



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

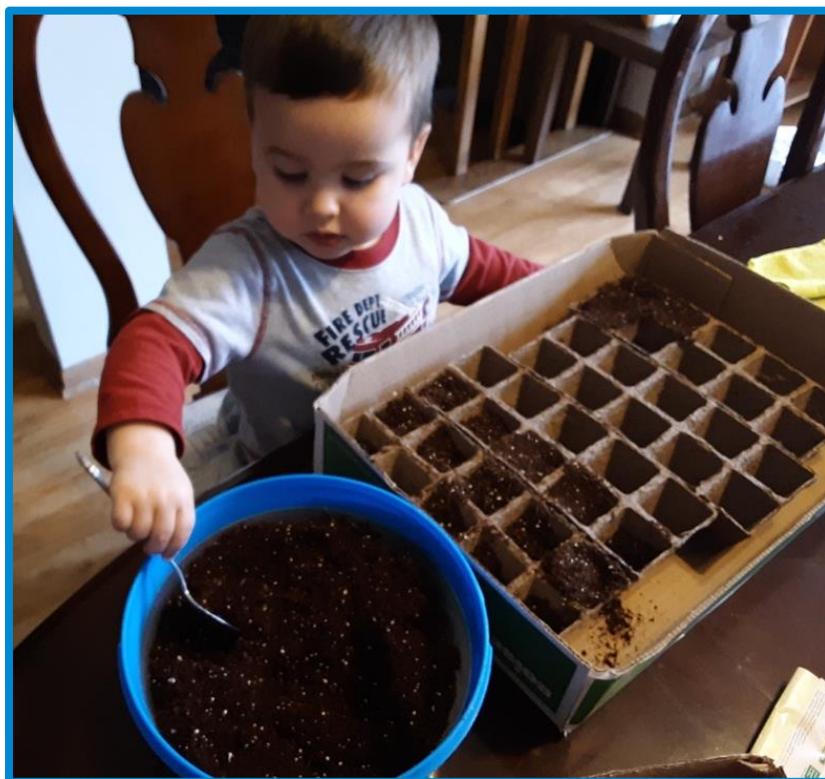
* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

Planting Seeds

Children find great joy in playing in the dirt, splashing in the mud, and exploring the natural world around them. As adults, can dirt make us happy? Would you be surprised to know that studies show those who spend time with their hands in the soil, planting seeds and gardening are more relaxed and happier? As we continue to be safe and be physically distant from others in our world, we can find satisfaction in being able to interact with life in our own backyard, which is evident by an increased interest in and return to gardening. Our God continues to teach us about His Kingdom by using the world around us, often what is right outside our back door. We step outside to encounter the warmth of the sun, the richness of the soil, joy of a spring rain, and the aroma of the growing garden. Beginning with Creation, and throughout Sacred Scripture we find the abundance of gifts that God has given to us. The natural world is an ever growing gift that each of us are called to celebrate and enjoy. The children delight in the stories Jesus shares in the gospels about planting seeds.

The Mystery of the Kingdom of God is one of the greatest mysteries of our faith. It was such an important part of what Jesus wanted to communicate during His time on earth that there are over forty parables about the Kingdom in the Gospels.

Jesus taught in parables. He used ordinary, everyday objects, like seeds, to speak about the Kingdom of God. Seeds are often so small that they go unnoticed. Yet they can change and grow





to become something so very big. The children have come to know that there is great strength and energy within the tiny seeds.



Isaiah prepares the soil, plants seeds, and waters them as they begin to sprout. Isaiah is in a Toddler Atrium environment in his home and at St. Augustin Church in Des Moines, Iowa.

At Home

- Plant seeds in an empty egg carton, empty milk carton, in a pot, or in your yard. If you are not able to plant a garden in your yard, you can still enjoy a garden experience by planting in a window box or a pot on the front step. Enjoy the feel of the soil in your hands. Decide as a family if you are planting vegetables or flowers, or both? You may want to start small when making a new garden. You will first want to evaluate and choose a site. Examine your soil and prepare your soil to receive the seed. You will want to decide who waters the plants, and how often they are watered. Some families label the plants and keep a garden record or journal.
- Make a prayer card with a Bible verse about seeds.
- Read one of the parables about seeds. The children may want to copy the story.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - Mark 4:30-32

This parable is offered to the youngest children and repeated each year in all three levels of the Atrium.

- The mustard seed, even though it is so small must have a strength or force to become so big. What could it be?
- Have any of you ever planted any kind of seeds?
- When you plant a seed does it come up right away?
- Have you ever noticed that when you plant a seed you can't see it, but when you come back after it has grown, you are able to see it?

- Can you hurry the seed to grow just because you want to be big?
- Can the seed make itself grow faster?
- So, if this strength or force doesn't belong to the seed, who does it belong to?

The Parable of the Growing Seed -Mark 4:26-28

This parable is for the older children (ages 5+)

- Just imagine the man plants the seed. Then he goes to bed. He sleeps. He goes out. There is nothing there. Then he goes to bed. He sleeps. He goes out. There is still nothing there. He goes back to bed. He goes out and sees a tiny bit of green.
- Did he have the power to cause that?
- How is the Kingdom of God like that?

The Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:2-8

This parable is for the oldest children (ages 8-12)

- What do seeds need to grow?
- Who might the sower be?
- What do you think the seeds might represent?
- Is the sower stingy with the seeds?
- Or do the seeds come to all people?

Under the heading 'Care of Environment' we would include... many outdoor tasks such as digging, planting, weeding, watering, sweeping up leaves, and so forth."

—E. M. Standing, Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work

