



Back to SCHOOL!

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Your support helps provide an informative website, toll-free number for homeschool questions, homeschool publications, statewide graduation, annual conference with nationally-known speakers and Iowa's largest homeschool curriculum hall, legal liaisons, Homeschool Day at the Capitol, support for homeschool groups and leaders, homeschool national honor society, and support for national homeschool research.

Reminder:

All 2017 NICHE Memberships will expire on December 31, 2017. We provide this magazine as a free resource to our members and to those who have recently contacted us or attended our events. If you are not a member of NICHE, we hope you will join us. Register online at homeschooliowa.org.

More about the HSLDA Discount

NICHE members are eligible for a \$20 discount on Home School Legal Defense Association membership (new or renewal). When you join NICHE, simply write the NICHE Group Discount Number (available by emailing niche@homeschooliowa.org) on your HSLDA application or renewal form. Pay only \$95 (normally \$115) per year. Or sign up online: www.hsllda.org.

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what’s the point?

The NICHE Board believes that even more important than quality academics is eternal salvation from the penalty and power of sin. While we come from different church backgrounds, we, with all true Christians, agree on the fundamentals of salvation:

1. All people are in rebellion against the God who created them and deserve eternal punishment for that rebellion (sin).
2. God, in love, sent His sinless Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross as payment for the sins of sinful humanity, rising again from the dead.
3. Jesus’ death and resurrection provide forgiveness of all sin and reconciliation with God to any who repent and believe in Him.
4. Salvation cannot be earned by any act on our part; it must be received as a free gift by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

If you’d like to talk more with someone about your relationship with Jesus Christ, we invite you to write niche@homeschooliowa.org for a confidential and biblical response.

magazine

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our mission

To provide Christ-centered events, communication, and resources to better equip, inform, and encourage Iowa home educators to the glory of God!



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New Beginnings

At the beginning of each school year, I sit back and analyze where we've been, where I want us to go and think about what I need to do to get us to that goal. The 2016-2017 school year started with our family in the middle of relocating to Iowa, leaving our homeschool support group in Kansas City, leaving friends, leaving some family (and getting closer to other family) and moving our homeschool space from a 1200-square-foot open floor plan basement with maps on the walls, bookshelves full of resources, and whiteboards for everyone to the living space of a 32-foot-long 5th wheel. We made it through the school year, but it was tough! Because we had to be back and forth between Kansas City and Muscatine several times, we were not able to wrap up the school year until mid-July. But it was a good year full of learning. Change is hard. It makes us uncomfortable and makes us aware of how much we need to depend on God. However, the changes our family went through in the past year have also brought us new friends, new opportunities, and the unmistakable hand of God directing our steps.

One of the new opportunities that God brought into my life is the privilege of assisting with the Homeschool Iowa magazine. I began my career as a 19-year-old college student at the reception desk of a twice weekly newspaper in Topeka, Kansas. In that role, I had the opportunity to sell advertising and then to design the ads I was selling. In designing ads, I found my professional calling ~ graphic design and marketing. The newspaper was a fabulous place to work. We were a small company, and I had the opportunity to work in a variety of roles until I found my niche - and became the managing editor at the age of 22. When I married a couple of years later and moved to Kansas City, I took a job in the pre-press department of a printing company. That job helped to refine my design skills and gave me the opportunity to work with some great marketing professionals. In 2007, my daughter was born, and I became a freelance graphic designer and marketing specialist, also doing virtual assistant work for a few of my clients, helping with customer service and public relations. But the most important thing that happened in 2007 is that I found the calling of my heart ~ being a mother.

Our homeschool journey started in 2012 when my daughter began kindergarten. My son started 2 years later. I'm thankful that we are able to be a homeschooling family. It was through needing resources for the past school year that I found the Homeschool Iowa - NICHE community. I was putting together our state history curriculum and needed ideas for field trips, so I started looking online, found the NICHE website, found the Facebook communities, and asked a question on the Homeschool Iowa discussion group. That single question has led to a few online friendships, meeting a couple of other local homeschool moms for a field trip, and this opportunity to serve you by putting together a magazine full of articles to challenge you, encourage you, and inform you. I have been very impressed by the organization and resources of the Homeschool Iowa community. Our new NICHE regional representatives are going to be an incredible resource for families around the state. I'm excited to be a part of this organization, happy to be a new Iowan, and am looking forward to what the 2017-2018 school year will bring us (for me, it includes a new basement school room! So excited about that!)

If you have ideas for the magazine, please reach out to me. I want the Homeschool Iowa magazine to be a blessing to you. I hope we can bring a smile to your day, provide resources that are useful, and allow God to use us to encourage you on your homeschool journey. I can be reached at editor@homeschooliowa.org.

~ Jenn Warren



Jenn married an awesome, hard-working guy named David in 1999. They spent the next 8 years camping, fishing, hunting, taking other people's kids out on outdoor adventures, and training black labs for AKC hunt tests. In 2007 Chantae was born and she changed everything. In 2009 Brandt completed their family. The Warrens (including a couple of black labs) reside in Muscatine, Iowa, and enjoy the outdoor recreational opportunities that living on the river in Iowa bring.



Finding Your NICHE

Homeschool Iowa Regional Representatives

We are pleased to introduce our Homeschool Iowa Regional Representatives to help support you and your family on your home education adventure.

Each regional representative is a seasoned homeschooling veteran with extensive practical skills and wisdom that come from years of experience.

Their duties will include helping NICHE identify the needs and concerns of homeschooling families in their areas, as well as facilitating communications with local homeschool support groups and providing counsel to new home educators in their regions.

Regional Representatives Coordinator ~ Polly Lilly

Polly and her husband Dan are NICHE board members. They have been married for 39 years and have three sons, one daughter, and five grandchildren. Polly is well-equipped to be the NICHE Regional Representative Coordinator, bringing a wealth of experience both as a homeschool support group leader and a supervising teacher. Polly is an excellent mentor possessing a wealth of knowledge, the ability to communicate with compassion, and a teacher's heart.

You may contact Polly at regionalreps@homeschooliowa.org.



Meet your NICHE Representatives:

Region 1

Denise Huskamp | region1@homeschooliowa.org

Denise has been married for 34 years and has four grown children, all married. She has served for decades as a homeschool supervising teacher, helping families within a 70-mile radius of her home. Denise's gentle spirit and good listening skills equip her as she encourages homeschooling families.



Region 2

Alicia Navarette | region2@homeschooliowa.org

Alicia and her husband of 17 years have been blessed with three children. She serves as a leader of her local homeschool support group, planning activities, and assisting with its operations. Well-known as a homeschooler in her community and the surrounding area, Alicia is often approached by those seeking information about home education.



Region 3

Kristen Borseth | region3@homeschooliowa.org

Kristen has been involved in homeschool groups located in several Iowa locations, including the area near her current home in northeast Iowa, and she has helped to organize activities of interest to homeschooling families as well. She and her husband Tim have been married for almost 25 years and have six children, three of whom have now graduated.



Region 4

Laura Anne Cvrk | region4@homeschooliowa.org

Laura has been married to her husband Cory for 27 years, and they have seven homeschooled children, four who have graduated from high school, and three who have graduated from college. She has lived in several different locations in Iowa and has served in various leadership positions with her current local homeschool support group. Laura also has experience teaching children with learning disabilities and special needs.



Region 5

Molly Benson | region5@homeschooliowa.org

Molly Benson and her husband Bill have been married since 1978 and have five children, including a special-needs child. She has served homeschoolers in the Carroll area for many years as a support group leader and supervising teacher. In her role as the coordinator of the Homeschool Iowa Used Curriculum Sale, we've seen Molly repeatedly demonstrate her gentle servant's heart.



Region 7

Jill Oppman | region7@homeschooliowa.org

Jill has filled many roles of service for NICHE, planning and organizing event details for the Homeschool Iowa Conference, Capitol Day, 25th Anniversary Banquet, and more. Due to moving a couple of times, she's been involved in several Iowa homeschool groups. She and her husband Darren have been married for 32 years and have four adult children and are grandparents as well.



Region 8

Teresa Ott | region8@homeschooliowa.org

Teresa and her husband Jim (married for 32 years) started homeschooling their four now-adult children after they experienced six years of public schooling, so she knows about "jumping in at mid-stream." She has served as a homeschool supervising teacher and a homeschool support group leader and advocate in the Dubuque area, as well as a Homeschool Iowa Conference team member.

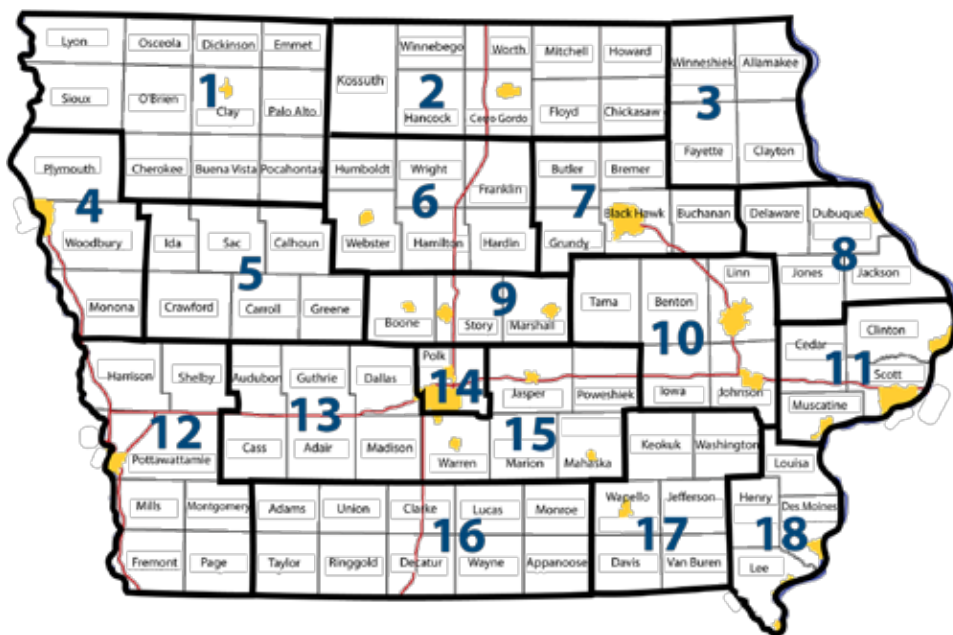


Region 9

Shellie Arentson | region9@homeschooliowa.org

Shellie served for several years as the NICHE support group coordinator and organized sponsored functions for support group leaders. She and her husband Emory are retired NICHE board members and currently co-lead their local homeschool support group. They have been married for 29 years, have eight children, and are blessed to be grandparents as well.





Regional Representative
POSITION OPEN

Region 6
This position will serve North Central Iowa.

To apply, please email Polly Lilly, Homeschool Iowa Regional Representatives Coordinator, at regionalreps@homeschooliowa.org

Region 10

Terri Nowotny | region10@homeschooliowa.org
Terri and her husband Marty have been married for 28 years, have five children, and five grandsons. She has served faithfully for years as a homeschool supervising teacher, traveling many miles to meet with families, and she helped to start a homeschool support group in her area. Terri coordinated the teacher re-certification credit course at this year's Homeschool Iowa Conference and has served as a conference speaker as well.



Brenda Kelly | region10@homeschooliowa.org
Brenda has, from the time she started homeschooling 26 years ago, looked forward to the day when she would be able to encourage others in their homeschooling journeys because it is such a passion of hers. Gifts of hospitality and encouragement have given her the opportunities to do just that, including serving as a Homeschool Iowa Conference team member. Brenda and her husband Chris have been married 32 years and have six children.



Region 11

Natalie Schneckloth | region11@homeschooliowa.org
Natalie and her husband Cory have been blessed with 10 years of marriage and three children. She has helped to create a successful local homeschool co-op and homeschool curriculum library. Natalie has experience homeschooling with very limited financial resources, so she has a heart to reach out to those who struggling in that area. She also served as a speaker at the 2017 Homeschool Iowa Conference.



Kathryn Wilson | region11@homeschooliowa.org
Kathryn has co-hosted a local online homeschool support group and encouraged homeschooling families in her area, promoting home education and helping parents succeed as effective teachers. She also served on the 2017 Homeschool Iowa conference team. Married for 18 years, she and her husband Steve have four children.



Region 12

Dawn Meadows | region12@homeschooliowa.org
Dawn has lived in Iowa for 3 years, but she has already accepted a leadership role in her local homeschool support group here after serving as a group leader in her former state. She and her husband Russ have been married for 12 years and have five children, three of whom have graduated. Dawn is dedicated to supporting and encouraging homeschooling families in her newly-adopted home state of Iowa.



Region 13

Karen Courtney | region13@homeschooliowa.org
Karen and her husband Mark have been married for 35 years and have eight children, graduating the youngest this past May. She has served for many years as a supervising teacher in several counties, as well as moderating a Facebook page for homeschooling families in her area. Karen is ready and willing to share from her experience and to offer encouragement to homeschooling families in her region.



Donna Owen | region13@homeschooliowa.org
Donna admits that a dozen years ago she didn't know anything about homeschooling, but through helpful mentors, personal research, and homeschooling three children for 11 years, she's learned a lot. She has served in leadership roles in several local homeschool support groups and has an extensive networking connection with many homeschooling families. Donna has been married to Jon for 22 years.



Region 14

Cathy Sorensen | region14@homeschooliowa.org
Cathy has been married to Bob for 33 years, and they have two children and two foster sons. She served as president of the large homeschool support group in her local area and has continued to coordinate the Mentoring Moms program in that group for 18 years. Cathy is passionate about helping homeschooling families and promoting home education.



Continued on page 8

Meet your NICHE Representatives:

Continued from page 7

Region 15

Dawn Cowman | region15@homeschooliowa.org

Dawn quips, "I've been homeschooling forever, it seems!" Her cheerful, helpful attitude has been evident as she has served as a local homeschool support group leader and supervising teacher. She and her husband Rick are retired NICHE board members and Homeschool Iowa Conference team members, have been married for 26 years, and have four children and three grandchildren.



Region 16

Krista Woodard | region16@homeschooliowa.org

Krista has officially retired as a homeschooling mom and now serves as the children's librarian in her local public library. Nevertheless, she continues to serve homeschooling families in her area, encouraging new homeschoolers, networking current homeschoolers, and providing services, especially through her work at the library. Married for 22 years, she and her husband Rick have three children and two grandchildren.



Region 17

Jennifer Miller | region17@homeschooliowa.org

Jennifer has been homeschooling since 2000, and she's participated in independent local homeschool support groups, both large and small. Jen has a good working knowledge of various homeschooling approaches (Charlotte Mason, classical, etc.) and their corresponding resources. Jennifer and her husband Luke have been married for 24 years and have five children, three of whom have graduated.



Region 18

Lisa Chase | region18@homeschooliowa.org

Lisa has been married to Marty for 30 years, and they have been blessed with three grown children, who they have homeschooled all the way through high school – and they intend, God willing, to do the same for their 9-year-old. Lisa is the leader of the local homeschool co-op in her area and is ready to lend an ear and a helping hand to any homeschooling families who need support or encouragement in southeast Iowa.

NICHE Resources for Iowa Homeschoolers

**Have you visited the Homeschool Iowa website lately?
It offers a wealth of resources for Iowa Homeschooling Families!**



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On our website you will find:

- Details about upcoming events of interest to Iowa homeschooling families.
- Resources - if you need a form, we probably have it here! Plus other helpful information
- Contact information for your Regional Representative
- Referral request forms for local homeschool support groups and supervising teachers.
- The "Start Homeschooling" tab walks you through the "whys", "hows" and "what's next" of homeschooling
- Our FAQ section addresses many of the questions we receive repeatedly.
- Advertising Opportunities: Do you provide a product or service that would be of benefit to Iowa Homeschooling families? Then you should advertise with NICHE! Get the details online. BONUS: Your advertising dollars spent with NICHE help to further homeschooling in Iowa and protect our freedoms as homeschoolers.
- And, of course, a way to contact us! We would love to have you join NICHE as well - details about becoming a part of NICHE and the added benefits you receive (including a discount for HSLDA membership!) that are under the "Contact NICHE" tab.



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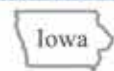


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Over 500 attendees participated in our Homeschool Iowa 2017 Capitol Day! Attendees checked in at the Capitol rotunda and enjoyed a variety of displays and a rally. Morning activities included prayer walks, scavenger hunts, and tours. Families enjoyed lunch together, had the opportunity to speak to their legislators, and heard presentations from Gov. Brandstad and Lt. Governor Reynolds.



Save The DATE!

Homeschool Iowa 2018 Capitol Day March 13, 2018

This day is so much more than just a day to "lobby" our legislatures and provide them with the "face" of homeschooling in Iowa. It's a day of educational opportunities, a day of gathering with fellow homeschoolers, a day to recharge your spirit!

**Watch our website for more details soon!
homeschooliowa.org**



NICHE CLASS OF 2017

May 20, 2017 • Des Moines First Assembly • Des Moines, Iowa



The NICHE Class of 2017 had 88 students, requiring two graduation services, on Saturday, May 20th at Des Moines First Assembly in Des Moines, Iowa.

To participate in the NICHE 2018 Graduation Ceremony, graduates must be a child of a parent or parents with a 2018 NICHE membership and must have been homeschooled for at least the 2017/18 school year. Graduates must confirm that they believe in Christ for their salvation or have received Christian training. Other guidelines will be outlined on our website when plans for our 2018 ceremony have been finalized. Please visit homeschooliowa.org for more details.



2017 NICHE Graduation Speaker, Eric Ludy





When Parenting Throws You the Unexpected

BY KIM STILWELL

From the time I was a little girl, my dream was to be a mommy. I never really had any other major goal. I can't begin to tell you what a joy parenting has been for me. My children are one of the biggest blessings in my life. I have loved homeschooling them (most of the time!) and am so thankful for the extra time that gave me to be involved in my children's lives.

Having said all of that, anyone who has been a parent for any length of time knows that parenting brings challenges. I anticipated getting up multiple times each night with my babies. I knew potty training would not be easy. I was fully aware of the fact that I would be cleaning up after overflowing diapers and sick little tummies. I expected that my children, like their mom, would be sinners. I expected that there would be times when they were disrespectful and disobedient. I even expected that I would probably have a child or two who was extra stubborn and strong willed. All those things proved to be true.

However, some parenting challenges caught me completely off guard. Never did Jeff and I imagine that we would have a child born with a birth defect that would require ten surgeries. We didn't expect to have a child who experienced fairly severe special needs. We had never heard of the term "sensory integration dysfunction", much less expect to have a child who experienced it. Nor did I imagine having a child who struggled with depression, to the point where she struggled to get out of bed some mornings, and even contemplated suicide at times. That wasn't even on our radar! After all, this wouldn't happen to a child who was born in a loving, Christian home, would it?

With our daughter Jessica's permission, I'd like to focus on that last one. For many years, out of respect for Jessica's privacy,

I would not have spoken about this on such a public platform. But Jessica has reached the point where she is ready to share her story in hopes that it will help others.

One of Jessica's biggest struggles has always been fear. She has always felt every emotion deeply. However, starting at about age twelve, her fear and sadness consumed her. She began to struggle spiritually, doubting her salvation, and even doubting if there was a God. She became intense and emotional about everything. Jeff and I expected this to be short-lived. We thought we could simply pray for her and talk her through it, and that this "phase" would be over in a few weeks or perhaps a few months. That didn't happen. It lasted for years.

Fast-forward to nineteen-year-old Jessica. Though she still struggles some with fear and mild discouragement, Jessica has become a tenderhearted young lady who reaches out to others, purposely strives to do things outside her comfort zone, and who serves the Lord. Her intense struggle has given her compassion for others who experience similar trials. It was a long, difficult journey for all of us. However, it has also been a time of much spiritual growth as we learned how much we needed the Lord. We were too weak and frail to do it on our own.

I'd like to share some things with you that we learned along the way. I realize that these specific principles may not apply to the particular situation you are going through with your child, but perhaps some of what I share here will be helpful to you and your husband as you help your children through their particular challenge.

1) Do not neglect your own spiritual growth. Having a child go through an extremely difficult time can be consuming and

exhausting, but God can and will use this difficult time to help us grow. You need to stay spiritually strong so that you can help your child. You need to make sure that you spend time reading God's Word, meditating on His promises and praying. Church attendance at a Bible-preaching church is essential during this time, both for yourself, and your child.

2) Be there for your child. Let them talk. Let them process. If they need to talk about their struggles every single day, be there to listen. I am thankful that Jessica was very open and needed/wanted to talk about what she was going through. At times this was draining and exhausting, both emotionally and physically, but I much preferred that Jessica talk to me instead of clamming up. If you do have a child who clams up (I have a couple of those as well) do not try to force them to talk; it won't work anyway. Let them know they are free to tell you anything. Be available. If they do open up, even slightly, be there to listen. Having said that, your whole lives cannot revolve around what your child is going through. More about that later.

3) Avoid scolding or lecturing. Avoid it like the plague. Listen. Share Scripture with them. Give practical and godly counsel. Pray for them. Pray with them. Gently and lovingly admonish them. If you do mess up and scold or lecture, ask their forgiveness. I blew it many times, but Jessica was always quick to forgive.

4) No matter what your child tells you, do not act shocked. If you do, it will take a long time to regain their trust. (Especially those clammer-uppers!) No matter how horrified you may feel inside, remember that no sin, no thought, no action is beyond God's love and forgiveness. There is no sin that cannot be overcome in Christ's strength. Thank your child for opening up to you and encourage them with the fact that, while sins may have earthly consequences, God will forgive any sin if we only ask.

5) Seek the help of a biblical counselor. While Jeff and I, and a couple of dear friends did all we could to guide Jessica through her difficult time, we now believe that having biblical counsel would have been beneficial. A biblical counselor probably would have helped Jessica get to the root of her problem; and would have helped her overcome the problem in a shorter amount of time than what it took. Ideally, one's pastor is the best place to start.

6) Do not let your child's difficulties harm your marriage. It is easy to let our struggling child's issues take over our lives, but remember that your marriage is your number one human priority. Your child will be much better off, not to mention more secure, if they know that your marriage is strong and healthy.

7) Be careful not to neglect your other children. They need you, too. Not only do they have their own struggles (even if they are to a much lesser extent), but having a sibling going through a severe struggle may add to their own insecurities and confusion. While a child with severe needs of any kind can be consuming, we need to remember that our other children need us, too.

8) Encourage your child to spend time daily in Bible reading and prayer. No matter what their emotions and feelings

may be, remind them, gently and in love, that their relationship with God is not contingent on their emotions. The less they feel like reading God's Word and praying, the more they need to do it. If your child finds this too overwhelming to do on their own, plan a time for the two of you to have a Bible time together each day.

9) Our child's struggles, no matter what they might be, are not an excuse to sin. We should still not allow our child to be lazy, disrespectful, or to mistreat their siblings.

10) Put your child in situations where they reach out to others. One of the best ways to overcome discouragement is to focus on someone besides ourselves. When going through a difficult trial, it is easy to become selfish. Putting others first, even when we want to just curl up and cry, helps us to remember that life is not all about us.

11) Admit you need help. We tend to want the world to think we have it all together when it comes to our motherhood. This

is to our detriment. God has put us in the body of Christ for many reasons, and one is to be able to lean on our brothers and sisters in Christ in times of need. While we should respect our child enough to not broadcast their struggles to the world, it is wise to seek godly counsel.

This may sound over-simplistic, but a friend recently shared that these five things helped her overcome a time of discouragement. Jessica did many of these things, and I believe they did help her in the long run.

"We tend to want the world to think we have it all together when it comes to our motherhood. This is to our detriment. God has put us in the body of Christ for many reasons, and one is to be able to lean on our brothers and sisters in Christ in times of need."

- A) As mentioned previously, have daily time in God's Word and prayer.
- B) Exercise several days a week.
- C) Drink plenty of water.
- D) Avoid junk food. Focus on protein, fruits, and veggies.
- E) Get outside every day.

Perhaps your family is going through something even more heart-wrenching than what my family has gone through. Perhaps your child has completely turned away from God. Perhaps your child has such severe physical or mental problems that you are required to be "on call" 24/7. Perhaps your child is in juvenile detention or incarcerated. Whatever you and your child are going through, remember that God loves your child even more than you do. Remember that He gives strength, grace, and courage that we cannot even fathom. Remember that, even in the darkest moments, God is with you. He will never leave you, or your child. He will never forsake you or your child. May God bless you and help you as you seek Him in every circumstance of life.

Kim has been married to Jeff, her high school sweetheart, since 1987. They have been blessed with five children: Joshua, married to Alissa; Joseph; Josiah; Jessica; and Jennifer. The older four are young adults, and Jennifer is in high school. Jeff and Kim have homeschooled their children since their oldest son started school. They make their home in Des Moines, Iowa.



2017 Conference Highlights

This amazing and impactful event would not have been possible without our dedicated conference team and volunteer staff – and our wonderful attendees, speakers, and exhibitors. Thank you!



“Thank you for providing the free mini conference. It really helped my stress levels going into homeschooling!”



“I enjoyed attending for the first time as a homeschool mom (vs. as a student), and my husband and I both found it very encouraging. Glad you’re still keeping Christ as the focus!”



“The venue was very nice, and the speakers exceeded my expectations!”

Shine
Matthew 5:16



25th Anniversary Banquet



“Thank you for putting together, praying over and organizing such an amazing conference. May God bless you richly for your labor of love. It was a Spirit-bathed, amazing experience I’ll never forget. Can’t wait until next year!”



“I learned a lot from each one of the speakers. Everyone was positive, real, honest, and encouraging. I also really enjoyed connecting with NICHE leadership! Everyone was loving, gracious, and helpful, including your teen helpers. They were excellent.”

Coming in 2018



Heidi St John

NICHE Annual Conference

More than just a place to gather notes, plans, and ideas

BY CRYSTAL WIELAND

On my bookshelves are journals and planners filled with notes I have taken at homeschool conferences and meetings; ideas which I plan to research. Some ideas I have implemented, and some have been repeated in those notebooks more than once and I still haven't gotten to them. I fill notebooks with aspirations and ideas, and I'm always hopeful I will get to it someday.

When registration for this year's NICHE Conference came around, I didn't hesitate to sign up. Even if it was in Coralville, ninety miles from home, AND even if I had plenty of pages full of ideas which could keep me busy having my own mini-conference with myself.

The NICHE Conference is a time to be with my kind of people, my tribe, my community. I can let my guard down at the NICHE Conference. I don't have to explain myself so my listener knows when I make a joke about my kids teaching themselves, I really don't mean they are teaching themselves. I don't have to be apologetic or defensive when I'm talking about homeschooling when I'm at the NICHE Conference.

When I'm surrounded by this group of people, we understand we are all trying to grow, and teaching our kids means we are teaching ourselves. The meeting friends in the hall between workshops fills my heart as much as the sessions. When I sit in workshops, my heart swells to see parents feverishly taking notes adding to their own collection of notebooks.

When guest speaker, Todd Wilson, makes a joke about a homeschool truth, it feels good to laugh, even though literally I was crying to my husband about the exact same downfall three weeks earlier. In this community, I take comfort I'm not an oddity, we are all in the same boat, and life is not the highlight reel. We are in the trenches, and it's the real thing.

I want someone to speak Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit boldly into my life from the platform with practical tangible application to my homeschool life. I want Christ to be glorified. I want my armor shined and the dents buffed out when I'm at the conference.

This year I was encouraged because as I sat on the patio one evening and an assortment of homeschool parents came out to relax and fellowship – homeschool pioneers now helping with homeschooling their grandchildren, parents with teenagers helping in the conference, and moms with little ones I realized I would have missed these stories if I were in Des Moines because I would have jetted home when the conference was over to fix dinner and take care of the family. Here I was in awe of the parents who were homeschooling when homeschooling wasn't cool, when homeschooling was actually very difficult and ostracized them from their community.

There are homeschoolers all over the state of Iowa who have been traveling to homeschool events for over twenty years. I don't think of this because I'm from Des Moines. Everything happens here. Others are used to packing up the family and having overnight stays. It's part of their homeschool story. They find it important to their homeschool well-being.

Juggling to get myself to the conference was not easy. My plans were pretty fluid until the week before on how I was going to get there. I roomed with another awesome mom, and we talked homeschooling even after we had lights out and were in bed. As the conference rolled on, I was reminded this is beautiful and I need this. I called my husband to thank him for letting me come and also make a request: I would love to be with him at the conference next year.

In a grand display of opposites, I attended the conference in Coralville Friday and Saturday, and then on Monday morning I was in downtown Des Moines at the Iowa State Capitol. The

Iowa Legislature's Government Oversight Committee was interviewing an array of departments and speakers and Homeschool Legal Defense Association attorney, Scott Woodruff, was representing the side of homeschooling. The room was abuzz with media and special interest attendees.

So one day I was celebrating being a homeschooler, and two days later I was praying for our rights to homeschool to stay intact as we know them today. The crux of the committee meeting was not homeschooling, but

it was one of the layers. Not everyone is in favor of homeschooling, and some of those are our elected representatives. So while we can enjoy our freedom, we also have to be vigilant to guard it and be informed.

We need the NICHE Conference, in whatever town it may be in, to remind us we have a community which is actually so much bigger than the one we live in day-to-day. We need to be reminded of the bigger vision. We need these lessons and reminders to strengthen our resolve.

Trust me, I came away with more notes and things to do, but I came away with the deep sense that homeschooling is my calling, and if I have to fight for it, I will. If the Lord has called you, He will equip you. And the NICHE Conference is a key catalyst in equipping me. Thank you, NICHE, for being faithful to bring good speakers, to bring truth and teaching to our homeschooling lives. See you next year.



Crystal Wieland is wife to Jason and mom and teacher to Isaiah, 11 years old and Justice 4 years old. She lives in Urbandale where she went to high school and college, and didn't know homeschooling existed. She is thankful she knows now. She serves on the Board for Home Educators for Excellence in Des Moines (HEED). Her life verse is Psalm 27.

LEGISLATIVE WATCH: NICHE & HSLDA Advocate at a June 5 Hearing for a Reasoned Response to Recent Tragedies

In response to recent distressing high-profile cases, in which two teenage girls died tragically due to alleged neglect, the Iowa Legislature's Government Oversight Committee convened a six-hour hearing on June 5th. The committee received testimony from a number of witnesses, including Department of Human Services (DHS) officials, law enforcement officers, county attorneys, child welfare program workers, and Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) attorney, Scott Woodruff.

NICHE President Tom Krueger, NICHE Legislative Liaison Bill Gustoff, and NICHE Administrative Assistant Julie Naberhaus attended the standing-room-only hearing and spoke to legislators before and afterwards.

At the heart of this investigative effort were concerns about the causes that led to the girls' tragic deaths. Both teens were former foster children who had been adopted under the oversight of DHS, and their parents received monthly adoption subsidy checks. The parents of both teens had been subjects of prior abuse reports to social services. Both of the girls had been withdrawn from public school by their adoptive parents – allegedly to receive instruction at home.

The Homeschool Angle

Several of the legislative committee members at the hearing believed that increasing homeschooling regulations would help prevent such deaths.

HSLDA Attorney Scott Woodruff disagreed.

His alternative proposal was based upon the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CECANF). According to the commission's 2016 report chronicling over two years of nationwide study, lives can be saved by developing a policy firmly grounded on statistically valid risk factors.

Focus on Risk Factors

The primary risk factor that overshadows all others is a prior report of abuse or neglect that merited investigation.

Based on this simple principle, Woodruff proposed that any family reported a second time for abuse or neglect be subjected to a more muscular response—both in ascertaining the facts of the case and in offering help.

He stressed that this policy should apply to any family.

This distinction is crucial. If we want to protect children, we need to develop effective child welfare policies based upon proven risk factors rather than applying random measures like mass government monitoring of all families whose children do not attend traditional school.

Countering the Criticism

Some have attempted to use these teenage girls' dreadfully tragic deaths to justify attempts to restrict homeschool freedom.

During the last legislative session, Senator Matt McCoy introduced Senate File 138, which called for every public school district to carry out visits to every Iowa homeschool family home once per quarter. The legislation directed that mandatory reporters were to observe every homeschooled child in order to check on their "health and safety."

Senator McCoy, who was one of the Government Oversight Committee members, continued to advocate for restrictions on homeschool liberty at the June 5th hearing.

McCoy called Iowa's 2013 homeschool reform legislation (which, in part, instituted Independent Private Instruction) a "reckless, senseless, gutless bill that essentially requires no accountability" and he repeated his commitment to seeking legislation that will require some sort of "well-being check" for all homeschool families.

"If we want to protect children, we need to develop effective child welfare policies based upon proven risk factors rather than applying random measures like mass government monitoring of all families whose children do not attend regular school."

Equipping Children for a Dangerous World

BY CHAWNA SCHROEDER

The world is a dangerous place.

Flip on the nightly news, skim trending headlines, or browse the internet, and that reality parades before you. From local murders to international terrorism, from arson to human trafficking, we cannot escape the darkness shrouding our world.

Yet as dangerous as knives, guns, and bombs can be, they are not the greatest threat our children face. A far more insidious enemy lurks in the shadows: the ideas and beliefs spurring these external dangers. After all, actions don't spring from a void. They flow from the heart—from thoughts, philosophies, desires, and beliefs which can and do infect us all (Matthew 15:18-20, Mark 7:20-23).

Facing the Enemy

How, then, should we deal with this threat bombarding us from every side? How do we handle this war of ideas with our kids?

Isolating our children from the war often sounds like a great solution. But we cannot always be there, telling them what to do or think. Some day, sooner than most of us want, our kids will step outside our protection. What will they do then? For if we have isolated them from the world their whole life, our children will lack the necessary tools to handle such an overwhelming barrage. And what tools they do possess, they will lack experience using. Is it any wonder that they fall prey to the first sweet-talking or rational-sounding enemy they encounter?

When we realize this, the temptation arises for us to shove our children head-long into battle. Maybe, we think, facing the enemy on his own turf will teach our kids how to defend themselves. Sometimes this works, but more often than not, they will simply succumb under the enemy's endless attack.

In both of these cases we have made the same, often fatal, mistake. We have sent out our children ill-equipped. We have provided them neither the tools nor the training to face the enemy. We have forgotten to teach them the art of discernment.

Defining Discernment

When you read that term "discernment," many different concepts may come to mind: a spiritual gifting, a natural intuition, divine guidance. These are not wrong perceptions. Discernment can be a gift, and both intuition and guidance play a role in our discernment. However, each of these definitions raises a problem. None of them can be taught. As a result, many throw up their hands and walk away saying, "There is nothing else I can do."

That is a lie. There is something we can do. While gifts, intuition, and divine guidance cannot be taught, there is a frequent-

ly overlooked form of discernment which can be taught: the spiritual discipline of discernment.

Contrary to the other definitions, this type of discernment is not given to the select few. This discernment we acquire through constant use and training. Moreover, God desires everyone to have this kind of discernment because it marks us as spiritually mature Christians (Hebrews 5:14).

Therefore, the discipline of discernment is the ability to recognize good as good and evil as evil; the skill to separate that good from evil; and the choice of keeping the good and throwing the bad.

Recognizing the Good

The first step in preparing your kids, then, is to arm them with the Bible.

You cannot separate the good from evil until you first know what qualifies as good and what qualifies as evil. You cannot understand those qualifications until you understand the un-

changing standard that separates the two. Therefore, much like those trained to spot counterfeit money, we must train our

kids to recognize the true, the real, the genuine, and the good, because then they will be able to spot the fake and the evil, no matter what guise it takes.

As a result, we must train our kids to be biblically literate, as the Bible is our final say on what is true and good in this world. This is why Scripture frequently portrays itself as a sword (e.g., Ephesians 6:17). It protects, defends, and separates.

We must teach our kids to know all the stories of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. We must hone their understanding of God's character and Christian doctrine. And most important of all, we must train them to study the Scriptures themselves and feed themselves spiritually from it. For what good is a sword if we must rely on someone else to wield it for us?

Separating Good and Evil

The ability to recognize good and evil is not enough. We must also develop the skill to separate them. This comes from applying the Bible to our everyday world. We often read the Bible and learn its magnificent truths, yet fail to do anything with that truth. We must guard against becoming merely hearers of the Word who deceive ourselves (James 1:22).

So while we ought to teach our children the stories and doctrines of Scripture, we cannot stop there. Indeed, we dare not stop there. Swords are sharp and pointed. They can and will do much harm if improperly handled. The Bible is no different.

"...the discipline of discernment is the ability to:

- *recognize good as good and evil as evil;*
- *the skill to separate that good from evil;*
- *the choice of keeping the good and throwing the bad."*

Therefore, we must teach our children to use the Bible wisely. They must learn what separates an absolute from a principle and a principle from a personal boundary. They must understand the why behind the command. They must develop the habit of comparing whatever they encounter—whether Christian or not—against God’s standard.

Choosing Good

Finally, having learned to recognize the good and separate it from evil, our kids now have a choice: Do they keep the good or the bad?

Of the three parts of discernment, this is the hardest one to teach. Indeed, it probably can’t be taught. We cannot force anyone to follow God nor can we make them choose the good.

Yet there are ways to encourage your kids to pursue the good. First, pray for them. You can plant and water and fertilize, but God alone causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). So ask Him for the growth. Second, model a lifestyle of discernment; a good example is the most powerful testimony to the benefits of discernment. Third, engage in discussion. Encourage your kids to ask many questions, and don’t always provide an answer. In fact, providing all the answers means you are doing the discerning for them; they aren’t learning to think for themselves. Instead, answering a question with a question can go further than the best answer as it forces the kids to come to their own conclusions. It cements the beliefs as theirs.

Facing the World

Obviously discernment is not a fail-proof method against the dangerous ideas we face every day. Error can and will creep in unwittingly at times. Some kids will still decide the enemy’s lies sound better than the truth you’ve taught them.

But by teaching them the discipline of discernment, we equip them with the tools and the training to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:4-5), increasing their odds of not only surviving but thriving as children of light in this dark world



A homeschool graduate, Chawna Schroeder is the author of Bearing the Sword, a curriculum which teaches the basics of discernment to teenagers. Find out more about Chawna and her writing at chawnaschroeder.com or connect with her on Facebook @ChawnaSchroederAuthor.

Your Public Library

An Amazing Resource for Homeschoolers

BY MANDY GRIMM

Iowa has the honor of having the highest number of public libraries per capita in the nation, and it is not difficult to discern this is a source of pride for all Iowans. Gone are the days of dusty shelves and cantankerous bespectacled librarians shushing the masses while accumulating books. Libraries across the state have become community centers – places where small children build social skills, elementary students start learning computer coding, and adults learn to read, complete job applications online, or access Wifi. The State Library of Iowa, a sort of “governing body” for all public libraries in the state, is committed to Iowa libraries providing quality, 21st Century services as well; their latest long-term plan includes funding for continuing education of Iowa’s library directors and staff in order to keep up with the latest trends and needs in library service provision, but to also build and improve online database offerings and collections. I am highlighting in this article some of the online resources that libraries provide, which could be beneficial to homeschool families. A quick caveat: while every library in the state has the option to provide these services to their patrons, there is not a requirement to do so. Each library director has the

autonomy to determine the best use of their funding to meet the majority of patron needs. However, those needs change, and library directors and staff desire patron feedback, so please ask, recommend, or discuss available resources with those at your local library!

Libraries have always been about books. Even with the advent of e-readers and online magazines, print forms are still very pertinent. Most libraries offer suggestion boxes, either physical or virtual, and do their best to meet patron needs. However, if a particular book is not available at your local library, ask about the Interlibrary Loan Service. Most Iowa libraries are able to borrow (either with no cost to the patron or a small fee to cover postage) from other Iowa libraries, and books typically arrive within days of the initial request. Please keep in mind, that other libraries do not allow Interlibrary Loan of materials that have been printed within the past six months, but those would be the perfect suggestions for an in-house purchase! The majority of Iowa libraries are members of an e-book consortia called Bridges; other library systems in more urban areas may have a different consortia with the same premise. Because libraries are pooling funds together, the consortia is able to maintain a much larger collection to offer all the patrons from all the libraries. So even if you are a patron of a very small, very rural library, you will still have the ability to borrow from a larger collection! Bridges has the option to borrow e-books or audiobooks as well as some limited video streaming; lending periods are two weeks, and instantly will be removed from your device at the end of the lending period – no late fees or need to remember to return your books! Bridges also purchases new titles for the adult fiction, adult non-fiction, and children’s collections (picture books-young adult books) each month; title recommendations are always accepted via the Bridge’s website.

Historically, the State Library of Iowa has negotiated rates for online database packages so that all Iowa libraries are able to afford these resources. These packages have often included academic journals, scholarly articles, or job resources. Many library patrons may be familiar with EBSCO, which has had the contract to provide academic and scholarly journal databases in the state of Iowa for many years; however, beginning July 1, 2017, Gale is now providing these databases. Many libraries are still unfamiliar with using these new resources and are in the process of updating websites and links for patron use outside of the library. How-



“Libraries allow children to ask questions about the world and find the answers. And the wonderful thing is that once a child learns to use a library, the doors to learning are always open.”

– Laura Bush

ever, a new feature is the use of geolocation, which will use your computer's location to “log in” to the appropriate library for your use. This should make the log-in process less cumbersome for many, as it will not require you to remember a library card number. Gale has specific collections to browse or search, including agriculture, books & authors, business, environment, science, health reference, fine arts/music, home improvement, psychology, history, and vocations/careers. These searchable databases will provide you with PDF documents of various articles and appropriate bibliographic information for citation. Gale also provides Kids Infobits collection, which is pertinent K-5 content for use by that age group. By partnering with Gale, the Chilton Reference Library (auto maintenance manuals) is available as well, which historically has been too expensive for many libraries to provide. The new database package also includes access to Transparent Languages, which offers language learning as native English speakers, but also for many other language speakers to learn English. Many libraries will be changing website information and creating brochures or hand-outs to help patrons learn how to use these great new tools!

Also through your library, there is access to Learning Express Library, which is a fantastic resource for jobs and adult learning. There are eight “courses” to choose from, including working toward GED/HiSET testing, basic computer skills, college prep, resources in Spanish, and others. Each of the eight courses have many options to use in exploring those topic areas, including practice ACT or SAT testing, career path readiness and exploration, and reading or writing tools. Patrons can create an account to monitor progress as well. Often ACT or SAT prep manuals change from year to year, and career readiness tests may also change as well; Learning Express makes regular updates to these areas in order to maintain the most up-to-date information, tests, and tips possible!

Depending on the size of your local library, other online databases may be offered. Freegal is an online music download database that many libraries subscribe to; Zinio is often used for online magazine subscriptions. Other libraries have searchable databases of their own for genealogy resources, including digitized local newspapers or references books of local family history. Some offer Wifi hotspots, e-readers, or iPads for checkout. With any of these services, libraries have a list or links on the homepage of their website, or under the online resources page, with log-in and usage instructions. Library staff love to visit with patrons, though, so never worry about asking questions on these services or other gems your local library may offer!



Mandy Grimm is the director of the Columbus Junction Public Library in rural southeast Iowa; prior to working at the library, she was in social work, which surprisingly coincides with library work quite well. Her perfect day would involve hot chocolate, a blanket, some snow outside, and a pile of books. She lives on a farm with her husband, son, and daughter, but only operates the fork lift, shuttles people to and from equipment, or bakes pies. When she's not coaching baseball or taking kids to activities, she likes to crochet, binge-watch Netflix, or practice yoga.

Filling a Need

Quad Cities Homeschool Co-Op Starts Curriculum Lending Library

It all began with a vision to help new homeschooling families and needy families who want to homeschool but are low on financial resources - the CHALK Lending Library. CHALK (Christian Homeschool Activities and Learning for Kids), a Quad-Cities area Homeschool Co-op sponsors this curriculum library. Natalie Schneckloth, NICHE Region 11 Representative and homeschool mom, remembers that it was the generosity of former homeschoolers that helped her to successfully homeschool her children and wants to be a blessing to others through the ministry of the Curriculum Library. “My husband and I went through some very hard financial times and yet, somehow, God always provided curriculum for our educational needs. I wanted to be able to do the same for other families. The hopes and vision for this library is to not only lift some financial burdens off of families, but have a means of equipping the huge influx of new homeschoolers in our area. Many of them are coming out of the public schools and have no idea what a curriculum even looks like or which ones to pick.” Additionally, Natalie hopes that the library will help area homeschool families network with each other and will allow experienced homeschoolers to mentor new homeschoolers - providing them with encouragement, support, and the tools necessary to be successful. “I want the library to be a way to speak hope and life into their situation, be a means of finding friendship and comradery, and even a means for us, as Christians, to share the gospel or pray with those that truly need the ultimate hope going forward in homeschooling and in life, a relationship with Jesus Christ.”



One shelf of curriculum sorted and ready for check-out at the CHALK Lending Library

The library was blessed with an influx of books in its beginning when a local private school closed down and a church purchased the premises, discovering that many books had been left behind. They donated those books to the library, and CHALK members sorted through the books, adding what they needed to the library and selling the rest as a fundraiser. The collection has been added to by many generous homeschooling families, and the library is currently searching for a permanent residence. In the meantime, Natalie has made room in her home for these materials. For more information about the library or to talk to Natalie about starting a similar library in your region, please reach out to her by email at region11@homeschooliowa.org.

LEDGES STATE PARK



FieldTripIowa.com

ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE



FieldTripIowa.com

DES MOINES ART CENTER



FieldTripIowa.com

EARLY SCHOOL



FieldTripIowa.com

Field Trips: *A Spiritual Necessity*

BY JENNIFER CIHA

A well-rounded home education wouldn't be complete without lots of field trips; right? I am not just talking about the "grocery store field trip". We all know the benefits of field trips: firsthand experience, knowledge from experts, and fellowship with friends. Harvey & Laurie Bluedorn suggest: "Give your child experiences from which to build his understanding of the world - experiences he will draw upon and perhaps revisit when he is older."

If you're like me, you start the year off with noble aspirations. However, as autumn slips by, consumed with new curricula and a busy co-op schedule, well intended plans get pushed aside. Perhaps reflecting on the spiritual aspect will encourage us to take a fresh look at field trips, going beyond the academic to a higher purpose.

Have you ever stopped to consider the spiritual benefits of a field trip? That's right, spiritual benefits! Your family can find spiritual blessings in the midst of learning outside the home. Let's dive into five blessings that come from field trips.

1. Experience God's Glory

My mama heart soared during a recent family trip to a spectacular, rugged Missouri State Park. While hiking, our son proclaimed out loud, "This is the most beautiful place I have ever seen. It makes me want to worship God!"

Isn't that our goal for home education? To draw our children to God and create an environment for worship? How blessed our children are when we take them to experience all of God's wisdom and glory, whether in nature, at the science museum, or through history exhibits where we learn about God's provision for humanity.

*"I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonders."
Psalm 9:1*

2. Be a Light

What a statement our families make when we interact with our communities! Nothing stands out more in today's society than a group of well-mannered, appropriately dressed children with a desire to learn. On a field trip, we are first a testimony of Christ, but also of home education.

It can be tempting to keep to ourselves and stay under the radar. But God has called us to be a light in this dark world. Field trips serve as opportunities to shine.

*"You are the light of the world.
A city on a hill cannot be hidden."
Matthew 5:14*

3. Practice Apologetics

Sitting criss-cross applesauce on the floor of the library, my sweet six-year-old looked appalled as the traveling zoo program

Where to GO on a Field Trip:

educator continued to lump people into the animal category during an animal classification presentation. Do you cringe in these situations? Do you cover your children's eyes as you walk past certain museum displays?

I would like to argue that to prepare our young adults to face worldly philosophies, they need to form their convictions as children, with us, outside our homes in the public square.

*"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."
Colossians 2:8*

4. Character Development

Most mothers don't really need a wristwatch. We can typically tell the time based on the reservoir level of our coffee mug and our children's behavior. Is it nap time? Close to lunch time?

Breaking the daily routine and going on a field trip presents an opportunity to practice overcoming selfishness, showing patience, obedience, and self-control when we are less inclined to do so. Before a planned outing, we should strive to prepare our children's hearts, as well as their minds.

*"He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding."
Proverbs 16:32*

5. Meet New People and Pray For Them

Our favorite naturalist at the local county conservation is leading the hike today. He doesn't know it, but I am praying for him as we wander through the timber. At the historical museum, my kids know one of the guides by name. He's a sweet, elderly gentleman who the children look for each time we visit. These are just a couple of the people who we have met as we travel and learn outside of our home.

Family prayer time can be enriched by keeping a list of those whom God brings into your life through your learning opportunities.

*"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone."
1 Timothy 2:1*

As you start planning your upcoming school year and field trips, spend time reflecting on these five spiritual blessings. Is God calling your attention to any one area? Perhaps you need to start preparing your children's hearts before outings or engage in a few more debates with your mini-theologian. Whatever it may be, commit those areas to the Lord in prayer. Plan your year in eager expectation and watch in awe as the Lord uses ordinary field trips to spiritually bless your family and others.

Jennifer Ciha is a NICHE homeschool graduate and now helps coordinate the social media for NICHE. She and her husband Tom currently homeschool their two children in Ankeny, Iowa. Jennifer blogs about her family's field trips and adventures at www.fieldtripliowa.com where you can find practical information and inspirational photographs.

Bluedorn, Harvey & Laurie. Teaching The Trivium. Iowa: Trivium Pursuit, 2001.

When we first think of field trips we think about visiting the state capital (DO go here - on Capitol Day with NICHE!) nature centers, science centers, art museums, historic landmarks. And all of those are good but don't limit yourself to just those BIG field trips - think simple too:

The Iowa State Fair and your local county fairs

An Iowa farm (call your local FFA or 4H group if you don't personally know any farmers)

Local police station, sheriff's office, fire department, or National Guard center

Area hospital, veterinarian clinic, or ask your dentist or optometrist for a tour of their clinic

County humane society or animal rescue organization

City hall, water treatment plant, recycling or waste management center, post office, and library

Veterans society or VFW group (they may have volunteer opportunities to serve our veterans or be willing to come speak to your local co-op or group)

Nursing homes are great places to volunteer, go caroling, or give end-of-year presentations

Bank, newspaper office, artist studio, photographers' studio

Grocery store (not for food! For a behind-the-scenes tour!)

TV and radio stations

Restaurant, bakery or coffee shop

Hardware store, pet store, or other locally-owned stores

Factories, many will offer tours - just call and speak to someone in the office

Downtown areas, county courthouse

Visit ALL the small museums and historic sites in your county and any close neighboring counties. Small museums are often more hands-on than the larger museums

Agricultural co-op or seed company

State Forests and State Parks (Did you know that Iowa has 70 State Parks, 4 major State Forests, 90 State Preserves and 6 National Wildlife Refuges? Visit as many as you can!)

Register online for the Travel Iowa travel guide - then make that guide your own! In Iowa, we have the Amana Colonies, the Madison County Bridges, an Amish community, several Dutch communities, and many other interesting things. The Travel Iowa guide is a good starting point to find things that interest you and your children.

TripAdvisor.com and Roadtrippers.com are two other great resources for finding attractions, points of interest, and other things to see when planning a trip.

Drama! Music! Fun! & MORE!

NICHE's Young Volunteers Enjoy Conference

Every year at our annual conference, our children's program team puts together a Bible-based program for the kids to enjoy while their parents are in sessions during the conference. Each year holds a new theme, communicating principles found in the Word of God in an effective and exciting way through songs, memory verses, activities, lesson times, and drama! The 2017 8-part drama was fully scripted and costumed, the stage beautifully set, and the storyline captured the attention of every attendee. LIBERTY, the 2017 theme, presented how true liberty is found in Christ, with the drama being set in early American history. Three of this year's young volunteers, siblings, wrote about their experiences volunteering with the children's program at the 2017 Homeschool Iowa Conference.



My name is Abigail Valiente, and my siblings and I volunteered at the Homeschool Iowa Conference this year, with the children's program. One word I would use to explain the conference is "fun." At the conference, I was one volunteer out of many different kinds of people. I was excited to participate in the drama, especially since one of the things I love to do is acting! I enjoyed this drama immensely, and I have been acting in theatre since I was in third grade. All of the other volunteers were interesting, and I enjoyed getting to know them. All the people I met were uplifting, as well as energized for God. In every large group, there was a play performance, and I helped with each of them. The theme this year was "Liberty," centered around The Revolutionary War. The costumes were all uniquely handmade by the leaders. My favorite thing I was a part of was helping in the sound booth during the drama when I wasn't performing. Everyone I worked with was kind and friendly. I really enjoyed my time at the conference. Next year I hope it will be as fun as this year, and I'm looking forward to seeing everyone again!



Hello, world! My name is Emma Valiente, and I am going to tell you all about the homeschool conference that I was a part of this year. It was a great experience! The name "homeschool conference" doesn't sound like much fun, BUT it was actually a lot of fun, cool, humorous, and many more things. The theme of the children's program at the conference was based on The American Revolutionary War. Cool, right? I was in the drama, and it was awesome! It was the most amount of lines I've ever had to memorize, but I didn't mind. My character's name was Mrs. Betty Parker. I was a little old lady, and my character's demeanor was sweet and gentle. I got to sign autographs with my character's name for the children. There were classrooms for the kids to go to and do activities, and there were 4 classrooms for the staff like me. The volunteer teams needed to get there early and wait for the kids to arrive. Each class was one of the US territory names. There were 1, 2, 3, and 4 classrooms and their names were, New York, Boston, Williamsburg, and Philadelphia. The drama team would go from room to room and play games with the kids, staff, and all who were there. It was so much fun! I was very happy to be in the drama and to be a staff member too. I feel that the conference brought all three of us (my siblings and me) closer to Christ. I want to say thank you to the children's director and the second director, the drama crew, the staff, and all my new friends. Thank you for the great time!



My name is Devin Valiente, and I volunteered at the Homeschool Iowa Conference this year in early June. I chose to participate as a team member, and my sisters chose to be a part of the drama team. I was on Team Williamsburg. Our duties were explained so thoroughly by the leaders that I was able to entertain the children and provide them with the care required with great ease.

The work was divided up evenly among the volunteers; no one was overworked, and everyone had a meaningful place on the team. All of the staff was extremely friendly, and there was no negative feedback to anyone of any kind. Everything had a very well-defined plan, and things went smoothly. The children were never bored and enjoyed every aspect of the conference, especially the drama. The process was enriching to everyone, including the volunteers. I feel everyone learned something useful. The beautiful piano music may have inspired some to learn to play themselves. I am starting piano lessons this week because of my experience at the conference. The acting may have sparked an interest in a hobby, and maybe some developed a desire to watch and play with little children. The conference was great, despite my skeptical mindset in the beginning.



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INDEPENDENT PRIVATE INSTRUCTION (IPI)

REQUIREMENTS:

>> No initial reporting required
If public school written request received,
use NICHE Independent Private
Instruction Response Form

ACCESS AVAILABILITY:

>> No access to Dual Enrollment
for public school services, activities,
or Senior Year Plus options
(*other than concurrent enrollment*)
>> No access defined in Iowa Code for
Parent-Taught Driver Education

COMPETENT PRIVATE INSTRUCTION (CPI) Option 2 w/ Opt-Out Reporting

REQUIREMENTS:

>> No initial reporting required
ACCESS AVAILABILITY:
>> No access to Dual Enrollment
for public school services, activities,
or Senior Year Plus options

>> Access available for
Parent-Taught Driver Education
Use NICHE Optional Report Form
for CPI Option 2 with Opt-Out
when applying for status as a
teaching parent for PTDE.

OPTIONS WITH REPORTING AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL SERVICES

COMPETENT PRIVATE INSTRUCTION (CPI) Option 2 w/ Opt-In Reporting

REQUIREMENTS:

>> CPI Form A must be filed
by Sept 1 or within 2 weeks
after removing child from school
>> Annual assessment results
report must be filed by June 30

ACCESS AVAILABILITY:

>> Access available for
Dual Enrollment
for public school services, activities,
and Senior Year Plus options
>> Access available for
Parent-Taught Driver Education

COMPETENT PRIVATE INSTRUCTION (CPI) Option 1 w/ Your Chosen Teacher

REQUIREMENTS:

>> CPI Form A must be filed
by Sept 1 or within 2 weeks
after removing child from school
>> Meet with your chosen teacher
8 times (2 per quarter)

ACCESS AVAILABILITY:

>> Access available for
Dual Enrollment
for public school services, activities,
and Senior Year Plus options
>> Access available for
Parent-Taught Driver Education

COMPETENT PRIVATE INSTRUCTION (CPI) Option 1 w/ HSAP* Teacher

REQUIREMENTS:

>> CPI Form A must be filed
by Sept 1 or within 2 weeks
after removing child from school
>> Meet with HSAP* teacher
16 times (4 per quarter)

ACCESS AVAILABILITY:

>> Access available for
Dual Enrollment
for public school services, activities,
and Senior Year Plus options
>> Access available for
Parent-Taught Driver Education

*Public School Home School Assistance Program

“Pray” is Practical Advice

BY KIM ZUBER

In the almost four years since our special-needs daughter, Johanna, graduated from our homeschool, the “Towering Spruce Academy,” we have found that the learning never ends. When my husband and I decided to take her out of public school and bring her home to teach, I was overwhelmed with the responsibility. I questioned my ability to teach her, wondered how to find the right curriculum for her needs, was anxious about ensuring that I could still get her all the right therapies. In short, I wondered how I could “fix” her. I was focused on myself, my abilities, this new “job” I had taken on, forgetting that I was never alone because I had my husband’s support and, most importantly, I had God to lean on too.

I remember being frustrated by all the homeschooling articles I read that advised me to pray, pray some more, and then, when I was done, to pray again. I thought to myself that I really needed more practical advice than to just pray. Being told to pray made me feel more hopeless, as in “how am I ever going to be able to do this?!” Hopeless! Now I can say that the most practical advice I can give a new homeschooling mom, especially one with a special-needs child, is to pray and ask for God’s guidance on your journey.

In addition to prayer, one of the most helpful things my husband and I did was to have Johanna evaluated by a professional. For us, it was a special-education teacher who was also a close friend. She helped us find our starting point. With her guidance, I was able to find books at my daughter’s level and we started there, working through word lists, learning signs to go with them, working at Johanna’s pace until we reached a plateau. Then we would stop and move on to something different.

We worked hard at math for many years. Unfortunately, math is something that my daughter may never understand. But she does know what order numbers come in and has a basic understanding of the value of money. For the rest of Johanna’s life, we will be working on sign vocabulary, reading, communication, and life skills. We may not have made the advances her “normal” peers did in school each year, but our daughter is learning, is happy, and loves to hang out with other girls her age. Participating in the 2013 NICHE Graduation was one of the highlights of her life. These days the friends that she graduated with are finishing up their college degrees and Johanna likes to stay up late – because that’s what they do too. When she is “grown up,” she wants to be an artist.



Kim & Johanna Zuber

PHOTO BY HANNAH ELISE PHOTOGRAPHY

Looking back, it is clear to me that I was trying to make Johanna into what I thought all of her peers would be. Now, I realize, that God had a different plan for our daughter, and that through much prayer, he has directed our steps as my husband and I worked together to raise and teach her. Johanna has not met many of the goals I set for her in those early days, but by working together, we have become very close. We laugh, we read, we craft, we work on life skills, we exercise, we do everything together. Johanna will always require my care, but I can see that God has prepared me for this task. I cannot imagine a future that does not include Johanna right by my side. However, I have learned that whatever the future holds, it is in God’s hand, and he will prepare the way for whatever comes.

Kim Zuber and her husband have been married 29 years. They have two amazing adult children. In Kim’s free time, she enjoys photography, crafts, and cooking.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

James 1:5-6





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