



LIVING THE FAITH AT HOME

BY ELIZABETH F. CALDWELL

It's Saturday night and a family of teenagers sits down for dinner. Friends of two of the teenagers join them for the family meal. Hands reach out for the blessing which they have been singing together since the boys were in preschool. One of the friends has learned the blessing since he has been a regular dinner guest at this table. In explaining this to the other friend, the mother says, "It's what we do."

"It's what we do!" We say thank you to God for health and strength and food to eat. Some speak of the important role of parents in helping their children "find faith at home." I don't think the issue is really one of finding faith at home as it is living the faith at home. Essential is helping parents make connections for themselves between practices of faith experienced at church (prayer, reading and studying the Bible, caring for others, exploring ways to live faithfully and responsibly in the world) and living these practices at home.

It's really easy for parents to abandon their role as primary faith educators. All the reasons seem very logical when articulated: "I don't know enough to teach my child." "You're the professional, you teach them." "Isn't bringing them to Sunday school enough?" "I really don't know what I believe, how can I be responsible

for my child's faith? Isn't that your job?"

It is our job as educators and pastors to help parents name their fears and at the same time claim some agency, responsibility for the parental role as one who does possess both interest and abilities in nurturing a child in the life of the Christian faith. Essential in this job is helping parents be attuned to their own spiritual practices.

Craig Dykstra's list of spiritual practices is a good beginning point for dialogue with parents.¹ Practices address fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human acts – they have practical purposes: to heal, to shape communities, to discern. Practices are done together and over time. Practices possess standards of excellence. When we come to see some of our ordinary activities as Christian practices, we come to perceive how our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world.²

Dorothy Bass reminds us of how simple and ordinary things we do every day involve us in God's continuing recreating of our world. Our job is to help parents become attuned to the ways they can parent their children so that faith expressions are possible. Some parents are well prepared to do this; others do not know how.

In thinking about the opportunity parents have in "making a home for faith," here is a simple checklist for parents. As an educator or pastor of a church, what would you like to be able to expect from parents in this partnership of nurturing children in the life of the Christian faith?

Spiritual Practices

- Worship
- Telling the Christian story
- Interpreting Scripture
- Prayer
- Confession of sin and reconciliation
- Encouraging others
- Being in service and witness
- Suffering with neighbors
- Providing hospitality and care
- Listening
- Struggling to understand the context of life
- Criticizing and resisting the powers of evil
- Working together to create social structures which sustain life in accord with God's will

Compiled by Craig Dykstra



They should be able to:

- Read a story from the Bible or a children's Bible Story Book
- Tell a story from the Bible
- Be comfortable with a child's questions
- Pray
- Make time sometime during the week for practices of faith which are important to them
- Ask faith questions - engage work, the newspaper, and the Christian faith
- Struggle to understand and interpret affirmations of faith
- Be a participant/lay leader in worship and religious education
- Explain the meaning of the sacraments
- Explain the meaning of Christmas and Easter

- Explain what it means to be Christian
- Have a basic understanding of other faith traditions (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim)
- Involve children in practicing faithful response to the two great commandments to love God and to love our neighbors³

"It's what we do" she said. Parents who are committed to living in response to the promises made at a child's baptism will make intentional commitments to living faithfully in the world.

It's what people of faith do: love God with all our hearts and all our souls and all our might. We keep these words of God in our hearts and we remember that we should tell them to our children and talk about them wherever we are - at

home or away, when we sleep, and when we get up to meet a new day. We live these words so they are visible before us in the actions of our hands, in the ways they open our eyes to the world, and know that they are written so they are visible to us on the doors of our homes.⁴

Notes

1 Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, Geneva Press, 1999, p. 43.

2 Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, Jossey-Bass, 1997, pp. 6-8.

3 This list is adapted from Elizabeth Caldwell, *Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Children*, Pilgrim Press, 2000, pp. 40-43.

4 A contemporary adaptation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

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