

# Faith Milestones as a Tool to Grow Relationships

Debbie Streicher

(Vibrant Faith Ministries, Faith Formation Learning Exchange.net)

Celebrating a milestone in our lives is important. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and the list goes on. We can all think of a time when a milestone in our life was uplifted by our families with a party where friends and relatives gathered to honor important times in our lives. We received gifts and felt loved. It is good to be surrounded by many people who care about our lives and are with us for those special times. These times in our lives bring us together in an intergenerational setting where memories are made. We seldom forget about them and often seek to gather again with the same group of people to celebrate other milestones for ourselves and for others in the group.

When we reflect on the number of milestones celebrated in our homes, it is apparent families plan them and celebrate them without a second thought. It is a way of life. Who wouldn't celebrate a 1<sup>st</sup> birthday or a 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary?

Understanding the importance of the home in lifelong faith formation is a wise step towards the congregation partnering with the home. Investigating the importance of adding the element of faith to each milestone can make a difference in the way ministry is done. When done effectively and consistently, it is a tool that can build support groups and grow meaningful relationships within the congregation. Just as our nuclear family grows together through each of life's milestones, our faith family can grow together and support one another through faith milestones too.

Dr. David Anderson of Vibrant Faith Ministries states, "A faith milestone is a marker along life's journey that says, "This is something important and God is here, too." It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in everyday life."

As leaders in the congregation our responsibility is to help others understand and recognize God's presence in everyday life. How we go about doing that and the tools we use is part of the challenge we face daily. Opportunities to gather all the ages together to uplift and bless God's presence throughout our lives for milestone occasions can be provided as ministry events. We often overlook the impact and potential these events can have on building a faith community.

The Milestones Ministry model at [Vibrant Faith Ministries](http://VibrantFaithMinistries.com) incorporates a simple structure that includes:

- ◇ Naming,
- ◇ Equipping,
- ◇ Blessing,
- ◇ Gifting,
- ◇ Reinforcing

With this structure, the Milestones Ministry event has a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation. For example, naming an important time in the lives of varying ages can be becoming a first time parent, entering school, getting a driver's license, and so on. Equipping is bringing God's presence into the setting by providing scripture and caring conversations about connecting their faith to this event. Blessing is a special time for the entire congregation to gather and bless those individuals celebrating an event. Gifting is no different than something we do naturally for milestones in our homes when we give a present as a reminder of the occasion. Reinforcement is an important element in the ministry of the church. It is a time to bring the same group of people back together intentionally to talk about their lives, continue as a supporting faith community, and reflect upon their ministry together.

When we are able to provide a time to "check-in" and revisit the milestone events we celebrate, there is an opportunity to strengthen relationships and grow in faith together. Milestones in our lives are not weekly commitments. They are a natural part of our lives together as families and as a congregation. Many times we struggle to find and plan programs on a weekly basis that are met with low attendance and competing secular activities such as sports, shopping, or other events. When we want to celebrate a milestone in our lives, we make time for it. It is part of our culture. In our quest to bring all the ages together and become intergenerational in our ministries, does it not make sense to look to the milestones we celebrate as key times to uplift and celebrate God's presence in the life of the congregation? This has the potential of bringing the faith community together for an event many times during the year. This leads to growing relationships. The more we see of one another, the more we can experience our faith life together. It also provides a much needed support for parents, caregivers, and other adults as faith role models for children.

Should we be seeking ways to view the church as home too? By celebrating milestones that are already being done in the home as faith milestones in the church, we add the essential ingredient to the milestone, God's presence. The church role models for the home. Over time both the church and the home become centers for faith. *You also know we did everything for you that parents would do for their own children.* (1 Thessalonians 2:11)

There are several organizations and resources designed to introduce milestones as a tool to grow faith relationships in the congregation and in the home.

- [Milestones Ministry](#) (Vibrant Faith Ministries). This resource includes the Vibrant Faith Frame, 5-4-3 with an emphasis on the Four Keys listed below at the center of each Milestones Ministry event. Milestones range from celebrating Baptism to entering Sunday school to camp to getting a driver's license and more. All milestones include a special blessing in the congregation.
- [Faith Stepping Stones](#) (Faith Inkubators). There are 8 stones beginning with baby through graduation. Each Faith Stepping Stone includes an opportunity for parents and children to gather three times and culminate with a blessing at the altar. The first time, the physical needs of both parent and child are addressed. The second time is emotional needs and the third, spiritual needs. Each time parents and children meet, there are fun games, skits, a scripture verse set to music, and a small group time using the [FAITH5](#) as a core faith

practice. The FAITH5 includes sharing Highs and Lows, reading scripture, talking about and relating the scripture to lives, a prayer, and a blessing.

- [For Everything a Season](#). This book includes 75 different blessings for daily life to be celebrated in the home.
- [Milestones Blessing Bowl](#) (Vibrant Faith Ministries). The Milestones Blessing Bowl is a great way to celebrate each important milestone in the congregation. Hand-painted stones help visually remind congregations of the significance of a child's faith milestones, such as baptism, entering Sunday school, first communion, confirmation, and graduation.
- [Individual Milestones](#) (Vibrant Faith Ministries). Stones can be given as gifts as a reminder of milestones celebrated and placed in a Blessing Bowl. These beautiful remembrances will keep congregations rejoicing over special events long after they happen.
- [Milestones of Faith](#) (Sticky Faith). Steven Johnson, Director of Student Ministries at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Irvine, California writes about the importance of marking faith milestones. He describes the milestones as "rites of passage" and gives a short history of their development: *Our milestones ministry started with conversations about what "rites of passage" might look like in our context. Our essential question when developing faith milestones was: What does faith development look like in our community from birth to when our kids go off to college and beyond? Those conversations turned into ideas, then into small events and shifts, and then moved into consistent programs. It was only after people started seeing and getting excited about the programs working on the periphery of our church that our whole church caught the vision for milestones.* He also gives an outline of four practical ideas to begin a milestones ministry in your own context: 1) Start Talking, 2) Families and Community, 3) Start on the Periphery, and 4) Program It.
- [Family Faith Celebrations](#) (Group Publishing). Group Publishing describes these milestones as a lifelong pathway for church and parents to partner in the spiritual development of children—from birth through high school. Together, the church and families celebrate the moments a child or teenager publicly marks his or her journey with God. Each Family Faith Celebration contains three important elements...
  1. A Family Time Together Session
  2. An All-Church Celebration
  3. An At-Home Celebration
- [Legacy Milestones](#) by Brian Haynes. Brian Haynes describes Legacy Milestones as a spiritual formation process beginning in infancy and continuing through senior adulthood, designed around seven Legacy Milestones. He says, *"We partner with parents to equip preschoolers, children, and students with the Biblical and practical understanding to experience the next phase of life. In this way we build a legacy of faith into the next generation. We have created a simple path for families to walk on called Legacy Milestones. This is literally the pathway for parents to walk as they train their children in the faith. All of our events, seminars, and processes are designed to support this pathway."* The seven Legacy Milestones are: Parent/Child Dedication, Salvation and Baptism, Preparing for Adolescence, Purity for Life, Rite of Passage, High School Graduation, and Life in Christ