
Holy Hacks: October 11, 2019

By the Rev. Julia Mitchener

Last Sunday at the Cathedral, we held our annual Blessing of the Animals. It was a wonderful time for our pets to enjoy some extra attention.

Just like our four-legged friends, children long to know that they are loved and valued. This has always been true, though perhaps never more so than now. Studies suggest that children today are living with more anxiety than ever before. Pressure to achieve in the classroom and on the playing field, pressure to fit in with peers, pressure to meet their families' expectations —these and many other stressors are on the rise and can take a toll on young people's well-being.

Our Jewish sisters and brothers have a wonderful tradition of blessing their children during their weekly Sabbath meal. This is a special time in which parents can remind their kids that no matter what has happened during the past seven days —whatever math problems they may have missed on a test, whatever unkind words may have been spoken to them on the playground—they are loved and accepted. Parents go to each child in turn, place a hand on the child's head and say something like, "May God bless you and guard you" or "May God show you kindness and grant you peace."

We Christians can adopt similar rituals of blessing our children. Here are a few to try:

- At bedtime, say goodnight with a simple, "God bless you and keep you." As you speak these words, trace the sign of the cross on your child's forehead or the shape of a heart on his or her chest. Some children may like being reminded that they have a permanent, invisible sign of the cross on their forehead—it was marked on them with holy oil at baptism. Though the oil has long since dried up, the cross stays there to remind them of Jesus' love. When they find themselves feeling scared or lonely, they can touch their forehead to remember that God is always with them.
- The carpool drop-off line is a great place for saying a blessing for your child's school day. You can tailor your words to fit a specific challenge being faced: *God bless you and be with you as you take your spelling test. God bless you, and comfort you when you feel upset. God bless you and give you courage to do the right thing.*
- Put a "blessing bowl" near your back door and fill it with brief notes of love and affirmation (for example, *Alice, you are loved. Will, being your dad is my favorite thing. Parker, when God made you, God made someone very special*). Family members can grab a slip of paper on their way out in the morning and carry it with them throughout the day.

May God bless you, now and always.