to you as you wondered about the Word.*)

Pastor: For some time (*ALT: year after year*), you have sat among us, listened, and asked questions.

Congregation: We see your growing independence;
We are amazed at your expanding awareness;
We marvel at your developing gifts;
We treasure your exploring faith.

Pastor: Dear young people,
Follow the example of Jesus.
As you grow older, let your wisdom increase;
As you experience the favor of others, seek also the favor of God.

Congregation: May it be so. Amen.

Presentation of Faith Marker gift: (by Sunday school teacher, youth pastor, or mentor)

Becoming a teenager is wonderful and scary. We give you this (resource) to remind you that we will walk with you through your teenage years as you make important life and faith choices.

Closing word: Remember the words young Timothy heard from his mentor Paul: “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12 NRSV).

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents and mentors before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation and to offer resources to equip them in their faith formation responsibilities.)

Encourage parents and mentors to serve as partners in walking with teens during this searching phase of their lives. Consider ways that families and youth leaders, including mentors, can be intentional in providing opportunities for faith growth, such as a weekend retreat, service projects, and intergenerational events that welcome youth-adult interactions on a faith level.

Consider giving each family a copy of *Youth Ministry at a Crossroads* for this occasion.

Age 18: Entering adulthood

Age 18: Entering adulthood

Purpose: This milestone can also be celebrated alongside high school graduation.

Scripture basis: Proverbs 4:1-13. Ascension Sunday and the ascension texts might be appropriate for this milestone. The ascension of Jesus and the commissioning of the disciples can be understood as a graduation milestone.

Suggested setting: Young adults stand at the front where they receive the gift and then the blessing is offered by the pastor/youth pastor and congregation. Parents and/or mentors surround the young adults.

Worship resource:

Pastor: Hear, O young people, this instruction;
Give this your attention that you may
gain understanding,
For this is sound teaching;

Parents/

Mentors: Do not abandon the Lord’s instruction.
Hold fast to the Word with your heart;
Keep the commandments and live.
Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!
Do not forget nor turn away from the words
of God’s mouth.

Pastor: Do not forsake wisdom, and she will guard you;
Love wisdom, and she will watch over you.
Prize wisdom, and she will lift you up;
Embrace wisdom, and she will bring you honor.

Young Adults: God has directed us in the way of wisdom;
God has led us in the right paths.

Congregation: When you walk, your steps will not be impeded;
And if you run, you will not stumble.

Pastor: Take hold of what you have learned; do not let go.
Guard what you know, for wisdom is your life.

Congregation: May it be so. Amen.

Presentation of Faith Marker gift: (by parent, mentor, or pastor)

Adulthood, with all its opportunities and responsibilities, is exciting, scary, and challenging. This resource will remind you of our support and love in this time of transition. We echo the words of God to Joshua as the people prepared to move to a new land: "Be strong and courageous: do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9 NRSV).

Closing word: Hear the words of the psalmist: "The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God" (Psalm 14:2 NRSV). Be open to fresh encounters with the living God.

Parent/caregiver link: (Meet with parents and mentors before this celebration to explain the **Faith Markers Ministry** in your congregation.)

Ahead of time invite the parents, mentors, youth sponsors/pastors, and other significant people in the lives of these youth/young adults to write a note of encouragement to give during the presentation. If you give a cookbook or hymnal, have this group underline or highlight a favorite recipe or hymn and sign their name and a note beside it.

Believers Baptism (youth and young adult)

Believers Baptism (youth and young adult)

Note: This Faith Marker is included because baptism is a very special faith event that often happens during the teen years—not because it is considered an automatic rite of passage. Baptism is "an outward sign of an inner, spiritual transformation made possible through the resurrected Christ" (see *Minister's Manual*). At baptism, the believer is accepted into the congregation as a member upon confession of faith.

This worship resource is similar to the baptismal rite found in the *Minister's Manual* (Herald Press, 1998, pp. 38 ff.). Use whichever resource works best for your congregation, or adapt both as you see fit.

Purpose: The congregation affirms the youth's decision to be baptized and join the church community as a believer.

Scripture basis: Isaiah 43:1b-3; Matthew 28:19-20

Suggested setting: Invite the baptized youth to move down and stand on the floor near the front seats, facing out toward the congregation. Invite parents, mentors, sponsors, teachers, and others in the congregation to gather behind the youth at the front while the remaining congregation stands in front of the youth, completing the gathering circle.

Worship resource: The pastor and congregation surround the person(s) with the words of this litany.

Pastor: Long ago Jesus stood in the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized, just as you have stood here and presented yourself for baptism.

Since you were born, you have been blessed by the love of Jesus. The presence of the Holy Spirit has been with you in your growing years.

Congregation: God is your Creator; God calls you.

Pastor: Today you professed Jesus as Lord of your life and were baptized with water. You have been baptized, too, by the Spirit of Jesus who remains with you forever.

Congregation: God is your Redeemer; God walks with you.

Pastor: One day, while living for Jesus, you will be baptized by the fires of testing and God will be with you.

Congregation: God is your Savior; God protects you.

Youth: The Lord our God has saved us; the Holy Spirit guides us; Jesus Christ sends us into the world.

Pastor: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19, 20a NRSV).

(ALT: Go, therefore, continue to be disciples, and make disciples. In the name of God, your Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, invite others to faith and together learn to obey everything God has commanded. Amen.)

Congregation: May it be so. Amen.

Presentation of faith symbol: (given by pastor or mentor)

On behalf of the congregation, I welcome you into this community of believers, into the body of Christ. This (resource) will remind you that you belong with us and that the larger Christian community embraces a theological understanding of believers baptism.

Closing word: As God said to Jesus on the day of his baptism, so does God say to you: “You are my beloved child (children); I am very pleased with you” (paraphrase of Matthew 3:17).

Parent/caregiver link: During the course of the preparation for baptism, it would be good to meet with the parents for a course or refresher course on the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of believers baptism.

Encourage parents and mentors to invite faith conversations with the youth about baptism and church membership. Talk together about how youth can share their gifts in the church.

