The Grand Adventure
A New Call to Grandparenting

A Six-Meeting Program for Grandparents

By Gary and Kay Aitchison
“Grandparents are a precious resource for families, the church and society.” –Pope Benedict XVI, April 2008
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Acknowledgments

The Grand Adventure was written in response to an observed need in today’s society to make better use of the grandparenting connection in family life. The program was inspired by and modeled from the many dynamic and committed grandparents who share their time, talent, gifts and charisms with their grandchildren. We are especially grateful to Fr. Donald Conroy, President of the National Institute for the Family, for his insights and encouragement and to author Carolyn Gutowski for her vision and expertise in the field of grandparenting, that are so well expressed in her book Grandparents are Forever.
Introduction

*The Grand Adventure* is a six-meeting program designed for small discussion groups of about 8-12 grandparents. The program is easy to use and needs only a facilitator to organize the group and guide each meeting. The 1½ to 2 hour sessions could conveniently be held in either a home or a church. Each meeting provides an opening prayer, scripture reflection, discussion material and action suggestions that challenge grandparents to do something that will make a difference in their grandchild’s life.

Society has placed nearly super-human demands on today’s families. Parents are struggling to succeed in the multi-arena of family, jobs, church and community while also dealing with the effects of a diminished economy. In many homes, family life is getting only left-over time. Obviously, today’s families could use more support than most of them are getting.

Grandparents are perfect candidates to fill in the gaps in the fabric of family life- not to supplant the parents but as unique reservoirs of knowledge and experience who bring a valuable dimension to the lives of their grandchildren. Most grandparents care deeply about their grandchildren and want the best for them. In April 2008, Pope Benedict XVI recognized the value of grandparents when he said that grandparents are a precious resource for families, church and society. *The Grand Adventure* is designed to tap the grandparent resource and provide greater assistance to busy and stressed families.

*The Grand Adventure* helps grandparents to realize their true grandparent potential as they explore new ways to enhance the grandparent-grandchild relationship. They assess their many gifts and talents and ways to use them to benefit their grandchildren. This like-to-like ministry gives
grandparents support and friendship while it empowers them in their grandparent vocation

How to Get Started

- Sell the program to your pastor and parish faith formation committee.
- Choose a facilitator to organize and run the program.
- Advertise through your parish bulletin, bulletin boards, retirement groups, phone calls, word of mouth. Invite new, seasoned and prospective grandparents, grandparent singles, grandparent couples. Ask interested grandparents to bring a friend.
- Gather interested grandparents for an information meeting to meet one another and to explain the program and distribute program material.
- Eight to twelve participants make a comfortable size group.
- Set a meeting time frame of 1 ½ to 2 hours followed by a brief social time.
- Decide on a meeting time schedule. Once a month or every other week are preferable, however the program could also be used as a once a week Lenten program.
- Decide on a meeting time that works well with grandparents or give a choice of meeting times. Consider a morning meeting that follows daily mass or an afternoon meeting for retired folks. An evening meeting would be best for younger grandparents.
- Choose a meeting place: a church meeting room, the leader’s home or rotate among participants’ homes.
- The facilitator or another designated leader should lead the meetings.
- Nametags may be helpful in the beginning.
- Each member of the group should be invited to share and every person’s contribution should be accepted and appreciated.
- Meetings should be on time and conclude promptly but
be followed by a social time.

- If the meetings are held at the church, ask for volunteers to host the meetings by bringing treats and making coffee.
- The purpose of the program is two-fold: 1) It will build community among grandparents and empower them in their vocation. 2) It will help grandparents to take a more active role by consciously sharing their talent, faith and wisdom with their grandchildren.
ONE

Job Description: Grandparent

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for this opportunity to come together. Today we begin a new adventure in our grandparent role. Please send your Holy Spirit to walk with us. Guide our conversation, and inspire us to be the best grandparents we can be. Help us to discover our grandparenting charisms and use them in the best way to enrich our grandchildren’s lives. Empower us and guide us on our grandparenting journey. We ask these things in the name of your son Jesus Christ. Amen

Scripture Reflection

For everything there is a season,
    and a time for every matter under heaven:
    a time to be born, and a time to die;
    a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
    a time to kill, and a time to heal;
    a time to break down, and a time to build up
    a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
    a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
    a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
    a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
    a time to seek, and a time to lose;
    a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
    a time to rend, and a time to sew;
    a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
    a time to love, and a time to hate;
    a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

- What are the characteristics of this time and season in your life?
- In what ways do you see God working in this time of your life that are different from the past

DISCOVER

Many of us carry an idealized image of grandparents that might have sprung from a Norman Rockwell painting. The grandma from our past memories is decked out in her print apron serving the Thanksgiving turkey to her large family gathered around the
huge dining room table. She can be counted on to whip up a delicious home cooked meal at the drop of a hat. She can bake chocolate chip cookies or a loaf of homemade bread, darn a pair of worn sox, soothe bruised egos, rock a crying baby and still keep a special place in her heart for each of her grandchildren. Grandpa, her companion, is a jolly, friendly soul with a pocketful of stories and another filled with hard candy. He is always ready to share either with a grandchild. He is a jack-of-all-trades who can build a birdhouse, whittle a wooden whistle, and fix anything.

Share and Discuss

1. Bring pictures of your grandparents to the meeting.
2. Introduce your grandparents to the group by showing their pictures and telling their stories.
3. What do you remember about your relationship with your grandparents?
4. How was love and affection expressed by your grandparents? How was love and affection expressed in your family of origin?

DISCOVER

Grandparenting is not a role that we necessarily choose, instead it is chosen for us. For some it comes too soon, and for others the wait is far too long. Many are delighted to arrive at this next stage in life, but for others it is a challenge that brings them face to face with their own mortality and aging process. For some, it is an ambiguous time. Whatever one’s feelings about this new role in life, there is no choice but to accept it. Surely, grandparenting is a vocation that God calls us to, much as we are called to other vocations. For those who embrace this new role in life, grandparenting can be a transformative experience with new adventures and wonderful opportunities. The relationships we create with our grandchildren can make a huge impact in their lives and in our own.

Share and Discuss

1. How has the image of grandparenting changed since you were a child?
2. Why have grandparents been important in your life?
3. What are your feelings about being a grandparent?
4. How has grandparenting changed you? for the better/the worse?

Act to Make a Difference - Choose one or more of the actions listed below or create a new one.

1. Begin a written, audio or electronic grandparenting journal. Tell the story of your grandparents and your relationship with them.
2. Write a job description for a grandparent. Share at the next meeting.
3. Read a book on grandparenting.
4. Call your grandchildren and tell them why they are important to you.
5. Show your grandchildren the pictures of your grandparents. Make copies of the pictures and put in a book for them.

**Long-Distance Grandparenting**

Many grandparents and grandchildren are separated by miles or even family differences. This can be a challenge. Long-distance grandparents can still keep connected but must be more creative in their approaches. Technology is a boon for both long-distance and close-by relationships. Telephone your grandchild. Find out what is going on in his/her life. Ask specific questions. Keep the conversation short so that they don’t get bored. Even a baby can learn to recognize grandpa’s and grandma’s voices.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Jesus, son of the Father, thank you for this new adventure begun today. We are grateful for the opportunity to explore and enrich our grandparenting vocation. Help us to recognize the many ways that we can bring your spirit into the lives of our grandchildren and guide them in their journey to you. May we be your instruments and make a profound difference in their lives. Amen

**Helpful Resources**


*Creative Grandparenting Across the Miles* by Patricia Fry, Liguori, 1997.

**Note to Leader:** Sharing pictures may be so enjoyable that it takes up a major portion of the meeting. If this happens, don’t rush through the rest of the meeting material. Instead, close the meeting with a prayer and use the remainder of Meeting 1 for your next session.