

For the

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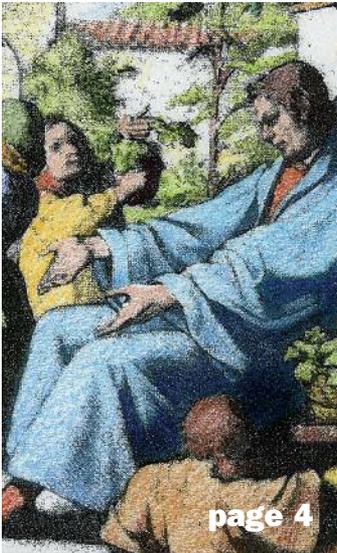
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FEATURES

4 The Family: A Place of Refuge

By Dr. Gene Edward Veith, Director of the Cranach Institute, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The home, at its best, is a refuge, a place where both children and adults can find a haven from the world, with all of its conflicts and politics, a place of love and acceptance and security, in marked contrast to the dog-eat-dog atmosphere that has become common from the workplace to the pecking orders of the school social scene.

7 The Family: A Place of Healing

By Dr. Beverly K. Yahnke, Executive Director of Christian Counseling Services, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

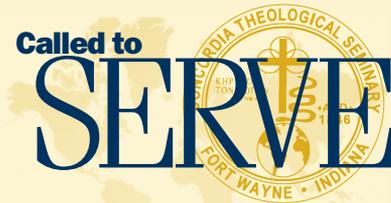
So what has become of the faithful family our Lord intended for His children to inhabit? Has the healing family, a place of teaching, comfort, and refuge become nothing more than an enigma for postmodern minds? Thanks be to God, the furor and froth of the culture may surround Christian families, but God's children are alive, well, rooted in Christ, and serving powerfully in their vocations.

10 The Family: A Place for Catechism

By the Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II, Dean of Pastoral Education and Placement, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Clearly Luther meant that this little book he was composing would have an honored and useful place in the Christian family. It was intended to be devotional, meaty but digestible, expressed in language that wasn't just for trained theologians but for fathers, mothers, and kids.

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The Family:

A Place for Catechism

By the Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II

Five years ago when I received a call to teach at the seminary, after 15 years serving congregations, I knew there would be many things I'd miss from the parish. One, though, clearly topped my list: I knew I'd especially miss having the chance to teach my own children in confirmation class. Rachel, our oldest child, was going into fifth grade, and I'd so much looked forward to teaching her—and then Daniel and Gabriel next—Luther's Small Catechism.

Fortunately, just understanding how Luther intended the catechism brought comfort. The catechism, we recall, is a summary of the chief Christian doctrines, "As the Head of the Family Should Teach Them in a Simple Way to His Household." I wasn't actually going

to be my children's pastor anymore, but I could—and should!—still be their primary catechism teacher.

Clearly Luther meant that this little book he was composing would have an honored and useful place in the Christian family. It was intended to be devotional,



meaty but digestible, expressed in language that wasn't just for trained theologians but for fathers, mothers, and kids.

That becomes even more apparent in a lesser-known variant of that well-known heading Luther attached to his work. Most of us have heard the translation of the German quoted above. By contrast, the *Latin* heading to the catechism translates, "How, in very plain form, schoolmasters should teach them to their pupils."¹ Consider that: The catechism is fully worthy to be taught by "the professionals" in the scholarly language, yet when rendered in the language of the people, it's first of all for the home. The catechism is, in fact, ideally suited to family devotional use in the home.

Instruction in the Word of God is, after all, always to begin within the family. Nearly three millennia before Luther explained the six chief parts, the creed of Old Testament Israel, the *shema*, as well as the commandments, were to be taught by fathers to their children. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home

INSTRUCTION IN THE WORD OF GOD: The car—chauffeur-ing to school, running errands—is a great place and time to memorize. In our family, Dad always ran the morning drop-off, and in just ten minutes a day, five days a week had kindergartner, second- and fourth-graders progressing nicely through the chief parts.

and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." (Deut. 6:4-9)²

Likewise Paul reminds Timothy that it was not the apostle who had been his teacher of the essentials. "Continue," Paul says, "in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it." Paul doesn't mean himself, for "*from infancy* you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15). No, it was dear Lois, Timothy's grandmother, and Eunice, his mother, who had planted the seed of faith (2 Tim. 1:5), just as God intended.

What better tool for parents to use in imparting the basics of the faith to their children than the catechism? The Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed declare our need for salvation and God's saving work in Christ—along with a description of the Christian life—as concisely as one might find. The Lord's Prayer is Christ's own best instruction in a believer's lively communication with our heavenly Father. The Sacraments and the Office of the Keys represent the lifeblood of the

believer, the means by which he or she comes to be and remains in Christ, all in so few pages that they can be committed to memory, beginning even with the very young child.

The true genius of the catechism, however, is that its familiar words only become more meaningful as they're mulled and weighed daily throughout life. The author himself was never finished with its lessons: "I am a theologian who has attained a fairly good practical knowledge and experience of Holy Scripture through various dangers. But I do not so glory in this gift as not to join my children daily in prayerfully reciting the catechism, that is, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer and meditating on them with an attentive heart. I do not merely pass over the words hurriedly, but I carefully observe what the individual word means. And really, if I do not do this but am preoccupied with other business, I feel a definite loss because of the neglect. For God gave the Word that we should impress it on ourselves, as Moses says (Deut. 6:7), and practice it. Without this practice our souls become rusty, as it were, and we lose ourselves."³

Luther would add, "I act as a child who is learning the catechism. In the morning and whenever I have time, I read and also recite, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, etc. And besides this I must also read and study every day. Yet, I cannot master the matter as I desire but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism and am glad to remain one."⁴ All this is to say that the whole family will be blessed year after year by gathering around God's Word as taught in the catechism.

The synodical editions of Luther's Small Catechism offer useful settings for doing just that. Section 2 of the 1986 and 1943 editions (pages 30-32 and 22-24, respectively) is devotional orders for morning, evening, and at table. By its suggestion, a family devotion could unfold this way⁵:

Make the sign of the cross and say, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The cross with the invocation reminds us of our baptism, the washing away of sins by which God once brought us into His kingdom, connecting us to the death of His Son. And what, we might ask the catechism, does that mean for a new day?

"What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."⁶

When our family begins its devotion, therefore, each one of us in turn speaks also his or her baptismal birthday.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

So, you've said them a thousand times before.

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Perhaps *today* is different for you than any day before. In a delightful letter to a friend, Peter the Barber, whose personal trials seemed to prevent him from praying, Luther points out that the Lord’s Prayer, the Commandments, and the Creed offer sufficient substance for a lifetime. “To this day I suckle at the Lord’s Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill.”⁷ Luther suggests that Peter pray the Lord’s Prayer one phrase at a time, dwelling there just as long and as freely as he will. He might do the same another day with one or more of the Commandments or with an article of the Creed. Luther only cautions that Peter not require too much of himself, so that his prayer time will not become tedious.

If you choose, you may also say this little prayer. Luther is modest in offering a piece of his own writing, but the Morning and Evening Prayers have surely become Lutheran classics. For our family, the one always concludes our breakfast devotion, and the other is always the last prayer after lights out. “I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son...”

Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn.

Even here, Luther directs us to the catechism as a possibility, for he has written wonderfully didactic hymns on each of the chief parts. Check them out:

Ten Commandments: LW # 331 (TLH # 287)

“Here Is the Tenfold Sure Command”

Creed: LW # 213 (TLH # 251)

“We All Believe in One True God, Maker”

Lord’s Prayer: LW # 431 (TLH # 458)

“Our Father, Who from Heaven Above”

Baptism: LW # 223

“To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord”

Lord’s Supper: LW # 238 (TLH # 313)

“O Lord, We Praise You”

Confession: LW # 230 (TLH # 329)

“From Depths of Woe I Cry to You”

So maybe I wouldn’t be teaching my children in confirmation class. We still learn—and keep on learning—the catechism together. Both the form and the substance of our family devotions are largely shaped by the catechism.

We close with a few other possibilities for using the catechism devotionally as a family:

The car—chauffeuring to school, running errands—is a great place and time to memorize. In our family, Dad always ran the morning drop-off, and in just ten minutes a day, five days a week had kindergartner, second and fourth-graders progressing nicely through the chief parts.

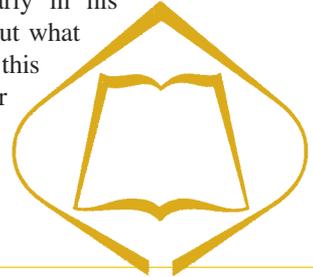
CPH’s Faith Alive Bible is designed to be a rich devotional and catechetical resource. Each commandment, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the other chief parts are illustrated with activities using the Small Catechism. Illus-

trated, too, with their scriptural bases are the liturgies from *Lutheran Worship* and *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

After lights out, children lying in bed can continue to hear and internalize the catechism spoken softly by Mom or Dad. They’re memorizing without even realizing it. And it’s not a bad way, as Luther would say, to “go to sleep at once and in good cheer.”⁸

The Christian Questions with Their Answers⁹ make especially appropriate family devotional reading on Saturday evening before Holy Communion the next morning. Vintage Luther, particularly in his answer to the very last question, “But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?” Look it up: page 42, or page 35 in the 1943 edition.

You’ll find yourself in a pleasant place: in the catechism, at home.



Notes:

1. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 342.
2. Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).
3. Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, comp. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1:125-26.
4. *Ibid.*, 126.
5. *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 30-31.
6. *Ibid.*, 22-23.
7. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43, *Devotional Writings II* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 200.
8. *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 31.
9. *Ibid.*, 39-42. (1943 edition, 31-35)

What better tool for parents to use in imparting the basics of the faith to their children than the catechism? The Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed declare our need for salvation and God’s saving work in Christ—along with a description of the Christian life—as concisely as one might find. The Lord’s Prayer is Christ’s own best instruction in a believer’s lively communication with our heavenly Father. The Sacraments and the Office of the Keys represent the lifeblood of the believer, the means by which he or she comes to be and remains in Christ, all in so few pages that they can be committed to memory, beginning even with the very young child.

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