

THE Promise OF Advent

The Promise of Advent: Preparing for a Season of Hope During Unparalleled Times

Episode 2 – How Will Our Children Cope? Family Resources for Celebrating Christmas

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Host:

- Rev. Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor

The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas

Panelists:

- Dr. Elizabeth Corrie, Associate Professor in the Practice of Youth Education and Peacebuilding Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia
- Cindy McNeil, Children's Ministry Director

Impact Church, Atlanta, Georgia

- Rev. Matt Rawle, Lead Pastor

Asbury United Methodist Church, Bossier City, Louisiana

Episode Recap:

This year has been hard on everyone, but it is especially challenging for children and teens who miss their friends and the life they were used to. Our panelists reminded us that the fear and chaos of this year is real for children too – but they don't always know how to interpret it.

Adam asked our panelists how we as leaders help children and families stay spiritually centered:

- Kids appreciate that church is “solid” for them right now. Their social lives have changed, school is different, and there might be tangible impacts of the virus and political unrest in their homes, but church is stable.
- Beth reminded us that we first must be spiritually centered in order to help others around us. She recommends daily Lectio Divina and the [Daily Examen](#), which are both adaptable across the developmental spectrum. Our world has gotten smaller these past few months so lean into those monastic practices of spiritual discipline.
- Cindy and Matt both spoke of special practices for children at their churches, such as a drive-through service to give third-graders their Bibles.

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When specifically discussing Advent and its traditions:

- Cindy reminded us that this is a season of opportunity to create new traditions. For example, children can create a space in their homes/rooms for spiritual traditions, just as we've created new spaces in our homes for work and school.
- Matt's church is using an ugly-sweater party as a jumping-off point to discuss the symbols of our faith. He encouraged leaders to err on the side of fun with kids during this time.
- When pastoring older children, Beth said it is good to remember Advent is post-election this year and during finals. They may want a more sober celebration, such as reflecting on the words of The Magnificat, where Mary recognized that the world was about to turn and change and she proclaims that she has said "yes" to God. Our teens feel that same importance to their own spiritual commitments. We're all in a *kairos* moment where we should try something new.
- Because the identity and structure of school is gone for many kids and teens, invite them to contribute to the planning of Advent services. Ask them for their ideas.
- Beth's church did individual videos where people "threw" a ball to each other – this idea can be used for lighting the Advent candle (someone passes their lit candle off camera and the next person picks it up).
- Youth have concrete ideas of how to use social media and digital technology to celebrate and create community – ask them for ideas. They already know how to connect with their networks.
- It's a good idea, if you're able, to send children mail each week from the church with crafts and activities, such as word searches and devotions.
- Matt's church is creating Advent trivia to play online during this season.
- Cindy is involving her ministry-team's children in planning. They are a group of kids frequently together, who miss that camaraderie, and they have seen leadership modeled and want to participate.

Through creativity and collaboration with children and teens, church leaders can create significant Advent practices and memories for this unusual and chaotic year.

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