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## Little children, let us love, not in word or in speech, but in truth and action. 1 JOHN 3:18

**W**hat does it mean to be children of God? We sometimes use that phrase quite casually, as befitting all people, but that is not the way the term is generally used in the New Testament. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we read, "But to all who received him [that is, Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." John further defines children of God as those who are born "not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (v. 12). For John, being children of God is not a natural condition; something we are born into. Rather, it is a state of being or becoming in response to the grace and goodness of God.

I wrestle with this definition. Given the human proclivity for self-deceit and rationalization, one can look back on childhood with a certain detachment that suggests, "I was a good kid. I didn't cause trouble. I wasn't selfish, or rude, or mean." Sometimes it takes your brother, thirty years after the fact, reminding you of the crude language you used in the church parking lot to realize that you may not have been as "good" as you remember.

Or perhaps it takes having children to raise a mirror to your shortcomings, as well as to theirs, to make you wonder what Jesus was getting at when he suggested we must become like children. Like the time my eldest son, then four, suggested his one-year-old brother be summarily executed for destroying a pre-school craft project. "Take him outside," he bellowed upon learning of the grievous injustice, "take him outside and kill him." Children can be mean. Children can be cruel. Children can be many things that fall short of the glory of God.

However, children are also in formation. Children are open to being shaped. Children have a sense of wonder about the world around them and their place in it. The early church father, Barnabas, writing near the end of the first century put it this way: "Since, then, he renewed us through the forgiveness of our sins, he made us into a different type of person, that we might have the soul of children, as if he were indeed forming us all over again" (Barnabas 6:11).\*

We are to become like little children, not so that we might be childish, but so that we might be open to being formed, or rather reformed, in the image and likeness of Christ. Reformed, to love not in word or in speech but in truth and in action. Reformed, so that our practice of



Children have a sense of wonder about the world around them and their place in it.

faith might square with our profession of faith. Reformed, so that we might know the word as well as live the word in ways great and small throughout our lives.

We are the little children John is addressing. We are the little children God is seeking. Do we have the soul of children, ready to be formed all over again?

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\* *Epistle of Barnabas, The Apostolic Fathers, Volume 2*, Bart D. Ehrman, editor/translator (Harvard University Press, 2003) 33.

## Rediscovering Children

**A** misconception of serious proportions exists among many Christians who think that the Bible says very little about children. In reality, we have neglected God's revelation about children, and our vision of the kingdom is but a pale reflection of what Jesus taught. This brief survey provides a biblical foundation for reclaiming the place of children in the church.

The Old Testament's cast of characters includes many children:

- *Ishmael* whose mother, Hagar, discovered that God was infinitely concerned about a single mother and her son (Genesis 16:9-12);
- *Isaac* who prefigured Jesus' sacrifice in the testing of his father Abraham (Genesis 22:1-12);
- *Joseph*, the dreamer who would one day save his father and the children of Israel from famine (Genesis 37);
- *Benjamin*, the boy who made possible reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 44 and 45);
- *Miriam* whose vigilance saved her baby brother, *Moses*, who would grow to lead the Hebrew people to freedom (Exodus 1);
- *Obed*, an ancestor of Jesus whose birth forms the climax to the book of Ruth;
- *Samuel*, the child who responded to God when adults failed and became a model for obedience (I Samuel 3);
- *David*, the boy whose actions routed the Philistines and revealed that God was not dependent on adult power or training (I Samuel 17);
- The unnamed servant girl who was the means of the healing for the commander Naaman (II Kings 5);
- *Josiah*, the king and reformer of ancient Israel, who was a boy when the reforms began (II Kings 22; II Chronicles 34);
- *Esther*, the orphan girl who became queen and risked herself to save the Jewish people (Esther 2);
- *Jeremiah*, who was chosen by God though he was "only a child" (Jeremiah 1).

It is not just that children appear but that their faith and actions were critically important to the unfolding purposes of God. Likewise, numerous incidents involving children are recorded in the Gospels, such as the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30), the official's son at Capernaum (John 4), Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56), the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-15), and the boy with loaves and fishes (John 6:8). Jesus demonstrated a heart for children and they were drawn to him. Three strands in the Gospel narratives call for particular attention here.

*The first is the incarnation—the birth of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.* The opening chapters of both Gospels repeatedly refer to children. Matthew quotes Isaiah's promise about the birth of a

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child (7:14); wise men search for a child; and shepherds are sent to find "a baby wrapped in cloths" (Luke 2:12). Simeon refers to the child as "a sign" (Luke 2:33) while the prophetess Anna speaks of him as the long-awaited hope of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). Perhaps our familiarity with the "Christmas story" blinds us to the radical nature of God's choice to enter the world as a child. The fullness of the creator God in a tiny child: Is it possible?" This is how the hymnist Edward Caswall put it: "Lo within a manger lies, He who built the starry skies." It is difficult enough to see how the fullness of God could dwell in a human being, so how much more to see the Almighty contracted to the span of a baby! The incarna-

tion calls us to find God in little things . . . in little ones; to move from the palaces and the powerful to the manger and the child.

*The second strand finds children and childlikeness a unifying thread from the Transfiguration to the Temple in the Gospel of Matthew (17-21).* Jesus' first act after the Transfiguration is healing a boy (17:14-21). Chapter 18 begins with the question of greatness answered by Jesus' admonition that unless we "become like little children" we will never enter the kingdom, coupled with a call to childlike humility and Jesus' self-identification with children, "when you welcome one of these children . . . you welcome me" (vs. 1-4). A curse on those who cause harm to children (vs. 6-7) is followed by the parable of the lost sheep, which stresses the value of even one "little one" to our "father in heaven" (vs. 10-11). Answers to adult questions about forgiveness (18: 21-35) and divorce (19:1-11) are followed by Jesus once again placing children in the center of things—and of the kingdom—by blessing a child (19:13-15). Chapter 21 sees Jesus entering Jerusalem to an enthusiastic crowd yet after he challenges temple practices, it is the children who continue the praise, angering religious leaders and winning Jesus' affirmation (vs. 12-17, citing Psalms 8:2). In this section we find some of the clearest teaching of Jesus about the nature of the kingdom.

*The final strand is therefore the nature of the kingdom.* By welcoming a little child, we welcome the Lord of the kingdom, which is not like an earthly kingdom at all! Not a territory but rather God's way of doing things, the kingdom is marked by greatness that has nothing to do with status, power, strength, influence, or wealth. Entry into the kingdom requires change—repentance and childlikeness. The requirement to become as a child to enter the kingdom is consistent with the answer of Jesus to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:1-16)—

we have to let go of all our adult preconceptions and start all over again like little babies . . . in Christ. Further the other great paradox of the kingdom—that while it has begun, it is not yet realized—is signed by children, who are fully human but not yet fully developed.

We have made fundamental errors about the kingdom of God and about mission, mistaking our efforts, power, and conquests for God's kingdom. We have gone about theology in the wrong way, as an adult-oriented pursuit with emphasis on philosophy, doctrine and theology and very little on stories, paradoxes and signs of the kingdom. We have mixed up our priorities and underestimated the place and contribution of children. We have contributed to societies where adults, power, wealth, and possessions seem to count for almost everything and where childlikeness is marred, or squeezed into adulthood by our commercialism and adult programmes of education. We have caused children suffering and have treated them as second-rate concerns of political systems. Yet we (still) have an awesome calling to be alongside children at risk, and in the process to reshape the processes, nature and structures of church, mission and society. If we fail, it is not just children who suffer but civilization. Not only will children fail to have their rightful place, but Jesus himself will be misunderstood and unrecognised. He will have knocked at the door of our souls and fellowships in vain. But when we welcome a child in his name, we will have opened our hearts afresh to him.

*Excerpted and adapted by permission from "A Little Child Will Lead Them: Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission," Keith J. White, M.A. (Oxon), M.Phil, Ph.D., Chair of the Child Theology Movement. The original article can be viewed on the Child Theology Movement website at [www.childtheology.org/new/articles.php?type=1](http://www.childtheology.org/new/articles.php?type=1).*



## Children as Recipients of the Reign of God

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16; parr. Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17)*

**I**n this pericope *Jesus blesses the children who are brought to him and teaches that the reign of God belongs to them.* The backdrop for this teaching and practice is his disciples' rebuke of those who were bringing the children and the disciples' attempt to hinder them. We are not told why the disciples react this way; and whether their reaction should be understood as entailing a pejorative view of children is open to question. In any case, Jesus forcefully overrides the disciples' intervention. He became indignant—one of only two references to Jesus' anger in the New Testament (cf. Mark 3:5), which suggests the seriousness of excluding children from the blessings of the reign of God (Hans Ruedi-Weber, "Jesus and the Children," Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979, 15-16)—and he issues the double command, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them." Then he takes the children up into his arms, lays his hands on them, and blesses them. These actions are followed by his teaching that the reign of God belongs to children. A more emphatic statement of children's reception into the reign of God by Jesus could hardly be made. Why is it, we can ask, that Jesus so vigorously counters the disciples on this matter and insists on welcoming the children into God's reign?

His teaching on the reign of God elsewhere suggests an answer. According to the Beatitudes, the lowly and powerless are the primary beneficiaries of that reign, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:20-23; cf. Matthew 5:3-12). Now children shared the social status of the poor, the hungry and the

suffering, whom Jesus calls "blessed." For this reason, apparently, he insists on receiving children into the reign of God. It is probably correct to say that children's vulnerability and powerlessness seem to lie at the heart of Jesus' extension of the reign of God to them. Children *qua children* in this sense—referring presumably to children within the covenant community—are the *intended* recipients of the reign of God. It has come for them.

*From "The Least and the Greatest," Judy Gundry-Volf in "The Child in Christian Thought," Marcia Bunge, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 37. Reprinted by permission of the publisher; all rights reserved.*



## Keeping Children in the Center of Our Ministry Vision

**C**ongregations often have a desire to work with children in their communities but are unsure about how to determine the best form of outreach. I begin my work with such congregations by having members answer and then discuss the questions below.

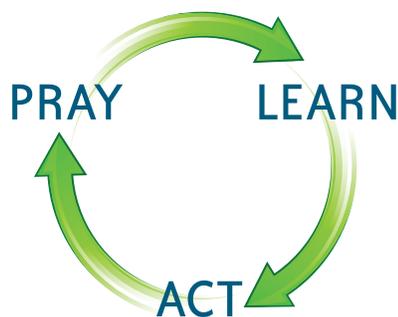
- Who are the children (infant to eighteen) in your community?
- Where are the children in your community?
- What are the needs of the children in your community?
- How is God calling you to influence the children?
- How will you allow the children to influence you?
- How is God calling you to support caregivers of children in your congregation and community?

Next, the church members are asked to describe the need that they see for ministry with children in their church and community. From that they are to develop and propose to their leadership a program that includes both a plan for action and for on-going reflection. This activity serves as a call to consider ministry with children and youth in broader terms than it is traditionally practiced in churches.

Would your first thought be to hand such a list of questions to a Sunday school teacher or youth minister? Would you also consider it important to reflect on these questions in a facilities and grounds meeting, with deacons or trustees or in quarterly business meetings? For many churches, the answer to the first question would be “yes” while the answer to the second would be “no.” Yet these questions are for everyone and every congregational gathering. When we reduce ministry with children to an enterprise separate from the rest of the ministry of the church, we miss the fullness of being disciples in community with children. When we incorporate ministry with children as vital and deserving of the most competent leadership and best ideas, we often experience a fruitfulness that exceeds our expectations.

The following graphic illustrates a practical model for ministry that Jesus practiced with his disciples. He

would spend time teaching them, send them out to “practice” the teaching, and then give them opportunity to rejoice, reflect, and regain strength.



*Prayer* is part of the preparation to reach out with the confidence that God is with you and will guide you. *Learn* what Scripture says about caring for the stranger, the orphan, the lonely, the sick. Assuming you do not know everything about the children or the families you serve, seek to understand their circumstances, needs and preferences in a non-judgmental way and be open to learning from them. *Act*, provide care and watch God work . . . and then pray, learn and act some more. Your prayers of thanksgiving will increase, your compassion will grow as you learn more, and you will be inspired to act in new ways—the cycle continues.

Last Easter season I listened to a report that the newly selected Pope Francis went to a juvenile detention center to wash the feet of the children! What a powerful witness as the Pope knelt at *their* feet! Are you willing to kneel at and wash the feet of children? Every church has children and youth. If they are not at your worship services or programs, they are somewhere in your community—in the public school, daycare or juvenile detention center; in town parks and foster homes. Can you imagine that God is calling you to see those children as your children? And can you imagine that those children are God’s instruments to influence you?

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## Spiritual Formation and Agency and Voice in Childhood

**W**alking in downtown Atlanta with my nine-year-old one frosty morning, we spotted a homeless person asleep on the steps of a church. My child stopped abruptly. “Mom,” she whispered urgently, “Why is that man sleeping there?” Uncomfortably aware of other pedestrians, I quickly explained, “He’s homeless, and that’s probably the only place he could find.” My daughter was incredulous. “But, Mom! That’s not right! We should do something!”

My first inclination was to say that I agreed, but that it wasn’t that simple—the man may not want to go to a shelter, he might have substance abuse issues, or be living with an untreated mental illness. But then I realized that my daughter was voicing outrage at an injustice. As a child, she could look clearly at the issue without viewing it through adult layers of experience and cynicism.

My daughter could articulate her indignation partly because she had been raised to value individual expres-

**We may vehemently deny that we view children as less-than-fully actuated humans with gifts to offer and contributions to make, but our actions often counter our words.**

sion. But there was more to it than that. Her own unique viewpoint and actions had to a great degree shaped her development, pushing her to voice those opinions clearly. She was employing what scholars in childhood studies call *agency* and *voice*. Agency refers to the fact that children affect their social worlds and shape their own development and identity. Voice can be defined as

those intentions, hopes, grievances and expectations unique to childhood. Voice is the expression of agency. (“Rethinking Childhood,” Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth. Eds.)

We may all be unconsciously influenced by Aristotle’s idea that children have the potential to become human but are not fully human because they are not completely mature. We may vehemently deny that we view children as less-than-fully actuated humans with gifts to offer and contributions to make, but our actions often counter our words. In their theological statements, most faith groups present a lofty view of childhood. Children are a gift of the Lord, we say. They are the future of the church—our most precious gift and solemn responsibility. We may say children are at the center of our faith communities, yet our practices do not always back that up. We welcome the children, but often that welcome is circumscribed by expectations that they will fit adult models of worship and faith expression. Or conversely, we segregate them into age-specific groups. While educational experiences that are developmentally appropriate are not a bad thing, how often do we provide authentic avenues for children’s voices to be heard, let alone opportunities where the spiritual formation of adults might actually be influenced by them?

Yet since the 1970s when the Federal Trade Commission was unable to limit advertising to children, marketers have embraced with open arms facilitating the voice and agency of children. The pervasive power of consumer culture surrounds children 24/7 with messages to buy. With the proliferation of electronic media, marketers have more ways than ever to bypass parents and target children directly. The tactics used to market to children are quite sophisticated. Among them is the “nag factor” in which children are encouraged to grasp their power to affect what products their parents buy. Increasingly, children themselves have access to money to make their own purchases. Is this the kind of voice and agency we want to enhance in our children?

Scholars in childhood studies who first explored a new way of viewing childhood were galvanized by what they saw as a crisis in childhood—rising rates of poverty



and abuse threatening today's children and putting their future in jeopardy. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child presents needs-based rights, underscoring the necessity of protecting the vulnerabilities of childhood. The Convention also affirms dignity-based rights, for example, the rights to identity and the expression of views. If, as many assert, consumer culture has become the most powerful force shaping children, and if one vehicle is enhancing agency and voice so that children become consummate consumers, people of faith cannot afford to opt out.

Below are some guidelines for how we shape authentic agency and voice in children while acknowledging developmental realities and respecting the primary care-givers who are primarily responsible for their spiritual formation:

**1. Find out more about what children say they need.** How many pastors actually know what constitutes a crisis to a child? In a study by the National Council of Churches (reported in *Rethinking Childhood*) that looked at children's and pastors' perceptions of children's needs for pastoral care, pastors identified the following as key: day of baptism, first day of school, day of first communion or confirmation, day of departure to college or armed forces, wedding, death of parents or grandparents. Children, on the other hand, identified: day your best friend moves away, when you get held back at school or aren't selected for a team, when parents divorce, when a pet dies, when a child you know dies, when parents or grandparents die. There is a striking disconnect between what pastors perceive about children's needs and what children themselves identify.

**2. Help children to know their voices are heard and respected.** One All Saints' Day after our dog had been

killed, we were invited in worship to name aloud those who had died in the past year. "Mom," my child whispered, "please say 'Heidi'." So feeling profoundly thankful for a human rather than canine-sounding name, I named the beloved dog who was so missed by a six-year-old. Other children have prayed out loud in worship for a sick turtle, given thanks for a litter of puppies, or prayed for a bullied friend. These prayers are received with the same seriousness as those voiced by adults. When asked what her church did for her, one older child responded that her church allowed her to voice her prayers in worship out loud, no matter how small.

**3. Be open to the formative power of children's perspectives in our own ongoing spiritual formation.** One group of eleven and twelve year olds became passionately interested in land mine removal projects. A one-time contribution was not enough. Educating themselves and the congregation, they raised enough money to purchase several prostheses for children. Theirs was a powerfully formative witness to me, the educator who thought she was providing the formation.

When we open avenues for the agency and voice of children, we make it possible for them to influence their own spiritual development. In planning experiences we hope to be formative, we enter into partnership with the Holy Spirit in their formation and our own. But we also step aside to provide space where the Holy Spirit can move in and through them.

*Martha Bettis Gee, a certified Christian educator, is recently retired as associate for Child Advocacy and Networking for the Presbyterian Church (USA). She continues to work as a writer, editor and educational consultant.*

# The Character of the Community

**A**t the heart of a healthy congregation lies love for God, and from that love flows obedience to God's commands, genuine worship, and love for one another. There is integrity between worship and life, words and deeds. Children who observe and are embraced in the love of such integrity discover what it truly means to be Christian. They see the meaning of the words they hear in church lived out before them through the week. They learn that love for and obedience to God touch every part of life, and they come to know a God who is present and active in all the challenges, joys, and sorrows they face.

Are churches today demonstrating this integrity of worship and life, word and deed? After studying the North American church over more than two decades George Barna expresses deep concern for the typical church.

*The stumbling block for the Church is not its theology but its failure to apply what it believes in compelling ways. The downfall of the Church has not been the content of its message but its failure to practice those truths. Christians have been their own worst enemies when it comes to showing the world what authentic, biblical Christianity looks like . . . Those who have turned to Christianity seeking truth and meaning have left empty-handed, confused by the apparent inability of Christians themselves to implement the principles they profess. ["The Second Coming of the Church" (Nashville: Word, 1998, 5)]*

Not only seekers but also children need to see the principles of the Christian faith lived out. God desires to gather a diverse, multigenerational people who demonstrate the character God expects, a community of people who live in ways that accomplish God's purposes in the world. Such communities can nurture genuine faith.

Healthy congregations will have a clear sense of their identity as children of God, disciples and friends of Jesus, chosen to participate in God's work in the world. They will be loving communities, expressing love to children and adults in the church, to neighbors in the sur-



rounding community, and to the world. (In Deuteronomy 6:5 and John 15:5, 8, 14-17, notice that God's people, Jesus' disciples, are to have a sense of identity as God's children and friends of Jesus.)

Nurturing congregations will experience disappointment, pain, and suffering. But together, by God's grace, they will find a way through. To provide our children, and ourselves, with a faith-giving community, we do not have to be perfect, to have arrived. God simply calls us to faithfully follow Jesus, growing as disciples. Wherever we are on the journey, God has a place of service for us.

The character, integrity, and spiritual vitality of the faith community will affect children profoundly. Those who care about the spiritual growth of children will care about the spiritual vitality of the whole congregation.

*From "Children in the Faith Community" in "Children Matter: Celebrating their Place in the Church, Family, and Community" Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse and Linda Cannell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 131-132. Reprinted by permission of the publisher; all rights reserved.*

## Children and Urban Ministry: A Gift of New Life!



Our congregation sits in the heart of an urban community, where it has been for 98 years. During its impressive “heyday,” worshipers needed to arrive almost an hour early to get a good seat. All age groups were present in the vibrant worshipping faith community. Children participated and sang in the children’s choir. Though the church has gone through many years of transition in leadership and membership, it is now poised to reinvigorate its commitment to the community and positioned to reenergize its ministry. This is a time for a new vision and a fresh beginning that can outshine our relished former years if we seize it as a ministry challenge.

Our urban context is now a depressed area where crime, poverty, and other social concerns abound. Throughout the years, children, except for one or two from the remaining dedicated families of the church, have grown up and moved on. Against this backdrop and through the evangelistic calling of one of our young adults, we were recently blessed with an influx of children from our community. They easily fill three to four pews in the congregation and their ages range from about 5 to 12 years old. These children are not only bringing new life into the congregation, but they are also challenging us to develop intentional, relevant and creative discipleship ministries. We are convinced that God has sent the children to us for such a time as this!

As a congregation, we are being stretched to include children in the learning and worshipping community. Ironically, though many have never attended church on a regular basis, they have an almost insatiable desire to learn, grow, and be involved in the faith community. Ministry with the children includes meeting their spiritual and physical needs. Young adults and older youth participate in preparing healthy meals for the children each time they gather. Our new member orientation program has been revised to include special material for younger children. We have also involved children and young adults as partners in the training of new converts among the children. It is no wonder to us that Jesus said “let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as

these.” (Matthew 19:14) Their innocence and love for the ways of Christ are refreshing to our comfortable and complacent faith community.

Our church has responded to God’s gift of the children in several ways. First of all, we have given thanks for the blessing that has come our way. The energy and freshness of the children remind us that not only are we alive right now, but we have a glorious future ahead of us. We have someone to pass the stories of our faith to and to ensure that future generations will know the meaning of our stones (Joshua 4:21). Secondly, we have attempted to be intentional with ministry to the children through weekly tutoring and Bible study sessions;

**This is a time for a new vision and a fresh beginning that can outshine our relished former years if we seize it as a ministry challenge.**

a summer enrichment camp; church school classes; and bi-weekly children’s church sessions. Children lead and inspire worship on youth Sundays. Finally, we have welcomed the children as affirmation and confirmation of the developing vision God is creating for our congregation, particularly as it relates to our role in this urban neighborhood.

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## Imagining a Life of Faith

**F**ive-year-old Matt\* stacks cardboard blocks into walls around him. When I ask what he is doing, he tells me he is building a castle. “The friends of the man who couldn’t walk, they wouldn’t be able to tear up the roof of a castle,” he says. “It’s good that Jesus was teaching at somebody’s home. That way, he could fix the man’s legs.” I agree that it was a very good thing that the paralyzed man’s four friends only had to dig through a sod roof to deliver their friend to Jesus for healing.

Sandy and Bryan flap a strip of blue fabric while Keisha pretends to sleep inside the boat outlined in tape on the floor. Prompted by an adult, the first two continue making waves while shouting, “Jesus! Wake up! We’re going to die!” Keisha jumps up, throws out her arms and yells, “You waves, be still!” Her friends drop the fabric, which settles quietly on the carpet, and cheer, “Jesus, you saved us!” Then Bryan announces, “Okay, now it’s my turn to play Jesus” and everyone runs to the other side of the room to begin another reenactment of the Bible story. Before they are done, each child and their adult friend all have a chance to portray Jesus.

One of the hallmarks of childhood is imaginative play. Children learn about the world through imagining themselves as participants in the stories they hear, the roles they associate with the people around them, and the tasks they watch others do. Toddlers’ favorite toys are often replicas of adult tools: a pretend phone, an imitation MP3 player, pint-sized kitchen utensils, plastic wrenches, and screwdrivers. Early elementary children learning to write will make up stories and illustrate them with pictures that reflect the images in their minds. Older children create avatars—cartoonish alter egos, often with superpowers—and navigate the virtual landscapes of computer games. At every age, children like to experiment with reality, testing what is meaningful and important in life by playing with ideas, observations and experiences.

Parents and church leaders can facilitate this experimentation by creating opportunities for children to imagine what the stories and practices of faith mean for their lives. A key aspect of this process is telling Bible

stories not just *to* children, but also *with* children. When children are responsible for providing sound effects, enacting the movements described in the narrative, repeating key words and phrases, and taking the perspective of different characters as the plot unfolds, they put themselves inside the story. As their bodies become part of the telling, their imaginations take them back in time to the desert crossing of the Israelites or the disciples’ trek on the road to Emmaus. They experience emotional connections with biblical characters as they say Peter’s words or mime Hannah’s actions. They feel the rhythm of each story as it shifts from opening to climax to conclusion, giving them a sense of how God works in the world through divine-human relationships.

It is also crucial that children repeat Bible stories multiple times so that they pick up more details and learn to tell the tales on their own. Just as young children love to hear the same picture book read over and over until they can anticipate each page and finish the reader’s sentences, they need to participate in biblical storytelling that encourages the same familiarity. In church school classes, it is not enough to tell a story once and then move on to a thematically related activity. Young children need to repeat the story three or four times, perhaps taking different parts in playacting or responding to invitations to fill in gaps in the storytelling after a couple of times through. Older children might conduct mock interviews with story “witnesses” who retell crucial parts of the narrative, or shoot and edit video dramas. Craft projects might include images from the story, with children narrating each part of the plot as they create a mural or add elements to a storyboard. At home, families can read Bible storybooks together and then use the book’s illustrations as prompts for retelling narratives. Parents can read the same story several days in a row as part of a bedtime routine, leaving pauses at significant points after the first few nights so that children can contribute signature phrases. Some children might even enjoy repeating Bible stories to family pets after hearing them told a few times.

As children learn the stories of the Bible, they also need practice imagining what these stories might mean.

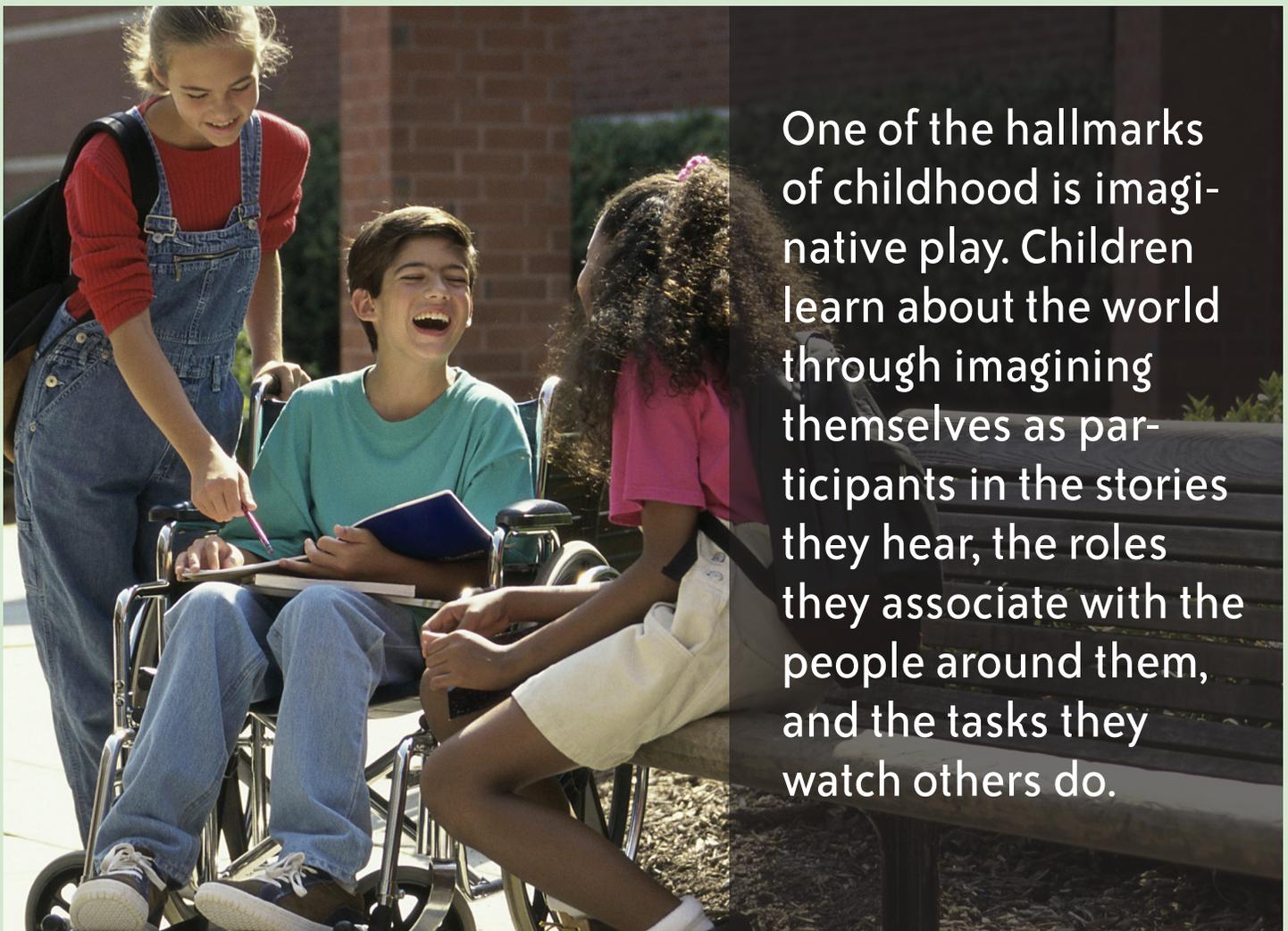
Parents and church leaders may be tempted to simply dictate the meaning of stories by telling children, “This is a story about God’s love” or “This story says that we should forgive others,” but it is much more effective to wonder aloud with children about what a story might mean than to inform children of a single possible interpretation. Saying, “I wonder why they took their sick friend to see Jesus” or “I wonder why the rich young ruler asked Jesus that question” or “I wonder why Jesus decided to eat dinner with tax collectors” invites children to think theologically. Most children will then bring their prior knowledge of Bible stories and their experiences of the world together as they imagine possible story interpretations. In response to a wondering question about the events of Holy Week, an eight year old once told me that Jesus was crucified because people forgot to use their words to work out their differences. Drawing on her life experience with childhood squabbles and adult limit-setting, she said, “The people got so angry that they wanted to hurt someone. They should have just taken a time out!”

Finally, children’s imagination helps them connect biblical stories with their own faith commitments and faithful actions. As they wonder about the meaning of

stories, they can practice translating those stories into contemporary settings. Once again, if adults refrain from naming a specific “take away” point and instead invite reflection as part of children’s immersion in a story, then children learn to be theologians rather than to passively receive others’ theological conclusions. Asking, “What would you say to God if you were scared?” or “How would you help the people on our congregation’s prayer list know that God cares about them?” encourages children to envision ways of being faithful. Following such discussions with prayers and projects built on the children’s responses then helps children see how what they have imagined can become a reality.

\* The names of all the children referenced in this article have been changed to protect their privacy.

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One of the hallmarks of childhood is imaginative play. Children learn about the world through imagining themselves as participants in the stories they hear, the roles they associate with the people around them, and the tasks they watch others do.

## To Teach Justice or Maintain the Status Quo?

I recently had the opportunity to study hundreds of children's Bibles and other children's religious education materials from the 1700s and 1800s at the American Antiquarian Society and the Library of Congress. What I found was disturbing. While there were certainly some examples that promoted a faith concerned with freedom and justice, the vast majority adapted, changed, and moralized Bible stories in ways that worked to squelch any spirit of protest or advocacy for change. I probably should not have been surprised. Those who had the power and privilege to publish material were, whether they realized it or not, adapting the Bible in ways that maintained the



status quo. When I returned home, I looked at more recent children's Bibles and educational materials and discovered that we have not made much progress. Throughout American history, the primary lesson of children's religious education materials, in a wide

variety of iterations, has been that if one is good, one will be rewarded; if one is bad or disobedient, one will be punished. Those of us who want to teach children that Christianity is a faith that calls us to work for justice have long-standing historical assumptions to overcome.

In the early American colonial period, the influence of Puritanism led to an emphasis on teaching children that they were depraved sinners in need of a healthy fear of God's judgment. The Bible was primarily presented not as a repository of these doctrines but for its own sake. Bible catechisms and other materials were provided to help children memorize the Bible, along with hymnals and doctrinal catechisms. The primary goal was to immerse children in Christian devotion through the use of prayers, hymns, and Scripture.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, during the time of the so-called Second Awakening, Bible stories were used as tools for conversion. The emphasis on the wickedness of rebellion and God's judgment upon it supported the goal of leading children to repentance. Many children's

Bibles from the 1800s, for example, retell the story of the forty children of Bethel who were cursed and killed by two bears for mocking the prophet Elisha in ways that would instill fear into any child who might show disrespect for his or her elders. Retellings of the story of Noah's ark inserted mocking neighbors not present in Genesis, suggesting to children that any kind rebellious spirit was to be avoided.

In the mid-1800s, a number of abolitionist publications for children, such as *The Slave's Friend*, were published for white children to encourage them to join the abolitionist cause. Most publishers of Sunday school materials, however, intentionally avoided the controversial subject. During this time a significant percentage of children of all races who came to the United States served as slaves and indentured servants. It may not be surprising, then, that the stories of the child Samuel and Namaan's little maid were popular. In many children's Bibles, these two children, who are taken from their homes and made to work, cheerfully and loyally serve their new masters. These adaptations taught children that they should work hard, be content with their lot in life and not complain.

During the mid-to-late-1800s, with a dawning sentimental and romantic view of children, many religious education materials told contemporary stories of sweet and gentle children who gladly gave their lives in order to serve their parents or others in authority. The biblical stories of the sacrifices of the boy Isaac and Jephthah's daughter were quite popular in children's Bibles of this time, with retellings that portrayed Isaac and Jephthah's daughter as completely submissive, gladly giving their lives for the sake of their parents without any thought of their own needs.

During the industrial revolution, at the end of the 1800s and into the early part of the 1900s, many white, Protestant Christians voiced fears that they could no longer trust immigrants or freed slaves to teach their children the virtues necessary to make them compliant workers. Protestant Christians took up the agenda of teaching children citizenry virtues such as working hard and not complaining. In some of these children's Bibles, Noah is lifted up as a role model for hard work. A few



Those who wish to teach children a faith that calls for civil rights, liberation, and justice would do well to look through their children's Bibles and Sunday school curriculum with a critical eye, asking "How are the Bible's stories being used and what stories are included?"

children's Bibles even suggested that the reason God chose Noah to be spared is because God knew Noah was a hard worker. While the Bible does not contain many details on the childhood of Jesus, children's Bibles have added stories and anecdotes that present the child Jesus as cheerfully and quickly obeying his parents whenever asked to do any task. These stories also imply or state explicitly that if Jesus himself was content with his station in life as a poor child then all children should accept their place.

In the mid-twentieth century, large single-volume or multi-volume children's Bibles became increasingly popular. Images in these volumes affirm loyalty to God and country—a reflection of the national emphasis on the U.S. as a God-fearing nation in contrast to nations on the other side of the Iron Curtain. While the 1960s and '70s saw some lessons of social justice entering religious education materials, the 1980s brought (perhaps in reaction) a strong affirmation of family values along with a return to non-rebellious citizenry values such as obedience, submission and hard work.

The last few decades have brought an increase of children's Bibles as fun, benign children's storybooks with anthropomorphic animal friends and smiling faces. In some cases, young children are encouraged to hug children's Bibles that are covered with soft fuzzy material, which literally transforms the Bible into a warm, fuzzy feeling. The messages implied by these versions of Bible stories are consistent with what sociologist Chris-

tian Smith calls "Moral Therapeutic Deism," in which human agency is played down and God is often seen as taking care of children to the point that there is no need for any person to take action. The story of Nathan the prophet speaking truth to power, for example, is rarely included in children's Bibles. In retelling the story of baby Moses, authors sometimes portray God providentially directing Moses' floating basket down the river to Pharaoh's daughter, rather than speaking of the clever and subversive act of Moses' mother and sister. Also missing are stories of the just and subversive disobedience of the Hebrew midwives who saved the Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:15-17).

Those who wish to teach children a faith that calls for civil rights, liberation and justice would do well to look through their children's Bibles and Sunday school curriculum with a critical eye, asking "How are the Bible's stories being used and what stories are included? Are we passing on a faith of justice and social action, or a faith of passivity and submission to a sometimes unjust status quo?" Such questions might lead teachers and parents to adapt curricula, change how Bible stories are used with children, and include more Bible stories that call children, and call us all, to become actively faithful and just Christian citizens.

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## Children and the Bible

**I**s the Bible only for older folks? Is it only for those who are mockingly called “Bible thumpers?” It is tragic to think that this may be the prevailing attitude today. The Bible is and will continue to be the word of God; the collection of inspired writings that inform and guide Christian character, attitudes, and values. *Its message is relevant today!* It is therefore imperative that the Bible be taught and that all develop the lifelong discipline of seeking its guidance. It is particularly important to seize the formative childhood years to instill a love for Scripture. Most major world religions teach sacred writings to children in an intentional way. The Christian community must not give up deliberate and planned teaching of our own sacred writing to both children and adults.

As a Christian educator for over 25 years, I’ve seen the pendulum swing from school-instructional methods to a storytelling approach to an emphasis on character-building apart from a biblical foundation. In the process



of exploring different models of teaching, we may have thrown the baby out with the bath water and lost the importance of teaching Scripture. While Bibles abound in various sizes and translations and are available in print, on the Internet and in phone applications, many people do not read the Bible. Many do not know how to use it, study it or apply it to daily life. More and more people are Bible illiterate and many cite difficulty in reading and understanding the text as the reason. We can change this tide for future generations if we are proactive and intentional.

The following questions may provide starting points for evaluating the place of the Bible in your setting:

- Do your explicit curriculum (intentional instruction) and implicit curriculum (transmission of norms, values, and beliefs through participation in the social environment) both reveal the importance of the Bible?
- Are you intimidated by the Bible or concerned that children find it boring or “old school?”
- Are children familiar enough with the Bible to navigate it for themselves?
- Do you use a sequential Bible method (Old to New Testament) so that children are given the background necessary to understand the stories in context?
- If you encourage and model Bible memorization, do you use child-friendly translations and make sure the children understand what they are memorizing?
- Do you use the arts, the media and technology to bring the Bible to life?
- Are children allowed to experience the fullness of the stories and helped to apply Bible teaching to their daily lives?

I was empowered to use the Bible as a book of faith while young. Most of my own Bible knowledge and the verses that I can quote from memory were learned in childhood. The stories of Scripture sparked my imagination and wonder as I identified with Bible characters and how faith in God helped them. I enjoyed Bible drills in youth group. As I have gotten older, in times of stress and grief, when I am in need of guidance and strength, the words of the Bible have become my words and my source of serenity. It is my daily bread. Although we navigate unique times and life is very different now—more stressful and complex for sure—from what it was when I was a child, childhood remains the optimal time for learning. Let’s be intentional in passing on our faith to our children by teaching them our sacred tradition.

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## La Biblia y la niñez

**¿E**s la Biblia sólo para los ancianos? ¿Es sólo para los fanáticos y conservadores? Desafortunadamente, muchos hoy en día piensan que es así. Pero sabemos que la Biblia es y será la Palabra de Dios—la colección de libros inspirados por Dios para guiar, inspirar y transformar nuestras actitudes, carácter y valores. *¡Su mensaje es relevante hoy!* Por eso es de imperativo que se enseñe la Biblia, y que todos y todas aprendan a usarla y a referirse a ella como una disciplina diaria. Es especialmente importante aprovechar los años de la niñez e inculcar a nuestros niños y niñas el amor a la Palabra en su uso y aplicación.



La mayor parte de religiones del mundo enseñan sus sagradas escrituras a su niños y niñas de manera intencional. La iglesia cristiana no debería abandonar la enseñanza planificada e intencional de nuestra propia Sagrada Escritura.

Como educadora cristiana por más de 25 años, he visto moverse el péndulo de metodologías en la enseñanza bíblica desde el método escolástico al sólo contar historias, o enfatizar las leyes y reglamentos de la vida cristiana. En este proceso de exploración de métodos de enseñanza quizás hemos perdido de vista la importancia de enseñar la Escritura. Aunque hoy en día hay biblias en todo tamaño, en varias interpretaciones, en el internet y en aplicación telefónica, mucho no la leen, y no saben cómo estudiarla ni mucho menos aplicarla a la vida diaria. Muchos alegan que su analfabetismo bíblico se debe a la dificultad de leer y entender la Biblia. Podemos aplacar las olas de

analfabetismo bíblico en futuras generaciones si somos proactivos, creativos e intencionales.

Por favor considere las siguientes preguntas para evaluar el lugar que ocupa la Biblia en su contexto:

- ¿Es la Biblia el centro focal del currículo explícito e implícito que se usa en su iglesia?
- ¿Se intimida al usar la Biblia pensando que los niños y niñas consideran su uso anticuado?
- ¿Conocen los niños y niñas los libros de la Biblia para poder fácilmente encontrar la historias por sí mismos?
- ¿Tiene un método secuencial para enseñar el mensaje bíblico del antiguo al nuevo testamento?
- Si anima y modela la memorización bíblica, ¿usa traducciones que sean fáciles de entender por los niños y niñas?
- ¿Usa las artes, la media, la tecnología para que la Biblia sea accesible y relevante?
- ¿Se le ayuda a los niños y niñas a aplicar la verdad del mensaje bíblico a sus vidas diarias?

De muy temprana edad se me inculcó la importancia de la Biblia como un libro de fe y de guía para toda mi vida. La mayoría del conocimiento bíblico básico y de los versículos que me sé de memoria los aprendí de niña. Mi fe en Dios y saber cómo vencer obstáculos creció a medida que los personajes bíblicos me demostraban cómo ellos y ellas vencían con el poder de Dios. En la juventud, disfrutaba mucho los concursos bíblicos. Conforme los años han pasado, en momentos de estrés o de dolor, cuando necesito guía y fortaleza, las palabras de la Biblia se han convertido en mis palabras y en mi fuente de serenidad. La Biblia es mi pan diario. Aunque los tiempos han cambiado y la vida es muy diferente de cuando yo era niña, ese tiempo tan corto de la niñez es todavía el mejor y óptimo para aprender y retener lo que es enseñado. Seamos intencionales en transmitir nuestra fe a nuestra niñez, enseñándoles nuestro libro sagrado.

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## Child's Talk



**D**uring a recent research project on discipleship formation in local churches (sponsored by The Project on Lived Theology), I visited an emergent congregation. Focusing most of its efforts on ministries of healing and hospitality, this group operates with an admittedly ad hoc and unorthodox approach to adult spiritual and discipleship formation. Despite this “intentional unintentionality” of adult Christian education, its nascent children’s ministry is taking a decidedly different path by devoting significant attention to Scriptural formation of children.

Each month the children explore a new Bible story, spending four weeks revisiting and responding to the story through different venues. When I asked the children’s minister about the apparent disconnect between the unstructured, heterodox adult gathering and the structured children’s time, she responded, “I really believe that children start off as spiritual beings, and I don’t want to mess that up!” She further suggested that while children are naturally spiritual, we need to give them the language to talk about it.

Many churches that are struggling to produce faithful, articulate and engaged believers could learn something from this church’s approach. The task of cultivating serious disciples begins with children’s formation, and many of those efforts fall short because they fail to provide children ways to assimilate and express their faith. While studies indicate that the number of adolescents attending church is not in serious decline, they also reveal a growing inarticulacy about faith—young people do not possess age-appropriate tools to talk about what they believe and what those beliefs mean to their daily lives. Sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton suggest that teens receive little help from faith communities in knowing how to express their faith, and children’s ministries do not fare any better.

The ground-breaking research on modern American society, “Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life,” identified a pervasive consumer attitude toward faith that sees most religious people in the U.S. choosing those aspects of faith that they like and leaving the rest in the background, making faith

part of the cultural ecology but not an intimate part of ordinary life. This consumer attitude of self-reliance and free choice—even regarding religion—is infused into children by the adults in their lives, and churches enable these attitudes through the lack of intentional Christian formation of our young people.

How then should we respond? First, we need to work hard at helping children express their faith in age-appropriate ways and intentionally explore how those beliefs are connected to daily life. Doing so may mean revamping children’s ministry to include more hands-on aspects and a variety of ways to respond to Bible stories, for example through art, movement and creative retelling.

Second, parents and other primary care-givers must recognize that they are indispensable partners in Christian formation, and the entire congregation needs to recognize its role in raising up a child in faith. While it may be easy to teach children to believe in God, it requires effort to help them move faith from the background to being the pivotal aspect of their lives. No parent is perfect. No church is perfect. Perfection is not needed. What is needed is intentional programming, effort, energy, volunteers, time, money and willingness to teach and show children that faith matters. It may or may not take a village to raise a child, but it definitely takes an entire church to raise a Christian.

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# Children in the Criminal Justice System

**S**ome 10,000 children are housed in adult jails and prisons on any given day in the United States. Fourteen states have no minimum age for trying children as adults while other states set the minimum at 10, 12 or 13 years of age. Children as young as eight years old have been prosecuted as adults. Over the last 25 years, young children have been prosecuted as adults in increasing numbers and subjected to harsh adult sentences.

Prosecuting underage children as adults is incompatible with the capabilities of young children and therefore traumatizing, abusive, cruel and unusual. Young children are developmentally incapable of exercising the judgment, maturity and knowledge necessary to competently defend themselves against criminal prosecution in adult court. While the U.S. Supreme Court has developed clear guidelines for insuring that adults are competent before they are subjected to criminal prosecution, the courts have not developed rules that address the unique characteristics of children, leaving child defendants vulnerable and at great risk in adult court.

As thousands of children have been transferred to adult courts, growing numbers have been automatically incarcerated in adult jails and prisons where they are at



increased risk of assault and rape. Children in adult facilities are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted than when placed in juvenile facilities. They are also much more likely to commit suicide after being housed in an adult jail or prison—more likely than children

in juvenile facilities and more likely than incarcerated adults. All states maintain juvenile facilities and while some states prohibit placing children in adult jails or prisons, many do not. Many children who are prosecuted as adults suffer from untreated mental illness, which often means acting out and suffering aggressive punishment for those actions.

## States with No Minimum Age for Adult Prosecution

Alaska ■ Delaware ■ Florida ■ Hawaii  
Idaho ■ Maine ■ Maryland ■ Michigan  
Nebraska ■ Pennsylvania ■ Rhode Island  
South Carolina ■ Tennessee ■ West Virginia

It was not until 2005 that the Supreme Court banned the execution of juveniles. Before that ruling 365 children had been legally executed in the U.S., 22 in the two decades prior to the 2005 Supreme Court ruling. While international law prohibits sentencing children to death in prison, the United States stands alone in imposing sentences of life in prison without parole on children. Thousands of children, some as young as 13, have been given life-without-parole sentences. Seventy percent of those 14 or younger receiving such sentences are children of color. Most of these sentences were mandatory, without any consideration given to the child's age or life history. Some of those convicted were charged with crimes that did not involve homicide or even injury and many were tried for crimes where the primary perpetrators were adults or older teens. Juvenile life-without-parole sentences still continue, but recent changes include a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that life-without-parole sentences can no longer be imposed on juveniles convicted of non-homicide offenses and a 2012 Supreme Court ruling that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children convicted of homicide are unconstitutional.

*Excerpted and adapted by permission from "All Children are Children: Challenging Abusive Punishment of Juveniles" from The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). EJI is a private, nonprofit human rights organization that helps the poor, the incarcerated, the condemned, and children. EJI provides legal assistance to juveniles with life-without-parole sentences and challenges the placement of youth in adult facilities and the prosecution of very young children as adults. EJI's litigation campaign to challenge death-in-prison sentences imposed on children, launched in 2006, led to the Supreme Court rulings mentioned in this article. Learn more at [www.eji.org](http://www.eji.org).*

## Children and Child-Adult Relationships

**T**he language we use about children and child-adult relationships is often fairly narrow and tends to undermine our professed commitment to children. Sometimes in the church, for example, we talk more about teaching or disciplining children than about respecting them or learning from them. We speak of parents as “care-givers” or “providers” rather than as spiritual and moral mentors. We work to find Sunday school teachers and plan programs but fail to work with parents to nurture children in faith, forgetting that the family is the primary agent of grace. As 19th century pastor and scholar Horace Bushnell wisely stated in his classic work, “Christian Nurture,” “Religion never thoroughly penetrates life until it becomes domestic” (Charles Scribner, 1861). We talk about

### Children have intrinsic value and are worthy of dignity and respect from the very start.

“family values” and the importance of the nuclear family yet sometimes fail to emphasize the Christian understanding of the family as a “little church” that reaches out to those in need. In contrast, the Bible speaks about children, parents and child-adult relationships in broad and rich terms.

If we explore scriptural insights regarding children and child-adult relationships then all of us—parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, church leaders, and pastors—can strengthen our approach to faith formation and our commitment to children both inside and outside our families. Outlined below are four important and almost paradoxical perspectives on children that have profound implications for Christian formation and child advocacy. While not exhaustive, these perspectives can help combat simplistic and distorted views held in the

church and in the wider culture and can serve as a guide to strengthen the church’s commitment to children.

*First and most basically, children are among the vulnerable ones in society.* The Bible depicts many of the ways children suffer as victims of disease, war, and injustice (e.g. the slaughter of children commanded by Herod as recorded in Matthew 2:16). Stories abound of Jesus’ ministry to those at risk in the society and among those marginalized are children. For example, Matthew records the story of Jesus healing a child who was a Canaanite (Matthew 15:21-28), an historic enemy and ethnic group hated by the Jews. Children are among the orphans, “neighbors” and strangers in need of compassion and justice, therefore parents and other adults are to protect them and provide their basic needs (Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:17-18 and 14:28-29). When parents are unable to take up this task, others in the community are to step in (Deuteronomy 24:17-21, James 1:27). All children are our neighbors, and caring for them is part of fulfilling the divine directive to seek justice and love others, as the prophet Isaiah put it, “to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (1:17).

*Second, children are gifts of God and made in the image of God.* Many passages in the Bible speak of children as gifts of God. Leah spoke of her son as a dowry, or wedding gift, from God (Genesis 30:20). Those who received these precious gifts were said to be “remembered” (or blessed) by God (e.g. Genesis 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:11, 19). Children are also sources of joy. Sarah rejoiced at the birth Isaac (Genesis 21:6-7). Jesus likened the joy his disciples would feel when his Holy Spirit came to the joy a woman feels holding her newborn (John 16:16-21). Genesis 1:27 tells us that God made humankind, male and female, in God’s image. It follows, then, that children, like adults, possess the fullness of humanity and are made in the image of God, who numbers even the hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:30) and forms our “inward parts” (Psalms 139:13). Children have intrinsic value and are worthy of dignity and respect from the very start. As gifts of God and full human beings created in God’s image, children are to be celebrated and cared for by adults.

*Third, children are developing beings and moral agents.* Several biblical passages remind us that children need caring adults to intentionally cultivate their growing moral capacities and responsibilities. Proverbs calls us to “train children in the right way” (22:6) and Ephesians admonishes us to bring them up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4). Adults are commanded to tell children about God’s faithfulness (Isaiah 38:19) and teach them about “the glorious deeds of the LORD” (Psalms 78:4b); to recite God’s commands and talk about them with their children “when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). Parents and others need to assume responsibility to provide models, guidance and intentional teaching to help children develop intellectu-

ally, morally, emotionally and spiritually. The reformer Martin Luther called parents to be “apostles, bishops, and priests to their children,” nurturing the faith of children and helping them develop their gifts to serve others (“Luther’s Works,” Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986).

*Fourth, children are models of faith for adults, sources of revelation and representatives of Jesus.* Many Gospel passages depict children in striking and even radical ways, turning upside down the common belief in Jesus’ time (and our own) that the primary role of children is to learn from and obey adults. Jesus is seen not only healing and embracing children but also rebuking adults who would turn them away: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14). Jesus lifts children up as models of faith and paradigms for entering the reign of God. “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” and charging “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” He identifies with children and equates welcoming a little child in his name to welcoming him and the one who sent him (Matthew 18:2-5). Nurturing children in faith means honoring their insights as well as their questions and learning from them.

Held in appropriate balance and tension, these four significant perspectives can enrich our understanding of children and child-adult relationships while strengthening our commitment to children. Our attitudes toward and treatment of children would be enhanced by remembering children’s full humanity as well as their need for guidance; their spiritual wisdom as well as developing moral capacities; their strengths and gifts as well as their vulnerabilities and needs. Keeping these biblical insights in mind, we would work more diligently and in a variety of ways to nurture the faith of children, while at the same time being open to the ways that children nourish our spiritual formation. Furthermore, we would acknowledge that all children, while vulnerable, are also made in the image of God, and we would not tolerate their harsh treatment or any form of injustice against them. Instead we would seek justice for children, becoming tireless and creative advocates for them in this country and around the world.

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## What Makes a Christian Family Christian?

*Family is the first place a child forms and experiences relationships. It is a child's first experience of community . . . and [where a child] develops her first view and understanding of the world. . . . I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that family is the most important arena for a child's spiritual development and soul care. (Ivy Beckwith, "Postmodern Children's Ministry")*

**O**f the multitude of people who have told me that they were raised in Christian families, a significant number have also shared tales of rigid, demanding, punishing and even brutal family lives, leading me to wonder, "What makes a family Christian?" Most people would identify being active in church, living according to certain rules, studying the Bible and teaching children about Jesus as markers of a Christian family. While such practices are likely part of Christian family life, they are not sufficient to make a family Christian. To be truly Christian, a family must be characterized by two simple qualities: grace and special consideration for the needs of children.

The most fundamental tenet of the Christian faith is God's grace. As Christians, we literally stake our lives on the truth expressed in Ephesians 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.* For any unit—a couple, a family, a church or other organization—to claim the moniker "Christian," its primary quality must be this most fundamental aspect of the faith. It is therefore incumbent upon Christians to dedicate the preponderance of their child-related efforts to creating households characterized by patience, kindness, calmness, respect, long-suffering, honesty, hope and joy (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Grace creates a safe place where children can freely explore what it means to be alive, knowing that missteps will be met with gentle boundaries, acceptance and a chance to try again. Grace also allows parents to relax,

to accept their children as children and themselves as imperfect beings who are willing to ask God—and their children—for forgiveness when necessary.

Jesus' self-identification with "the least" in Matthew 25:45 warrants consideration when we talk about children. The word translated as "least" generally indicates smallest in size, last in rank, lowest in stature and most limited in power. We must, therefore, include children among those whom Jesus deemed *entitled* to special consideration by his followers. Children are little. Their bodies and minds are busy with the enormous task of growing up. Children are unable to provide for themselves or to navigate the adult world so they easily feel insecure. Insecurity is compounded when the adults children depend on are unable or unwilling to act as the responsible parties in their lives. When the basics of life are lack-



ing, when structure is not provided or when unrealistic expectations are imposed, the task of growing strong in mind, body and spirit is put at risk. While we may find comforting the platitude that children are resilient, we



cannot deny that the first years of life last forever. The experiences of childhood are literally imprinted on developing minds and bodies and are therefore always present. It is crucial that early experiences be grace-filled if we want children to develop healthy, authentic, grace-filled relationships with Christ that extend throughout adulthood.

I recently watched a father carry his child out of a grocery store. “I want to stay,” the child cried and I thought, “Sweetie, what you want doesn’t matter.” Within seconds of banishing that troubling thought from my mind, I heard the father say, “What you want doesn’t matter.” A child’s first image of God is formed by his/her relationships with primary caregivers. How can children grow up believing they matter to a loving God when the message of so many child-rearing practices is “You don’t matter?”

The common practice of equating children’s obedience to adults with obedience to God is tantamount to blasphemy. It controverts a fundamental truth of Christian faith—that parents and children stand side by side under the authority of God. It also overlooks the reality that authentic faith simply cannot be coerced. Those who practice parenting as control and punishment impart a foundational image in a child’s soul (*psyche* in Greek) of a demanding, punishing God. Such an image is in direct contradiction to the loving God-with-us who was revealed in Jesus. Childhood God-images are operative throughout adulthood, even when they are replaced intellectually. Consider for example, how many of us, while professing belief in a loving, forgiving God, wonder when hard times come, “What did I do wrong? Why is God punishing me?”

When Jesus admonished his followers to let the children come to him (Matthew 19:14), what he did *not* say is as significant as is what he did say. He didn’t say “*Make* the children come to me;” or “Watch these children carefully lest they fail to enter the kingdom.” He said, “Of such *is* the kingdom of God”; “do not hinder them.” Grace provides a sense of security, and in that security children are most likely to find their way to a freely chosen relationship with the One who sees them as already a part of the kingdom. The call of Jesus is not to dominate children but to take heed of our own behavior lest we hinder their faith. The most powerful vehicle for Christian formation is grace-filled community. The most formative force in the life of a child is family. It is worth all our efforts, therefore, to create, nurture and support families as grace-filled communities.

*The Rev. Cassandra Carkuff Williams, Ed.D., serves American Baptist Home Mission Societies as national coordinator, Discipleship Resource Development. She is author of “Learning the Way: Reclaiming Wisdom from the Early Christian Communities” (Alban Institute, 2009).*

## To a Child

The greatest poem ever known  
Is one all poets have outgrown:  
The poetry, innate, untold,  
Of being only four years old.

Still young enough to be a part  
Of Nature’s great impulsive heart,  
Born comrade of bird, beast, and tree  
And unselfconscious as the bee—

And yet with lovely reason skilled  
Each day new paradise to build;  
Elate explorer of each sense,  
Without dismay, without pretense!

In your unstained transparent eyes  
There is no conscience, no surprise:  
Life’s queer conundrums you accept,  
Your strange divinity still kept.

Being, that now absorbs you, all  
Harmonious, unit, integral,  
Will shred into perplexing bits,—  
Oh, contradictions of the wits!

And Life, that sets all things in rhyme,  
May make you poet, too, in time—  
But there were days, O tender elf,  
When you were Poetry itself!

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY  
(1890–1957)

## Faithful Discipline? There Has to Be a Better Way

**T**emper, temper!” These unforgettable words came out of the mouth of our then five-year-old son, John. John knew that mom had reached her limit and was about to hit him. I choose to use the word “hit” rather than “spank,” because that is what spanking is. John’s five-year-old wisdom stung. More importantly, it caused me to reflect. I knew there had to be a better way. As a child psychologist then, and a Christian minister now, I am convinced the better way can be found by grounding our parenting in faith.

You may have heard that the Bible condones physical punishment. The oft quoted “Spare the rod and spoil the child” does not appear in the Bible nor does it refer to punishing children. It comes from the 18th century poem *Hudibras* and refers to squelching romantic feelings. While Proverbs occasionally uses “the rod,” the emphasis is on discipline, not hitting (13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15). Proverbs talks about “discipline” far

more often than it does the “rod” (sixteen times vs. four, according to an NIV English word search). Unfortunately we often equate discipline with punishment when the word actually comes from the Latin *disciplina*, which means instruction, teaching, learning or knowledge.

Significant research has demonstrated not only that corporal punishment is ineffective for lasting behavioral change but that it contributes to negative behavioral outcomes, and even limited use has negative long-term consequences (see, for example, Elizabeth Gershoff, “Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviors and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 2002, Vol. 128). Hitting engenders anger and resentment and teaches children that physical violence wins out in the end, and most important for Christians, it is not faithful.

We honor the Bible when we remember it isn’t a simple answer book or a “how to” guide. Scripture gives us guidance, but in many situations it does not answer the question “How?” The Bible does not specifically address all of the issues parents have to deal with today, such as: “How much screen time should our children have?” or “How can we help our children resist peer pressure?” While there are biblical commands that are timeless: “Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal.” (Exodus 20:13-15), more often there are broad values and direction revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. The grand sweep of Scripture leans toward love, what some have called the “rule of love”—“What is the greatest commandment? Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39); “Love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you” (Luke 6:27). Surely if we are to love our enemies then we must love our children, even if



at times our little ones may *feel* like our enemies! And love precludes using violence—hitting, shaking, yelling, shame or fear—to control behavior.

Choosing to not use aggression in our parenting, doesn't mean we are choosing not to discipline. On the contrary, effective, positive discipline is a crucial way in which we honor God and love our children. For Christians, Christ's "rule of love" must guide our discipline. Faithful love of children requires both nurture and boundary setting. Faithful love includes both grace (forgiveness and letting go) and justice (consequences).

Since the Bible doesn't answer the "how to" questions, we look to wise parents and to the guidance of the social sciences. Time and again, experience and research have demonstrated that positive discipline, rules, limits and natural consequences provide a framework for positive behavioral outcomes for children. Though it is beyond the scope of this article to address "how to" in detail, I offer some broad suggestions.

It is crucial to establish a loving relationship, clear communication and genuine trust with children, starting from the very beginning. Children learn what they live. When parents demonstrate respect, clarity, realistic expectations and consistency, children will want to do what is asked of them. Developmental psychology has a wealth of information to help parents know what is appropriate to expect of children at various ages and stages. Understanding child development can also help us respond appropriately to normal and healthy developmental behaviors such as "no-saying," temper tantrums and growing need of young children to assert their independence.

Much negative behavior can be prevented when parents establish routine habits (e.g. regular bedtimes), boundaries (no TV on school nights) and predictable responses ("when you do this, you will not be able to do that"). Such consistency and structure help children feel safe and know what to expect. Even something simple such as arranging the home's physical environment to minimize the possibility of misbehavior is important.

Positive discipline is an alternative to punishment (hitting, yelling, threatening, shaming). Positive discipline is a broad umbrella covering many different parental behaviors. Examples include: removing the child from an offensive interaction; time-out; verbal feedback couched in neutral, non-anxious language; removal of privileges; allowing natural consequences to occur; providing incentives and small, immediate rewards for positive behavior; and rewarding positive behaviors with praise and affection. Parental consistency in following through is key to the effectiveness of any of these methods.

The importance of parental behavior cannot be overstated. Parents who strive to model self-discipline, positive behaviors, and the "fruits of the Spirit" in their own lives utilize the most important and effective tool for

raising children. And we must not forget the responsibility to nurture faith habits such as prayer, forgiveness, family worship, charitable works and compassion to reinforce our commitment to Christ and to pass that on to our children. All of us, children included, are created in the image of God. When we think of children in this way, it seems impossible to consider hitting them. We are gifted with so many other ways to faithfully shape children's lives so that they will grow into their God-given potential and become the intelligent, active and compassionate beings they were created to be.

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#### To learn more about positive discipline see:

- "Discipline without Distress," (Judy Arnall, 2007)
- "Positive Discipline for Preschoolers," (J. Nelsen, C. Erwin, R. Duffy, 2007).

#### For information on child development, visit [www.abhms.org](http://www.abhms.org)>discipleship and Christian Education>resources to download:

- Age-appropriate Discipleship Formation
- Lifespan Development Chart



## Child Trafficking Awareness and Advocacy



**A** minimum of 100,000 minors who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of the U.S. are currently trafficked for commercial sex. As many as 325,000 more are at risk. The average age at which youth are lured into exploitation is thirteen, although victims as young as five have been identified. The statistic most often cited by police and child advocates is that within 48 hours, one in three run-aways will be approached by someone in the sex trade. According to *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*, children exploited through prostitution report they are typically given a daily quota by their traffickers.

A December 2012 report on WSAW television told the story of Sarah, a twenty-nine-year-old human trafficking survivor from Madison. "It's all over and it's everywhere and it needs to stop," she said. At 11 Sarah was molested. At 15 her aunt gave her to a man for sex in exchange for crack cocaine. At 19 Sarah had no job, no home and four children to care for. She paid the bills the only way she knew how explaining, "I lived on the streets; I slept on park benches. There was a guy who owned a gas station who liked me. In order for him to get me a hotel room, I had to have sex."

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) takes an active role in preventing child trafficking through its youth programs. "Immerse," the 2012 National Gathering of American Baptist Youth held in Washington, D.C., featured hands-on mission opportunities, daily small groups, creative and worship experiences, recreation and the opportunity to connect 1,000 other youth from across the country. Participants left the conference with a mandate to become involved with their communities and to share that passion with their families. The Justice for Children Initiative, which includes the Penny Project, seeks to raise awareness of child poverty throughout the United States and Puerto Rico and provides support for ministries responding to the needs of children who are potential targets of trafficking.

ABHMS also works in partnership with other faith-based anti-trafficking organizations through the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Human

trafficking at major sporting events is common as low-cost labor is required for many of the food and entertainment venues. Taking advantage of this need, trafficking labor suppliers keep the wages for themselves and give subsistence food and shelter to the workers (actually slave laborers) they provide. Similarly, increased hotel occupancy means greater opportunity for marketing children for sex.

In 2012 ICCR and a coalition of 36 U.S. and U.K. faith-based socially responsible investors, which included the ABHMS Common Investment Fund, launched "Celebration without Exploitation." Building on lessons learned during anti-trafficking campaigns at the 2010 World Cup and Super Bowls XLIV and XLV, this campaign sought to reduce the risks of human trafficking at the London Olympics by sending letters to area hotels, sponsors and suppliers, encouraging them to take steps to ensure that the full scope of their business operations were trafficking- and slavery-free.

*David L. Moore Jr. CFA, Director Of Investments with American Baptist Home Mission Societies, serves on the ICCR Banking Group. For information on Justice for Children, the Penny Project, or our work with ICCR, visit [www.abhms.org/justice\\_ministries](http://www.abhms.org/justice_ministries).*

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## Jesus *In* the Children

**W**e care about children. Our hearts are moved when we see children suffering and hear about children in need. Yet while we live in the richest nation on earth, many of our children live in poverty. While there have been incredible advances in medical science, there are children who lack basic healthcare. Our faith gives us a chance to move beyond sentimentality to take seriously how our relationship with God motivates and guides us to make a difference in children's lives.

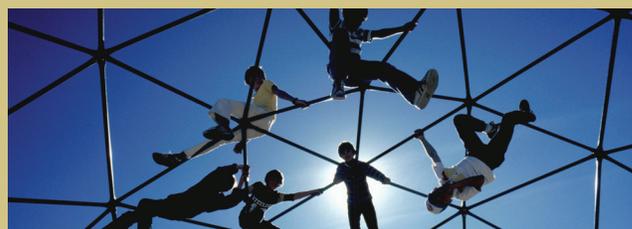
Our faith has always included a summons to ethical living. Throughout the Old Testament, the call to live justly and fairly rings out—with a focus on the vulnerable and powerless. The Jewish people were to act with justice; to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt and to be compelled by that memory to acts of compassion. Again and again comes the command to remember the poor, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 10:12-18; 24:17-18; 26:12-13; Exodus 22:22). The prophets were passionate when they spoke against those who were unjust to the vulnerable—immigrants, children without a father and women trying survive on their own (Zechariah 7:10; Jeremiah 7:6)—those with no Jewish man to speak for them, and therefore no standing in the community.

As was his practice, Jesus took the Jewish law and expanded it. To Jesus, immigrants, women and children weren't just people who needed charity, but full human beings of worth and value, just like Jewish men. Jesus' disciples were sure he was far too busy with important work to take time for children (a common adult perspective). But they were wrong! Not only did Jesus make time for children, he held them up as examples. He told the adults they needed to become as children again to enter the kingdom. And he responded to the disciples' argument about greatness by taking a little child in his lap and saying, "Whoever would be first of all, must be last of all and servant of all; Whoever welcomes one these little children in my name welcomes me . . . and whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me" (Matthew 18:2-6). When we receive children, when we welcome children, when we are with children, we connect to Jesus

and thereby with God. This is not to glorify or idealize children. Anyone who has spent any time with children knows that they can be sweet and innocent, and they can also be angry, strong-willed and downright defiant, but something about children has the capacity to open us up to Jesus.

As followers of Jesus we are called to care about children, to advocate for children, to welcome children. We are also called to look for Jesus not among the rich or powerful, but among the poor, the powerless, the vulnerable and to find Jesus *in* children. Welcoming children, we come closer to Jesus and closer to God. Look for Jesus . . . in the face of a child.

*The Rev. Deborah Bennett Reynolds serves as associate pastor, Lake Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester, New York. She is the 2013 recipient of the Hoiland Award for excellence in Christian education, awarded biennially by ABHMS. This article is excerpted from a sermon she presented for Children's Sabbath 2012.*



The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Celebration is traditionally held the third weekend of October. Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, it is a way for faith communities to celebrate children as sacred gifts of the Divine and to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect and advocate for all children. For information and resources, go to [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).

## From Shelter to Stability A Model for Homeless Ministry

**“L**et the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” These words of Jesus recorded in Luke 18:16 speak about his love and concern for children. From the very day children are born there is hope and joy, not only for their birth, but for their life. Parents, grandparents, friends and relatives are all filled with excitement because of the hope, dreams, opportunities, potential and possibilities that a newborn child represents.

In the early years of children’s lives, parents and loved ones watch for talents, gifts or natural abilities that may lead them to be the next president of the United States, or a surgeon, teacher, minister, star athlete, or award winning actor or singer. Yes, there is a plethora of hope and excitement surrounding the birth and early years of a child who is born into the world.

However, for some children, the hope diminishes fast and the joy is hard to find. Concern is not about the child’s talents or giftedness. Discussion is not about his

or her future, but his or her immediate present. What about the child who is just hoping to get something to eat or drink today, tomorrow or just this week? What about the children who are homeless and wondering where they will sleep at night? What happens to them?

There are some who want to debate and converse about how and why families end up homeless. They want to discuss the bad decisions, immoral behavior or sins of the parents. Such conversations can be fruitful and provide some insights into homelessness, but the immediate question is, “What about the children who are homeless?”

Homeward ([homewardva.org](http://homewardva.org)), an organization that coordinates homeless services, provides the following statistics about homelessness in the metropolitan Richmond, Virginia area. As of January 2013, 114 children were homeless. Some of the adults who care for them have spent time in jail or prison (56%); some have endured domestic violence (47%); some are unemployed (78%); some have had a problem with drugs (32%) or



alcohol (18%) at some point in their lives; some have a long term disability (20%); and some have experienced mental health issues (38%). These statistics suggest that the adults who are responsible for taking care of these children are also in need of help to manage their personal issues in addition to the stress of finding a place to stay on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. One can only imagine the impact of their parents' struggles on the children.

Research published in "The Unique and Combined Effects of Homelessness and School Mobility on the Educational Outcomes" (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chin-Chih, Rouse, & Culhane Educational Research, 41, 2012) reported that "homelessness had a unique association with problems in classroom engagement, school mobility was uniquely related to both academic achievement and problems in classroom engagement, and experiencing both homelessness and school mobility was the most detrimental for both forms of educational well-being"; that "Children with a family homeless experience demonstrated substantially more problems in both task and social engagement in school." The support systems that are needed to provide children with a stable environment are interrupted when children experience homelessness, and they often have problems completing school tasks and getting along with others. Children who experience instability in both their home and school settings are more likely to have the poorest educational outcomes. The instability of homelessness has a destructive effect on children's academics and other aspects of their lives. Children who are unable to navigate their educational journeys and interact with others in healthy ways have diminished chances of reaching their God-given potential and possibilities. How can a child who is homeless, has academic concerns and a difficult time socially even think about the future when his or her present seems so bleak?

In the greater Richmond area, one organization stands out as an answer to the plight of homelessness for families with children. CARITAS represents a partnership among congregations, volunteers, businesses and others to provide food, shelter, home furnishings, and other services for persons who are homeless and in need. CARITAS, which is the only organization in central Virginia that accepts families with more than three children or families with adolescent males, is unique in that its mission is not just to provide a place for people to stay, but to assist people in moving towards housing independence.

The unique philosophy of CARITAS, which manifests in a ministry that allows children to remain with their loved ones and provides a sense of solidity and hope, can serve as a model for other programs that seek to make a difference in the lives of children. The mission statement—"CARITAS mobilizes Greater Rich-

mond through its congregations to protect individuals and families in crisis and empowers those who strive for housing independence"—and their theme—"From shelter to stability"—characterize CARITAS's goal of providing services as a means of moving people from homelessness to a place of stability where they can live productive lives. This is the stability that children need to successfully navigate their academic journeys and to develop healthy social relationships. The kind of stability that CARITAS makes available for families, and specifically for children, enables them to build a strong

## How can a child who is homeless, has academic concerns and a difficult time socially even think about the future when his or her present seems so bleak?

foundation that allows them to dream of a bright (not a bleak) future, a future that represents a manifestation of their God-given possibilities and potential. The volunteers and staff of CARITAS are enthusiastic about the ministry they provide and excited about the clients they serve. As Edward Judkins, the Director of Shelter Operations for CARITAS describes the ministry, "CARITAS keeps families intact, which has a positive effect in building a strong family structure, and it provides more hope by keeping the family together. CARITAS meets people where they are, and we build our program around the family unit. Families that are working together and moving together are successful together." Penny Dortch, the Daysite Coordinator for CARITAS, spends a lot of time with the children because she represents strength and stability for them. As a former client of CARITAS, she has a particular sensitivity to the needs of families with children, who affectionately call her "Ms. Penny."

The physical Jesus who walked on this earth a few thousand years ago is no longer present physically. However, Jesus' hands and heart can be found in individuals and organizations that welcome children and provide them with the basic necessities of life, and thereby a future in which their hopes, dreams, potential and possibilities can become a reality.

*The Rev. Nathaniel West, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of Christian Education at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. To learn more about CARITAS, visit [www.caritasva.org](http://www.caritasva.org).*

# RESOURCES

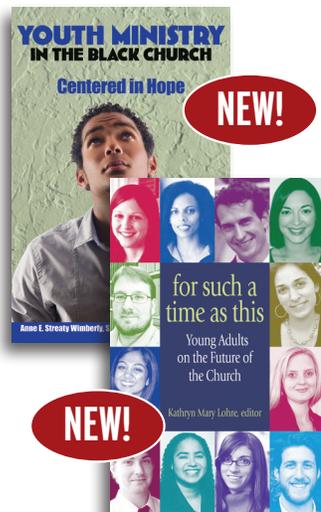
- The American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life can be found at [www.abc-usa.org> resources> official documents> policy-statements-and-resolutions](http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/official-documents/policy-statements-and-resolutions). For articles and resources related to Christian education with children, visit [www.abhms.org> ministries> discipleship and Christian education> resources](http://www.abhms.org/ministries/discipleship-and-christian-education/resources).
- For children's ministry resources, visit [www.abhms.org> ministries> children, youth and young adults](http://www.abhms.org/ministries/children,youth-and-young-adults).
- For resources in support of the Children in Poverty Initiative, visit [www.abhms.org> ministries> children in poverty](http://www.abhms.org/ministries/children-in-poverty).
- For free downloadable workshops related to children's ministries and Christian education, visit [www.abhms.org> workshops for church life and leadership](http://www.abhms.org/workshops-for-church-life-and-leadership).
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- "Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families: Living the Faith in Daily Life," by Diana R. Garland (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003)

## Books

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- "Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood," by David H. Jensen (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005)
- "Honoring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective," by Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2004)
- "Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities," edited by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh (Judson Press, 2007).
- "The Nonviolent Christian Parent: Raising Children with Love, Limits and Wisdom" or "Padres Cristianos y no violentos: Decisiones Acerca la Crianza Cristiano" by Teresa Whitehurst, Debbie Haskins, and Al Crowell (Download at [www.nospank.net/cnpindex.htm](http://www.nospank.net/cnpindex.htm) or email [alcrowell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:alcrowell@sbcglobal.net).)
- Child Theology Movement: [www.childtheology.org](http://www.childtheology.org)
- Children's Defense Fund: [www.cdf.org](http://www.cdf.org)
- Equal Justice Initiative: [www.eji.org](http://www.eji.org)
- Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility: [www.iccr.org>"issues">human trafficking](http://www.iccr.org/issues/human-trafficking)
- National Center for Children in Poverty: [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)
- Parents and Teachers against Violence in Education, Inc.: [www.nospank.net](http://www.nospank.net)

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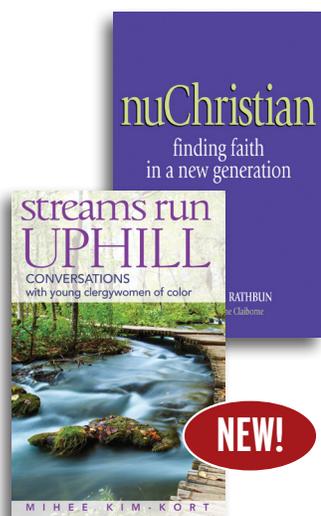
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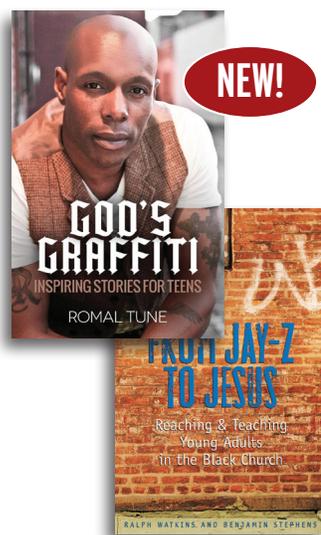
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