



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

CONNECTING FAMILIES TO GOD AND EACH OTHER



Grace and peace to you and your families. I pray you had a very Merry Christmas and are enjoying the many blessings that the season of Christmas brings.

A new year in the church and in our world has begun. We continue celebrating the mystery of Christmas up until the long awaited visit of the three kings (or wise men).

This is the celebration of Epiphany, the arrival of the three wisemen who traveled long and far to visit Jesus. In the United Methodist Church, we celebrate Epiphany on Sunday January 6th. This is a time of celebrating as we sing “joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

This month, I invite you and your family to practice **presence** as you take **time** together entering into a new year of life with God and each other. “Busyness” can quickly take over our calendars and our daily lives. As you practice **presence** this month, find ways to set aside time to be with God and with your family. When you gather, take **time** to reflect on the year past- Share your celebrations and disappointments. Then take **time** to plan together for the next year- share your hopes, your prayers, and list goals or activities you are excited about experiencing in the new year.

I wonder: What are you and your family looking forward to in 2019?

As we begin a new year, this is a great **time** to focus on family rituals and **time** spent together. Hopefully in 2018, your family found a date/time that works for you to gather, pray, and spend **time** together. If not, now is the perfect opportunity! Maybe you will connect during meal times, car times, or bedtimes. Maybe you will try to have a family meeting once a month where you share, listen, plan, and pray together. Whatever you decide know that this is a spiritual practice and takes time and intentionality for an event to become a routine, and overtime a ritual and tradition. Be patient with yourself and your family as you practice **presence** together. I share ideas below on how to connect to God and each other during this new year.

As we grow together I invite you to share your thoughts, prayers, wonderings, and experiences with #growingtogetherumc, or send an e-mail to: tcampen@riotexas.org. We would love to hear how you and your family are experiencing God together. There are also additional resources on the Rio Texas Family Faith Formation website too: riotexas.org/family.

Grace and Peace, Tanya

January 2019 – PRACTICING PRESENCE



Did you know?

This month, the church will celebrate two seasons- first Christmastide (Dec 25th-Jan 12th) and then we will return to the season of **ordinary time**.

The color for Christmastide is white. The color for ordinary time is green.

This is a great month for celebrating Christ's birth and presence in our lives as we seek to discover ways to respond to and share Christ's love with others in this brand new year!

It's a time for candles and celebrations as we say: "Happy Birthday Jesus!" & "Happy New Year Church and World!"

Look: Clocks

Clocks help us remember to take time to talk to God. When you see a clock, stop and take time to talk to God:

God, thank-you for always listening when I pray. Today I need you to help me [fill in the blank]. Amen

Listen: Magi visit Jesus

Scripture: Read [Matthew 2:1-12](#) together. You might choose to read one verse a day or break this into several different sections, reading together throughout the month. Take turns reading, giving everyone who desires an opportunity to read.

Memory Verse Activity: Print [Matthew 2:11a](#) and post on a bathroom mirror, or in a note in a lunchbox. Remembering how the wisemen practiced presence when they visited Jesus: "They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him."

Recommended Book: [Let there be light](#) by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Wonder

- I wonder what this Scripture/story tells us about God?
- I wonder what this Scripture/story tells us about us?
- I wonder what this Scripture/story tells us about being present?
- I wonder what we discover when we stop and spend time with God?

Work

Practice Presence: How do you and your family spend time with God and each other? Pick a time every week or once this month to practice being together. Decide what activity you would like to do together. Maybe you will read a story, play a game, go for a walk, or sing/dance together. Check out the featured resource, *A Homemade year*, for ideas too! The activity is up to you. At the end of the time wonder together:

- I wonder what your favorite part of being together is?
- I wonder what you want to do the next time we are together?

Then set a date/time for your next family together time. Conclude with a prayer for your family, thanking God for being with you.



Pray

God, thank-you for always listening when I pray. Today I need you to help me [fill in the blank]. Amen

Bless

How to bless your family: Blessings help us connect with and affirm one another. It is an opportunity for God's people to remind each other that God is with us and that God loves us. Blessings look different from person to person and family to family. Find a time each day to bless the members of your family. This might be at meal times, bedtime, or at the start of the day. One way to offer a blessing is to make the shape of a cross on your family member's forehead or hand while saying words of your choice.

(Make a vertical line.) God loves you.

(Make a horizontal line.) God is with you.

(Look your family member in his/her eyes.) You are a blessing.

(Hug your family member.) I love spending time with you.



Loving Neighbor

During these cold winter months, many people often feel isolated and/or alone. As you practice presence, decide as a family who in your family/community you want to visit. You might choose to take them cookies or flowers to brighten their day. You might also choose to bring a favorite book to read or story to tell. You might choose to visit someone in their home or in their hospital or nursing care facility. Share Christ's love this month by being present for someone in your community.



- When you take time to be present with God, family, and neighbor amazing things can happen. Take time to journal what you see, hear, and experience in these moments. Draw or take a picture if something catches your attention. All of these are ways to remember God's presence in your life too!
- When your family gathers, invite everyone to share how they experienced God that day/week/month. Celebrate God's presence in your lives.
- Have an exciting faith story to tell? Do you have a family faith practice you want to share? Let us know! E-mail your stories to: tcampen@riotexas.org and maybe your story will appear here in an upcoming issue of Growing Together: Families.



- Featured Resource: [*A Homemade Year, by Jerusalem Greer*](#)
This gorgeously-designed book is a guide to celebrating the rhythm of life's calendar of events, as well as the Christian liturgical year, focusing on God's love in our lives. Greer weaves her own faith story with original recipes, crafts and entertaining ideas, creating a vibrant, personal narrative that is a modern take on timeless traditions.- Paraclete Press
- Other Resources:
 - [*Passing it on, by Kara Lassen Oliver*](#)
 - [*Pockets \(A devotional magazine for children\)*](#)
 - [*Scrambled Starts, by Jenny Youngman*](#)



We wonder what you wonder about!
Submit your questions to: tcampen@riotexas.org and someone from our conference family will share their reflections in an upcoming issue of Growing Together Family.

This newsletter is written and produced by the office of Intergenerational Discipleship for the Rio Texas Conference. We invite you to share this resource in its entirety with anyone who might find the information helpful in their family faith formation process. Please credit the author when you share with others. You can contact the writer and curator for this resource, Rev. Dr. Tanya Campen, at tcampen@riotexas.org