

Milestones Ministry:



# Planting Seeds of Faith

This Milestones Ministry was developed in New Hamburg Ontario, by the Hillcrest Mennonite Church, with pastor Jan Steckley.

Illustrations by Sheryl Kinch (used with permission)

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**Milestones Ministry: Planting Seeds of Faith**

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## **Milestones Ministry**

As developed by the Hillcrest Mennonite Church with their pastor, Jan Steckley, in New Hamburg, Ontario

### **Introduction to *Planting Seeds of Faith*:**

In 1999, a group of people from the Hillcrest Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Ontario, who were concerned about nurturing faith in their homes and their congregation, attended an interchurch event called “Child in our Hands”. One idea from that conference compelled them to action. It was about developing a ministry that would mark the milestones of growth in their children’s lives. They dreamed, played and worked with this idea as a group and finally pulled the results together into a manual for their own use and further adaptation. Hillcrest Mennonite Church is willing to share this work with other congregations. When I, as Director of Christian Education and Nurture for Mennonite Church Canada, was introduced to this project on a fall visit to colleagues in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, I was delighted by the possibility of sharing this resource with our broader church. The communications department of Mennonite Church Canada was equally enthused when they received my ‘show and tell’ report. Therefore, we have reformatted Hillcrest’s excellent work and are now offering it to you, our Mennonite congregations, with the hope that this will stimulate you as you work at strengthening the faith nurture connections between your homes and your congregational life.

Shalom, *Elsie Rempel*

# What is a Milestones Ministry?

A Milestones Ministry is the intentional celebration of key milestones or “markers” along life’s journey which have opportunity to shape faith as we grow and change. These celebrations can occur within a variety of contexts and in many different ways in the faith community. Their purpose is to strengthen and nurture the faith of those experiencing a particular milestone, as well as the entire faith community.

A Milestones Ministry also seeks to build connections in intentional ways between faith nurture that occurs at church and the shaping of faith that happens at home.

Milestones Ministry enables individuals, families and congregations to honour and embrace the past (including our faith heritage), look with hope to the future (for what God will yet do in and through us) and celebrate the present (by symbolizing God’s presence with us **now**).



## Why a Milestones Ministry?

- **provide**  
a sense of welcome, belonging and acceptance in the faith community
- **develop**  
a sense of identity which is rooted in God and awareness of one’s giftedness as created in God’s image
- **prepare**  
for and give meaning to significant life events
- **create**  
memories which will serve as a resource for the future
- **build**  
relationships and create bonds with others in the faith community
- **nurture**  
faith at various points along life’s journey
- **resource**  
families and friends in nurturing the faith and creating a partnership between home and congregation for the purpose of nurturing faith

# Milestones Ministry

Age	Congregational Celebration	Symbol/Gift	Other Resources	Group Responsibility
<b>Infancy</b> – “Wrapped in God’s Love”	Baby’s first Sunday Parent-Child Dedication	Candle / blanket	Photo album	c/o Cradle Roll Coordinator
<b>2 yrs</b> – “God Welcomes Me”	“Meet the Teacher” Night	Prayer book	Library display of resources c/o Library Committee	c/o Sunday School Teachers
<b>5 yrs</b> – “God is with Me”	Children’s Gathering (end of June) Craft - God’s Eye c/o Children’s Coordinator	Pocket stone Bible Story Book	Resourcing Event for Parents (at same time) c/o Pastor(s)	c/o Children’s Coordinator
<b>8 yrs</b> – “God is my Friend”	Sleepover for all of Venture Club (first event in Sept) Friendship Bracelet craft	<i>God’s Love is for Everybody</i> or <i>Songs to Live By</i> tape or CD	Resourcing Event for Parents on Friday night c/o Pastor(s)	c/o Venture Club Leaders
<b>12 yrs</b> – “Growing in Wisdom”	“Stepping Stones” Garden-at end of worship service with “mentor” sharing (June)	Bible with Name and meaning inside signed by congregation	Resourcing meeting in April for parents (Kit to make stones given) c/o Pastors/Youth Leaders	c/o Youth Leaders
<b>16 yrs</b> – “Growing in Freedom”	Home-based celebration Key chain with inscription of 1 Timothy 4:12	Key chain with inscription of 1 Timothy 4:12	Resourcing event in January for parents c/o Pastor(s)	
<b>18 yrs</b> – “Growing in Responsibility”	Sunday morning worship celebration - on individual’s birthday	Knotted comforter		c/o Mennonite Women(comforters) c/o Worship Commission, Youth Ministry Team and Pastors

# Infancy

## Baby's First Sunday



"Wrapped  
in  
God's Love"

### Purpose

To provide a symbol of God's presence in the life of the child and his/her family.

### Celebration

During worship, a candle is lit and presented to the family with the following words:

*"May the light of Christ shine in your home so that \_\_\_\_\_ is warmed by the flame of God's love."*

### Parent - Child Dedication

"Wrapped in God's Love"

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
You knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
*Psalm 139:13-14a, 5*

## Purpose

In the Parent - Child Dedication service, we:

**recognize** each child as a unique individual created in God's image

**invite** parents to nurture their child in such a way that he/she grows in faith

**commit** to participate in the task of faith nurture and provide a community in which each child can grow to the potential God has placed within him/her

**recognize** that the family is a primary place for nurturing Christian faith

## Celebration

Pastors invite participating families to a gathering to talk about the meaning of Parent - Child Dedication and to plan the service. The Milestones Ministry will be presented and parents will be encouraged to purchase a special "faith photo album" for photos which will be given following each milestone celebration.

A blanket is purchased for each child by the **Cradle Roll Coordinator** who invites someone from the congregation to embroider the following on it:

*"Wrapped in God's Love"*

\_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)

*Dedication Service Date*

\_\_\_\_\_ Mennonite Church

*Blanket is presented to child as part of the Dedication Service by*

\_\_\_\_\_.

A picture of each child and his/her family is taken after the worship service to be included in his/her faith album. The **Cradle Roll Coordinator** is responsible to have the photo taken and given with photo caption to the child's family. This is easily done with a digital camera.

Photo captions can be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*For I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:14a*

*"Wrapped in God's Love"*

by \_\_\_\_\_ Mennonite Church

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

## 2 Years

### "God Welcomes Me"

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." *Mark 10:14*



### Purpose

At age 2, a child will begin his/her first year of Sunday School. In Sunday School, we hope children will experience God's welcome as demonstrated by Jesus, who said, "Let the little children come to me."

We celebrate this milestone by sharing God's welcome, inviting children to ask questions about God and exploring with them how God is present in the world. The resourcing event will help equip parents for the ministry of nurturing the child that has been entrusted to them.

### Celebration

A special "meet-the-teacher" event would recognize the beginning of experiencing God's welcome in the context of the Sunday School program.

Parents and their two year old would enjoy an evening of refreshments, storytime and interaction with teachers and other classmates.

It would be the responsibility of the **teachers** to coordinate this event at the onset of the Sunday School year (end of August).

**Teachers** would hold a short gathering time for the children to tell the story of Jesus' welcoming the little children. Children would be presented with a prayer book at this time. The **Education and Nurture Commission** is responsible for the purchase of prayer books.

A display of resources for nurturing faith for parents to borrow would be set up by the **Library Committee** at one end of the room, along with a list of "Simple Ways to Nurture Faith" and gift ideas which support faith nurture at this stage.

A picture of each child with family and teacher is taken at this event to be included in the child's faith album. **Teachers** are responsible to have photos taken and given with photo caption to the child's family.

\* Photo captions will be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." Mark 10:14*

*"God welcomes me"*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

## 5 Years

### “God is with me”

“...even there your hand will be guiding me, your right hand holding me fast.”



### Purpose

When a child turns five, he/she begins school. This is a step into a larger world without Mom or Dad always present. This is a time for meeting new friends, experiencing new and different learning opportunities and interacting with an expanding world.

We invite the child to also see God at work in that larger world. We celebrate this milestone using story and symbols which assure children that God is with them, guiding and protecting them no matter where they are. We also assure parents that God continues to watch over their children, even when they no longer do so.

### Celebration

At the end of June, the **Children’s Coordinator** will meet with all children turning five in that calendar year and share with them the story of God is like a rock.

Children will make a “God’s Eye” and a pocket stone necklace or key chain to remind them that God is with them no matter where they go. The **Children’s Coordinator** will be responsible for craft supplies and stones, including drilling.

A Bible Story Book will be given to each child to encourage learning Bible stories at home. The **Education and Nurture Commission** will be responsible to purchase Bible story books.

While children are meeting, their parents will meet with the **pastor(s)** for sharing and resourcing around nurturing faith at this stage.

A picture of each child will be taken with "God's Eye" and a globe to be included in his/her faith album. The **Children's Coordinator** is responsible to have the photo taken and given with photo caption to the child.

\* Photo captions will be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*...even there your hand will be guiding me, your right hand holding me fast.*  
*Psalm 139:10*  
*"God is with me"*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*  
*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

# 8 Years

## "God is my friend"

...but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." *John 15:15b*



### Purpose

At age 8, children are developing more lasting and significant relationships with their peers. At Venture Club, we hope that as friendships grow, children will also come to see God as Someone who wants to be their friend and who will help them befriend God's other children.

### Celebration

At the beginning of September, a sleep-over will be held for all Venture Club members (Gr. 3-5). Special activities which focus on the theme of friendship and God as friend will be planned to welcome Gr. 3 children into Venture Club.

One of the activities will be to create a friendship bracelet. **Venture Club Leaders** will be responsible for leading the activities and planning and implementing the craft.

Each child will be given a "Songs to Live By" CD or cassette or *God's Love is for Everybody* CD, with the message that as we gather with our friends at church, together we learn and enjoy songs which tell us of God's love and friendship. CDs will be purchased by the **Education and Nurture Commission**.

Parents will meet with the pastor(s) on the evening of the sleep-over for sharing and resourcing around nurturing faith at this stage.

A group photo will be taken by **Venture Club Leaders** and 5x7 copies made for each 8 year old to be included in his/her faith album.

**Venture Club Leaders** will be responsible for photo enlargements and distribution along with photo caption.

\* Photo captions will be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*...but I have called you friends... John 15:15b*

*"God is my friend"*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

# 12 Years

## “Growing in Wisdom”

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour. *Luke 2:52*



### Purpose

At age 12, young people are entering a new stage in life where they will more and more be making their own decisions, taking responsibility for their own choices and for their life's direction, and asking important questions about the faith which they've been taught.

Scripture tells us that when Jesus was twelve, he was growing in wisdom and years. In the temple, Jesus interacted with the teachers of the law, engaging them in discussions about faith and articulating his own sense of call.

At this milestone, we want to recognize and celebrate the growth in mind, body and spirit of a young person, as well as the uniqueness and giftedness he/she brings to our church family and God's mission. We recognize the importance at this stage of life of having faith "mentors" within the church community who will befriend youth and talk with them about faith and life issues.

We also want to acknowledge that we are all still growing in wisdom and commit ourselves to walking together as we grow into the people God created us to be.

## Celebration

Each year in April, **pastor(s)** and **Youth Group Leaders** will meet with all parents of youth turning twelve during that calendar year for sharing and resourcing around faith nurture at this stage. At this time, parents will be given a patio-stone making kit to take home. Together with their 12 year old child, they will create a patio stone with the child's name and elements that reflect the uniqueness of that child. The **Education and Nurture Commission** will be responsible for the purchase of kits.

In early June, each 12 year old will bring his/her patio stone to church. Following worship, a "mentor" from within the congregation will speak briefly on behalf of the youth and his/her patio stone will then be added to the "Stepping Stones Garden" at the church. The mentor will present the youth with a Bible with a plaque inside containing his/her name and its meaning. Persons from the congregation will be invited to underline a favourite verse in the Bible and sign their names. This time will conclude with a litany of blessing and commitment and a time of prayer for all those whose stones are added to the garden that day. **Youth Group Leaders** will be responsible for helping youth and their parents to identify a mentor. The **Education and Nurture Commission** will be responsible to purchase Bibles and **Youth Group Leaders** will be responsible to have them underlined and signed.

Individual photos will be taken of each youth to be included in his/her faith album. **Youth Group Leaders** will be responsible for having photos taken and distributed with photo caption.

\* Photo captions will be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*.....I have called you by name, you are mine. Isaiah 43:1b*

*"Growing in wisdom"*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*

*Date*

# 16 Years

## "Growing in Freedom"

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for other followers by what you say and do, as well as by your love, faith and purity. *1 Timothy 4:12*



## Purpose

At age 16, we recognize the increasing freedom and mobility that comes to young people at this life stage, particularly with the privilege of learning to drive. As freedom is claimed and celebrated, we as a church community also want to encourage a respect for the responsibilities which freedom brings.

This milestone is an opportunity to celebrate with young people their potential for setting an example for others which is in keeping with God's intention for our lives and our world.

## Celebration

We recognize this milestone as being particularly important to celebrate within the context of home and family. Therefore, in January, the **pastor(s)** will meet with all parents who have youth turning 16 during that calendar year to offer resourcing on faith nurture at this life stage and to provide suggestions for a home-based celebration event.

A key chain could be purchased as a gift from the congregation to be given as part of the celebration time in the home. The **Education and Nurture Commission** would be responsible to purchase key chains to be given to parents at the January meeting.

Parents will be encouraged to take a photo of their child on his/her birthday to be included in the faith album.

\* Photo captions will be prepared by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*..set an example for other followers by what you say and do,  
as well as by your love, faith and purity. I Timothy 4:12*

*“Growing in Freedom”*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*

*Birthdate* \_\_\_\_\_

# 18 Years

## “Growing in Responsibility”

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

*Matthew 28:19-20 (John 20:21)*



## Purpose

Age 18 is a time when young people are moving out into the world. This happens at a number of levels - emotionally, physically and mentally. As a church community, we want to celebrate this “leaving home” and recognize the possibilities in the lives of our young adults as they seek to develop and use the gifts and abilities God has given them. At the same time, we also want to remind them that God needs them and wants to use their gifts and abilities for the work of God’s mission for the world.

As a church family, we want to send each young person out in the clear knowledge that no matter where life leads them, God will be with them and we will be supporting them with our thoughts and prayers.

## Celebration

Around the time of a young adult's 18th birthday, some time will be taken during the worship service for a celebration which will include:

Young adult's sharing about future plans;

Parents' reflection on the meaning of this milestone as it relates to faith journey;

Presentation of a knotted comforter which has been crafted by \_\_\_\_\_ **Mennonite Women in Mission** or knotted by members of the congregation to symbolize the ongoing care and support of their faith community;

A congregational litany and prayer of blessing.

**Youth Group Leaders** would be responsible to help plan for the celebration during worship and to have a photo taken of the young adult with his/her comforter to be included in the faith album.

\* Photo caption will be made by the **Church Secretary** as follows:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*

*And remember, I am with you always,  
to the end of the age.*

*Matthew 28:19-20*

*(John 20:21)*

*"Growing in Responsibility"*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mennonite Church*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_



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