

Religious Education  
of Adults  
VF

Education of  
Adults

# PARENT EDUCATION

# IN EVERY CHURCH

By

Oscar E. Feucht



Information Bulletin on  
**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**  
No. 512

Board of Parish Education  
**THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD**  
3558 S. Jefferson Avenue  
St. Louis, Missouri 63118

Revised 1968

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
LIBRARY  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

# Parent Education in Every Church

## Parents Want and Need Help

The many books, newspaper columns, and magazine articles dealing with the role of parents in education indicate the widespread concern of parents. Not only are parents interested, but all parents have problems and questions on child training at every stage of the child's development.

There are three strategic moments when parents are most receptive and want help: (1) at the birth of the child, (2) when the child goes to school, and (3) when the child becomes an adolescent.

Christians are charged with the task of building one another up in the Christian faith. The local congregation can do this successfully, however, only as parents, school, and church have a united approach and consistently go at their task. This means more than setting up a teaching agency with trained educators. It means educating the fathers and mothers to perform their influential teaching task in the home. One of the most strategic steps a congregation can take is to provide guidance for parents.

## The Aims of Christian Parent Education

- To equip parents for the Christian nurture of their children.

In essence — to help both parents and children to understand what it means to live under the Gospel.

- To help them appreciate their children's individuality and understand their basic needs.
- To provide skills for helping the child at every stage of his growth.
- To develop a working partnership between home, school, and church.

## Every Church Can Have Parent Education

Parents in many cases are deeply committed and faithfully carry through their tasks. In other cases (as church records show) children baptized never come to "confirmation" and are lost to Christ and the church. Most parents need much help in fulfilling their privileges. The church can give them a high sense of the privilege of parenthood and equip them to help the child at every stage of his development to grow up — as Jesus grew —

in wisdom and stature,  
in favor with God,  
in favor with man. — Luke 2:52

*Parents* alone can do the most basic teaching a child must have — relating all life to God by the values, goals, aims they themselves live for; using the varied situations of each day to guide, correct, and train the child in the way he should go; providing both informal and formal instruction in Christian doctrine by their conversation and as they help the child experience God's Law, God's Gospel, and the Christian way of life.

Every church must find the ways in which it can serve parents best and equip

them for their task. Below some of these are outlined. Some will originate with the baptism. Other suggestions will indicate how you can involve the home in relation to Christian education courses and agencies. Still others will show how you can give more specific help in parent education.

## **Specific Services to Parents**

### **1. Parent Guidance Related to Baptism**

In the baptism of the child the church has a wonderful opportunity to provide an understanding not only of this sacrament but also of its meaning in the life of the child and the responsibilities on the part of parents and the church. For many families baptism is only an ancient ceremony, an occasion for "blessing a child," a time to "have the relatives for dinner." For others it is an "initiatory act" which loses most of its meaning for later life but provides a margin of "spiritual safety" if the child should die.

Baptism is much more than any of these things. In it God establishes a covenant with the child, makes him His very own, bestows all the fruits of Christ's suffering and death, spiritual life and eternal salvation (Gal. 3:23-29; John 3:3-5). Baptism makes us God's own children. It makes us members of Christ's body, the church, makes us kings and priests to carry out the mission Christ gives to all who are His disciples.

This covenant is carried out on the human side by the Christian family, particularly the father and mother (and sponsors), and by the Christian congregation. "Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" follows the baptismal command. This responsibility for spiritual nurture rests both on father and mother and on the Christian congregation. Baptism is to be lived—in daily repentance and daily renewal under the Gospel (Rom. 6:1-11). Baptism is our spiritual resurrection. This can take place only as the Gospel is taught and lived daily in the home.

### **INTERPRETING BAPTISM**

Prebaptismal instruction and counseling of parents is necessary in every case. It must not be assumed that parents understand the meaning and implication of the baptismal covenant. The preparation of parents cannot be done as hastily as one arranges for a baptism over the telephone. It calls for personal pastoral counseling.

#### *Involve Parents in the Baptismal Service*

This is the way one pastor does this in the baptismal service:

The pastor addresses the parents: "Since this child is given to you by God to be given back to God by you, will you earnestly assume the task of bringing him (her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4)?" Parents answer: "We do with the help of God."

The pastor then addresses the sponsors: "Will you faithfully assist the parents with your prayers, example, and encouragement in fulfilling their task and help establish in the child a lifelong fellowship with God through faith in Christ the Savior?" They answer: "We will by the grace of God."

At this point one of the elders of the church speaks for the congregation: "We as a fellowship of believers gladly take this child into our midst and will assist this family in the Christian training of this child for a life of faith, love, and service."

At the conclusion the sponsors transfer the child into the arms of the mother or father. The pastor invites the parents to step before the altar for the postbaptism prayer. He concludes the service by saying, "The child is the gift of God to the parent, and the child must be the gift of the parent to God."

The meaning of this service should be explained in the prebaptismal visit of the pastor.

The covenant made by God at the baptism will not be broken by God. It can be and often is broken by man—as was the case with ancient Israel.

The covenant is kept as parents and congregation fulfill their privileges as Christian teachers and keepers of the child; as they lead the child through teaching and training into the Christian way and equip him for Christian service in every context of life.

## 2. Involve the Family in Christian Nurture

To involve parents in the educational task of the church, it is important that the church does not assume full responsibility for Christian education but presents it as a shared responsibility, in fact, a responsibility in which the church supplements and supports the work of father and mother. It is true that the modern home frequently fails miserably at this point, and yet it is also true that life ways, basic values, fundamental religious concepts are taught and caught in every home. They can be negative or positive. So there is no escape from the parents' responsibility in religious education and especially in Christian training and discipline. Once this fact is made clear to parents, they will understand that *by becoming parents they already involve themselves in the nurture of their children.*

But how involve modern parents: (1) by giving them specific home assignments as related to the church's teaching program; (2) by requesting parents to carry out a daily devotional program (prayers at meals, daily family devotions suited to the needs of the child, including Bible reading); (3) inviting parents themselves to a parents' class or a Bible class so that parent and child are both enrolled in the Christian growth program.

In such a commitment the baptismal obligations are made specific.

## 3. The Nursery Department

Since the birth of a child finds the parents at a most teachable moment, it is important that immediately after baptism the church's educational program begins with the involvement of parents and a service to the child. The nursery letters which go out at 3-month intervals can be taken into the home by members of the nursery department of the Sunday school. In this connection visits can be had with the parents. Suitable tracts can be taken along as conversation pieces, also the booklet *Guiding the Young Child* from the Parent Guidance Series.

A warm relation to both father and mother needs to be cultivated in these first 2 years. When the child is enrolled in the nursery class for 3-year-olds, this is a

splendid opportunity to invite parents to bring the child, observe the finger play, songs, and storytelling technique used. Invite parents to bring children and to be observers.

Suggest types of devotions that can be meaningful. The child, for instance, can bring the Bible or light the candle or set up the family worship picture or center. The basics of Christian prayer are taught at this stage. Help parents to use the nursery roll pictures. Have conversation on how they are teaching prayer and Christian helpfulness.

#### 4. Home Visits by Teachers

Teachers of the Sunday school and the Christian elementary school can do more effective work with the child if they know the parents, the home situation, the degree of interest or lack of interest, and what they can or cannot expect of the child. Frequently the school or Sunday school tries to accomplish its work ignorant of what is actually happening in the home either to support or to neutralize its work. Good home visitation can get at the child's home problems. Most parents are eager to get practical suggestions.

Teachers will need to be conditioned for home visits. The pastor or department leader will be able to give practical assistance. Parents and teachers form a teaching team, and they can be a team only if the teachers know home circumstances and needs and feel closeness to both the parent and the child. Help the parents make the most of the preschool, school, and teen-age years of their children. Teachers may wish to equip themselves with special reading for this visitation work.

The first task is to relate to the home the Sunday school or Christian day school materials now being taught in the respective class or department. Thus the nursery roll teacher will want to introduce *Happy Times* and discuss the concepts being developed in the current quarter. The nursery-kindergarten materials have a built-in parents guide, usually a page per lesson. Help parents to use these as directed, and show how this can aid them as well as their children. Parents with children in the primary-junior departments have available to them a parents guide, an eight-page quarterly, which keeps parents conscious of their part in the Christian education task and supplies helpful suggestions for following through on Sunday's lessons at home. These must be ordered separately by the Sunday school.

The teacher in the Christian elementary school can focus on a number of subjects but should not overlook the spiritual training that such a school supplies and should indicate how parents can help with units in religion.

Those who are teaching in the weekday school, the vacation Bible school, or one of the confirmation courses will introduce their materials. The new catechism courses are especially challenging to parents.

It also means that these visits ought to be well planned. In your teachers meetings set up a series of topics that can be conversation areas. Make a list. It might look like this: (1) The Christian Family Standard, (2) Teaching Prayer, (3) Leading Your Child into the Bible, (4) Meaningful Family Devotions, (5) Parents and Children in Church and Sunday School, etc.

Home visiting needs to be organized. Fix responsibility. Will the Sunday school department secretary and the principal of the elementary school be in

charge? Will you develop a visiting team composed of the teacher and a class mother? What materials will be taken into the home? How arrange a definite period for the visit by telephone? How inform parents that visits are being made and their purpose? A little role-playing among the teachers will show how it can be done very warmly and meaningfully.

## 5. Parents' Classes and Courses

Special parents' classes can be scheduled several times a year under the auspices of the Sunday school or a parent-teacher league. They can be held on Sunday morning or on weekdays. Bible classes composed of parents will find it profitable to spend one quarter a year taking up the same lesson that is taught to the children, giving the adults a deeper understanding of the lesson and using the second half of the period to discuss ways and means of reteaching and living the lesson at home.

A St. Louis church that followed up written invitations to parents with personal telephone calls by class mothers was happily surprised by the large response.

*Guide to Growth* (Concordia Publishing House catalog, also available separately from Board of Parish Education) outlines materials for various courses for husbands and wives, couples and parents, as does also BPE Bulletin No. 510, *A Family Life Program for the Parish*.

## 6. Parent-Teacher Meetings

Every parent wants to know how his child is progressing. You can help parents by giving them an opportunity to learn what the church is doing to assist the home and how the home program can make Christian education more effective.

At a Baltimore church the teachers of the Sunday school invite the parents of each department four times a year. They discuss the lesson unit, its aim, the teaching methods used, and the help parents can give at home in "learn by doing" activities. You can discuss Bible readings, lesson preparation, and skills for helping boys and girls live under the Gospel as children of God.

At another church the Sunday school sets up four parent-teacher meetings a year. Here is their program for one year. September: Help Your Child Learn; November: How You Can Have Family Devotions; January: Your Child's Day (use of time); April: Christian Discipline.

In many churches a formal parent-teacher league is organized with 8 to 10 meetings a year. A carefully planned educational program helps to meet the needs of all parents. Speakers, films, panel discussions, and buzz groups are used to give variety to the presentations. The Parent Guidance Series of books supplies a rich source of challenging topics. The program includes education, service, fellowship.

Parent-teacher leagues can be sponsored by the Sunday school and the Lutheran elementary school. Children's classes can present projects in religion, missions, reading. Parents can be introduced to Christian sex education using the new six-volume series published by Concordia Publishing House. Teachers can be encouraged to use the colored filmstrips and records available with the series. A judge can speak on juvenile delinquency. Educators, guidance directors, leaders of the Family Service Society can be invited to speak.

The many stimulating programs available from the National Lutheran Parent-

Teacher League and the rich experience of program building which attendance at their annual convention provides can be most helpful to your parish in developing a really meaningful parent education program that meets the needs of parents of small children, school-age children, and of teen-agers.

## **7. Parent Conferences**

In the Christian day school by this term we mean the meetings in which the parents of a class are invited to a special session or in which the teacher individually meets fathers and mothers during such a parent conference week. Here the teacher gives some insights with regard to the child's participation and progress and gives suggestions to the parents. All parents are interested in the progress being made by their child. This conference should include the notable changes in the spiritual outlook of the child also in the home. Therefore it should be two-way conversation — parents reporting to teacher and teacher reporting to parents. This plan could be extended to confirmation class and to the Sunday school class.

### AREA PARENT CONFERENCES

In some sections circuit or area parent conferences have been held. Here the parents of an entire area are invited to come together and listen to qualified leaders. They break up into small discussion groups that may be dealing with a half-dozen different subjects like worship for children in the family, Christian sex education, when child training is Christian, understanding our teen-agers, teaching religion by the atmosphere of the home, and similar subjects. Such a general presentation with open discussion and breakdown into small workshops has proved to be most rewarding. These conferences attended by parents of an entire circuit can be very helpful in stimulating more meaningful parent education in the local church.

## **8. Reading Services: Church Library and Tract Rack**

The popularity of books on child care and training and of articles on parents' problems shows that most parents welcome practical help.

Keep your tract racks stocked. Include tracts serving parents and families. Build up a *Parents' Shelf* in your church library. Choose a librarian willing to learn how to introduce books, pamphlets, and tracts at parents' meetings, in meetings of couples, men, women, youth. Have books available and attractively displayed, Sundays and at weekday meetings.

Our church body has made available many excellent helps for parent education. Are you helping your parents discover and use them?

## **9. Other Opportunities**

Parent education should not be confined to groups or classes organized specifically for this purpose. Should your adult Bible classes be composed largely of men and women, of teen-agers? Why not one course from time to time that deals with this area? If it is composed of parents who have children in high school or elementary school, once again a subject related to homelife would be most significant.

Couples groups will get real help from a Bible study course like *Growing Together* or a discussion of Christian marriage in today's world. Men's groups might well discuss the father's role in the family. And women's groups could discuss such subjects as "The Woman and Her Parental Role in Changing Family Structures," or "The Home: Mission Station No. 1."

One parish has 10 women's circles that discuss five missionary topics and five parent-home topics each year.

### **Planning a Program of Parent Education**

*From the many kinds of parent education outlined briefly above it is apparent that every church can do much that is significant to help parents with their task.*

It is a mistake to think that parents are equipped for their tasks by nature, by mere observation, or by past experience, that they can be equipped with an occasional sermon, or that they are reading available literature.

"But how shall we begin?" you ask. One way is to call together several interested fathers and mothers, several teachers, a member of the board of education, and the pastor to explore the entire subject of more and better parent education. This group will need to approach the subject not so much from the standpoint of an organization as from the standpoint of service, to help parents meet the developmental tasks of their children with sound principles of Christian nurture.

Many congregations are forming a family life committee and asking these persons to assume responsibility for planning a program of parent education. Obviously the persons most vitally concerned about church-family relationships in your church should be included on such a committee. In a small church this might be a single individual, a couple, a concerned woman to whom the pastor could look for help in promoting family emphases and in keeping him posted on special needs. It could be the chairman or program director of the parent-teacher league. In a larger parish there might be a family life chairman or superintendent with no other major church responsibilities, assisted by a general committee and needed sub-committees.

Most congregations assign their responsibility for parent education to the committee on Christian education. However, the agenda of the average board of Christian education is already so crowded that family life and parent education are often overlooked except in advance of the May Family Week. It is imperative that parent education be specifically assigned and developed with enthusiasm and dedication.

Whichever method you choose for your congregation, the following questions need to be asked:

1. For which parents should a program of education be developed?
2. By what means will we help parents? Here a selection can be made of several services mentioned above.
3. What materials will be necessary, and how will they be supplied?
4. What methods will we use in parents classes and parent-teacher meetings?
5. What resource persons do we have among the parents? in the congregation? in the community?

Answering these questions, the committee will soon learn that it has more talent than it was aware of and that every congregation can do something significant in parent education.

The pastor, the board of education, or the board's subcommittee on family life education may take the initiative in calling such an exploratory meeting.

Parish leaders need to be committed to working with parents and families as part of their operating philosophy. See: "The Place of the Family in the Church's Educational Ministry," BPE.

### **How Can You Involve Parents in the Teaching Task?**

- by returning the duties as well as the rights to the home;
- by developing wholesome church-home-school relations;
- by enrolling whole families in the educational program instead of the children only;
- by asking parents to help each child with specific assignments to the parents;
- by personal conferences between parents and teachers;
- by a definite educational program designed especially to equip parents for their task;
- by asking each Christian father and mother to make a covenant to read the Scriptures with their children regularly;
- by using parents in program planning and the presentation of topics;
- by planning small group discussions in which parents can assist one another.

### **Motivation**

The pulpit program and the annual Christian Family Month observance can give Gospel motivation for all parent-education activities. Where a church works consistently for a year on such a ministry to parents, the Christian purpose of the homes will be lifted and the whole congregation spiritually benefited.

### **Bibliography**

Your planning committee will find many resources available. Here we shall list a few of them, beginning with some basic materials which place the nurture of children and parent education into proper perspective in the total ministry of the church.

*The Place of the Family in the Church's Educational Ministry* (BPE). \$ .15.

*The Church's Teaching Ministry*, Kenneth L. Cober, 1964, Valley Forge, Judson Press, 143 pages (paperback), \$1.50.

*Ministry to Families: A Handbook for Christian Congregations*, O. E. Feucht, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 94 pages, \$1.00.

*Helping Families Through the Church*, a 27-chapter text for training leaders, O. E. Feucht, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 344 pages, \$3.50.

*The Church Is Families*, Edward and Harriet Dowdy, Valley Forge, Judson Press, 158 pages (see ch. 5), \$2.00.

Bulletin 510: *A Family Life Program for the Parish* (BPE). Single copy free.  
Bulletin 513: *A Resource List for Your Family Life Program*—a comprehensive bibliography of books, tracts, study guides and pamphlets (BPE). Free.

*Sunday School Materials for Parents*

*Happy Times*, Monthly Magazine for Preprimaries, \$ .34 per quarter.  
Nursery and Kindergarten Materials, one page for parents in each lesson.  
Primary-Junior Materials, 8-page *Parents Guide* in each quarter, 5 cents per quarter.

*National Lutheran Parent-Teacher League Materials*

[Procure directly from their office at 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118]  
"In-the-family series," 10 individual programs for use with parents or family groups, \$2.50.  
Parent Education Materials (\$3.50), contains eight pieces of educational materials for family discussion groups.  
Annual Packet, a service to member groups, contains 10 booklets of planned program materials and 10 pamphlets of organizational materials. (Membership, \$20.00 or more)