



Information for congregations

Dear Ministry Leader,

Thank you for your encouragement of ministry with families. We hope the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* is one way for you to **equip families of all ages for discipleship in their own homes**.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the ***Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet**. This resource is designed to support families to grow in faith in the home through Bible reading, conversations and activities such as crafts and games. Christmas is a key event in the Christian faith as it celebrates the birth of Jesus, the Saviour of the world. It is also a time when people may be more open and willing to participate in activities and talk about what Christmas means with their family.

We would encourage your church to **print and gift copies** of the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet to each family in your congregations and ministry programs, such as playgroups or youth group. This resource is designed for families with children of any age, from pre-schoolers to youth and young adults and can be easily adapted for households without children as we have included key questions and activities that relate to different age groups, including adults and youth. Therefore, people of all ages may find this resource a useful tool for faith conversations in their homes as they prepare for Christmas. Your church may like to print off additional copies or email it to all people involved with your church with an encouragement to use this resource alongside or in lieu of other Advent and Christmas resources. For example, a few adults may like to meet together as a small group and work through each session weekly in the lead up to Christmas.

The *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet is designed so that families can pick and choose activities that are most useful for their particular family. There is no expectation that everything has to be done. We understand that not every activity will connect with every family because of the different ages and interests of the people in each household. Thus there is a variety of activities suggested - some of which involve different senses and different ways of connecting and growing with God. This may also provide a unique opportunity for adults to engage with the Christmas story in a more experiential way rather than just sit, read and discuss. For more information about what is in the resource please see over the page.

We would also encourage your church to hold a ***Christmas Family Faith Trail* event** for families to become familiar with the resource and have an opportunity to learn how to pray, read the Bible and discuss faith questions as a family. We provide more information about what this might look like over the page, including additional resources you may like to provide for families too.

We pray that families will grow as followers of Jesus this Christmas season as they share faith in their homes and as you worship together as a congregation.

May you celebrate the great news that Jesus our Saviour came to earth to save us!

Blessings to you and your ministry team,

Jeanette, Jo and Melissa



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What's in the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet?

The booklet has 6 different sections that each explore a different part of the Christmas story. Each section has:

1. **Bible passages** – to look up in a hardcopy Bible or online at www.biblegateway.com
We recommend using an age appropriate version of the Bible. Different Bible translations are written at different reading levels. Encourage families to consider this as they pick out a translation for their children to use.
 - New Century Version (NCV): 3rd grad
 - International Children's Bible (ICB): 3rd grade
 - New International Reader's Version (NIRV): 3rd grade
 - New Living Translation (NLT): 6th grade
 - New International Version (NIV): 7th-8th grade
2. **Activities for three different age levels:** pre-school, primary, all ages. Each family can choose and/or adapt the activities to suit their particular family and what they may have available at home.
3. **Prayer prompts** – Some suggestions for praying about the theme and your family.
4. **Reflection** – questions to extend thinking and discussion.
5. **Other ideas** – additional ways to explore the Bible story or theme.
6. **Chat bubble** – enquiring questions to engage families in faith conversations. This is designed to help facilitate “what this means for me”, but also introduces ideas around service and mission – bringing the message of Jesus to the wider community.

How can churches use the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet?

We suggest that this booklet is not just handed out to families but we encourage congregations to equip families to use the resource. It is important to help families understand the parental responsibility to be spiritual mentors of faith in their own home. Congregations too have a responsibility to train and equip parents in skills they can apply to situations and challenges they face in parenting for faith in their homes. This resource provides an opportunity for congregations to do this. Please encourage families that this booklet can be used just as a guide to prompt their own exploration of the Christmas story and they are free to adapt the resource in any way that best suits the needs of their families. This is an opportunity for families to be creative in the way they do faith at home.

Begin by **printing or emailing copies to families as a gift** to encourage faith formation in the home. As Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas, encourage families to do one station in each week of Advent, and the final station during the week leading up to Christmas Day. Each station is set in a particular area of the home to make it more relatable to their environment. Advent begins on November 29, 2020 so you may like to gift this to families in early November.

Offer a **mentor model** where an older member of the congregation meets with a family one to one, either after a church service or in someone's home, to discuss and model how to use the resource in their home context, including how to read the Bible, chat about faith, pray and engage in activities.

Host a *Christmas Family Faith Trail* event

This is a bit like a workshop for families or a special “Growing Faith at Home” event hosted by the church where families can experience how the resource can be used at home. Each station in the booklet is set up with the materials (or adapted versions of the activities) so that families can experience together each station. This should provide opportunities to read the Bible, chat about faith, pray and engage in activities so that families become familiar with these discipleship practices and feel more comfortable doing them at home. If you choose to model the stations, please feel free to adapt them according to your environment, resources and creativity. This could be held straight after a church service or as a stand-alone event.

If you would like to run an event, please let us know. We are more than happy to assist with suggestions on how to be effective in your unique setting. We’d also like to walk alongside you and gain feedback on how you utilised the resource.

Host an introduction to the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet

Create opportunities for families to experience part of the resource, perhaps one station, during or straight after a ministry program you already run, such as a playgroup, a Mum’s group, after church or during Sunday school or Kid’s club. This is a modified version of the above option of hosting a whole event.

Seek feedback

However you choose to encourage families to engage with the *Christmas Family Faith Trail* booklet remember to follow up families – check in with how they are going and ask them for feedback about how they used the resource, what was helpful, what would could be improved and any other ideas. Please share, as appropriate, their feedback with us so we can improve this resource for next year.

RETURNING TO SHARED SPACES FOR CONGREGATIONS:

In this unique climate of social distancing and restrictions, we need to consider how we offer events for families. Please check with your church’s policy and current government requirements around safety plans. In your planning, consider these points:

1. Reduce shared spaces – instead of different stations that multiple people can access, consider one table per family that they can work together
2. Reduce shared materials – consider disposable items, surfaces that can be easily cleaned
3. Hygiene – wipe down surfaces before and after contact
4. Signing in – have one person write down registration details at a registration desk.
5. Social distancing – avoid queues. Families can stay as a group, but individuals need to keep their distance. Consider a “one way” traffic plan.
6. No food! As much as we love to offer food as part of our hospitality, now is not the time to share food!
7. Take home packs – can you offer some DIY activities for families to try at home?
8. What can you offer in a community setting that families may not have at home? (value-adding option)
9. What can you offer online? Group chats, activities online.

Additional Resources for Churches to share with families

The FREE Bible App for Kids Find it at bible.com/kids. There is also a Parent Resources page at bibleappforkids.com to learn more about the Bible stories and engage in fun activities.

Lutheran Tract Mission Resources https://www.ltm.org.au/resources/new_resources

There are a range of different Christmas tracts, mini booklets, postcards and text cards available through the Lutheran Tract Mission, either order online or visit at LLL, 175 Archer St, North Adelaide.



Ideas for advent and calendar



Advent Sticker Calendar



God's promises of
Love, Joy, Peace and Hope

The Bible Society

<https://www.biblesociety.org.au> has a great range of outreach resources for children and youth. Browse their website and look out for the free Christmas little books for churches and outreach groups. <https://www.biblesociety.org.au/leaders-connect/#kids> has short video clips for kids about the life of Jesus

Grow Ministries

<https://www.growministries.org.au/> Check out their amazing resources including the resource pack "GIFT advent" <https://www.growministries.org.au/product/gift-advent-final/>