

July/August 2009 • Volume 25, Number 4

# LUTHERAN PARTNERS

## Raising Children in the Faith

Biblical and Theological  
Insights

Faith Sharing at Mealtime

Supporting Our Youngest



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**TECH AND YOUTH: WISE AS SERPENTS, INNOCENT AS DOVES** by Andy Arnold. The author, a pastor and self-proclaimed geek, offers technologically savvy advice for making the best use of the Internet for building relationships with and among youth while avoiding potential pitfalls.

**A VOCATIONAL IDEA SHAPING OUR YOUNG** by Lisa Kramme. The Nebraska Synod's Operation IDEA, begun in 2002, is planting, growing, and cultivating a sense of call among our young people to consider service both in the church and our communities.

**LEADERSHIP RESOURCES:** Go to [delicious.com/lutheranpartners](http://delicious.com/lutheranpartners), a social networking bookmarking site, for more online resources.



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# COMMENT Children and Faith

William Decker

*Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray. (Proverbs 22:6, New Revised Standard Version)*

As time has passed, translators have rendered this familiar verse in the English Bible in a variety of ways.

Familiar to many of us is the version found in the *King James Version* and the *Revised Standard Version*: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

"Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life" says *The Good News Translation*.

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" states the *New International Version*.

Distinct from the others, *The Message* moves away from teaching to "pointing": "Point your kids in the right direction—when they're old they won't be lost" (*The Message*).

Train...teach...point. They are all English renditions for the Hebrew word, *chenak*. This word can be translated "to train" or "to dedicate." Even "to inaugurate" is a possibility.

So what might it mean for families and congregations to be in the ministry of training, teaching, and dedicating our children to grow up in and live out the faith today? This issue of *Lutheran Partners* addresses that challenge.

We will only be able to touch a few aspects of this many-faceted issue. We begin with a foundational piece written by Professor Marcia Bunge who underscores biblical and theological themes pertinent to raising children in the faith.

Linda Staats looks at the eminent place given to the mealtime as a place where faith can be passed on. Dawn Rundman examines how families and congregations can initially encourage faith life in our very youngest (she also offers a sidebar listing ten ways to encourage biblical literacy among older children).

Linda Kramme, of the Nebraska Synod staff, describes Operation IDEA, a program that helps young people listen to God's call for ministries in the church and world on *Lutheran Partners Online*.

Also online, Andy Arnold, a pastor from Montana who works with youth, offers technologically savvy advice for making the best use of the Internet for building relationships with and among youth while avoiding potential pitfalls ([www.elca.org/lutheranpartners](http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners)).

Check out "Written on the Heart," as well as our media reviews for additional content on raising children in the faith.

## Jesus, Justice and Jazz

For decades, large group youth gatherings of friends and peers have played a significant role in our church as it supports congregations and families in their childrens' faith lives.

In just a couple of weeks, New Orleans will be playing host to approximately 37,000 youth and adult leaders for the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering, aptly named "Jesus, Justice, Jazz."

According to the Web site, the Gathering will focus on service and justice, as well as worship, music, Bible study, service, learning, play, prayer, the witness of leaders from others nations, reflection, caring for others and new friendships.

Please pray for those attending. Check out the Web site at [www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Youth-Ministry/Youth-Gathering.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Youth-Ministry/Youth-Gathering.aspx)

## James Mahler: In Memoriam

Teachers, in our public and private educational institutions, play a vital role in the raising of our children.

A dedicated Lutheran school educator, James Mahler, died on May 9, 2009.

Jim's support was impressive, stretching from his years as a student and teacher in Lutheran schools to his 25-year tenure at California Lutheran University in the education department. For 12 years, he contributed to the "Facets" column in *Lutheran Partners* in support of Lutheran school education. He was rostered as an associate in ministry.

In a dedication to Jim's life to be published in the *Devotion Guide—2009-2010*, Mel Kieschnick wrote that the "cause of Lutheran schools seemed to be in [Jim's]

DNA. He loved Jesus, and like Jesus, Jim loved kids. He felt deeply that they deserved only the best. Quality Christian education from preschool through graduate school deserved the finest that church and society have to offer." (This guide, published by ELCA Schools and Early Childhood Centers, will be posted online at [www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education/Pre-12/Devotional.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education/Pre-12/Devotional.aspx) on or around August 10.)

Our prayers and condolences to the family and friends of James Mahler.

## ACP Awards

The Associated Church Press, which met in Indianapolis, Indiana, last May for their annual convention, honored *Lutheran Partners* with two awards for 2008: an Award of Excellence in the "Department" category for "Written on the Heart," co-edited by Stephanie Frey and Marcus Kunz; and an Honorable Mention in the category of "Publication Redesign" to Ann Rezny, our graphic designer.

Congratulations to Stephanie, Marcus, and Ann for work well done.

William Decker is editor of *Lutheran Partners* and *Lutheran Partners Online* ([www.elca.org/lutheranpartners](http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners)), Chicago, Illinois.

## Prayer for Young Persons

God of all good gifts, your Son gathered children into his arms and blessed them. Help us to understand our youth as they grow in years and in knowledge of your world. Give us compassion when they face temptations and experience failures. Teach us to encourage their search for truth and value in their lives. Help us to appreciate their ideals and sympathize with their frustrations; that with them we may look for a better world than either we or they have known; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 83)

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# LETTERS

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## In Nineteen Seconds

(Note: The following letter comes in response to "Written on the Heart" stories published in our March/April 2009 column. The column dealt with experiences involving faith and doubt—ed.)

It was a day like any other day. I was worried about the faith of my grown children, neither

one of whom went to church anymore. I was brooding about it as I entered the elevator and pushed the button for the 19th floor. It was an elevator ride like any other. What could happen to ease my worry from the first to the nineteenth floor? Not much, I would have guessed had I been asked.

There was a man on the elevator. In typical city fashion, we nodded "hello" and then retreated to our corners huddled in a silent defense against the close quarters. It is a strange reality being in a closed box going upward, often with many strangers too close for comfort. Not a place for anything inspirational to happen, I would have guessed had I been asked.

I was wrong.

At about the eighth floor, the man looked over at me and noticed the cross I was wearing. It was made from black onyx and mother of pearl. "What a beautiful cross," he said.

"Oh thanks," I said. "It's a gift from my son. He went to Cuba with a theater company and came back with this cross for me."

"Lovely," he repeated.

"Yes," I said, and I heard myself saying something else. "While I am grateful for the cross I'm worried about his faith. I don't think he believes anymore."

"Oh yes, he does," the man snapped back. "Give him time. He wouldn't have even thought about the cross for you if he had no faith. Give him time. *You have faith!*" The elevator stopped. The door opened. He was gone before I had a chance to say, "Thank you."

I got out at the 19th floor a little stunned and actually feeling better. He made my day. He gave me hope. "He could be right," I thought. Maybe God can speak ...

...[i]n nineteen seconds.

CAROL SODERHOLM  
Chicago, Illinois

## Ministry Preparation

I think Maria Erling makes some very good observations regarding the uphill task of ELCA seminaries preparing rostered leaders for ministry (March/April 2009). Second-career students do bring many formidable challenges to the institution, which she has duly noted.

One problem intrinsic to an academic institution educating clergy in America is that there are tenured faculty with secure jobs. They are the ones who are training clergy who are accountable to yearly reviews, which could result in being asked to leave. Also, the church is a volunteer organization which cannot force a hike in tuition or reject members from "matriculation." In fact, my experiences have been that the seminary is a top-down institution with the same power that academicians can hold over students' heads in many other professional institutions. It often feels like a "power play," which is unavailable to clergy once they practice ministry after the candidacy process. This makes the whole topic of working in "dialogue or as partners" to be problematical at best.

A direction the seminaries might pursue is to actually "model" the partnership and dialogue in the classroom that is envisioned to be practiced in congregations. I am not sure academia in the ELCA or many other institutions is ready for this step. It may be one reason why virtual [online] campuses are becoming attractive in many fields of study.

DAVID COFFIN  
Ada, Ohio



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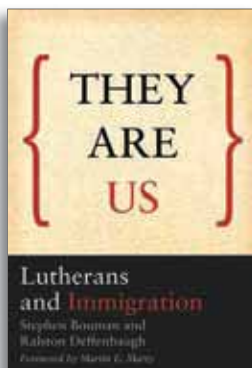
# LUTHERAN QUESTIONS

## To Those in Need

Early in the institutional stage of Christianity there is this [scriptural] picture of how wealth and property were handled: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common ... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold" (Acts 4:32ff).

If that is called communism or socialism, for "They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need," who would dare condemn it? Who could say that is wrong? Is what is going on now in our [government's] Recovery/Stimulus actions antibiblical in its dimensions? Go figure!

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## They Are Us

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STEPHEN BOUMAN and RALSTON DEFFENBAUGH  
Foreword by MARTIN E. MARTY

*They Are Us* explores the biblical, historical, theological, and cultural foundations for Lutheran participation in a public conversation that has important implications for the future of this nation. Based on professional experience and grounded in Christian faith, the authors make the case for immigration reform and call the church to a mission of evangelical hospitality.

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# WRITTEN ON THE HEART

Editor: Stephanie Frey

## Catching the Faith

Our July/August authors provide personal stories of how children have “caught” the faith, and how the Christian home is the “first church” for children.

Our thanks to Jeffrey Sackett, Clear Lake, Minnesota; Chip Borgstadt, Omaha, Nebraska; Nancy Campbell, Saint Leonard, Maryland; Matthew Nelson, Walla Walla, Washington; and David Schafer, Westminster, Maryland.

If you wish to reproduce one of more of these submissions in print and online publications, please contact our editor at [writenontheheart@elca.org](mailto:writenontheheart@elca.org) and we will forward your request to the author.

## Signed with the Cross

*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).*

The senior pastor in my first call taught me the powerful importance of making the sign of the cross upon someone's forehead. On one day in particular, he took me to the home of a dying woman, laid down next to her on the bed (she was too weak to sit up), and read from John's Gospel (*I will not leave you orphaned, I am coming to you*). Then he traced the cross upon her forehead.

I will never forget the silent power of that mark. It was as if we knew what it meant without saying a word: through baptism God had been with her from the beginning, God was still there in her suffering, and one day she would be raised with Christ.

Over the years the sign of the cross has taken on power for our family. One night, when our twin daughters were young, I came upstairs to find my wife singing a blessing song to them and making the sign of the cross. The tradition stuck. As the years

have gone by, even on the worst days of raising twin daughters, we could still draw that cross and bless one another. This makes great sense to me: with the sign of the cross at the end of the day we seem to be saying, “No matter what happened today, the Lord is still with us. We are defined by Christ's love.”

In our church many children come to the Lord's Table with their parents. They receive the sign of the cross and a blessing (*By the waters of your baptism, the Lord has promised to bless you and keep you*). Recently, I was presiding at Holy Communion when a small boy named Ryan came forward with his parents. As I bent down to bless him, he quickly reached forward and made sign of the cross on my forehead instead! In that moment I was struck again by the power of that cross—a silent reminder of the gifts God gives to us all in baptism—forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

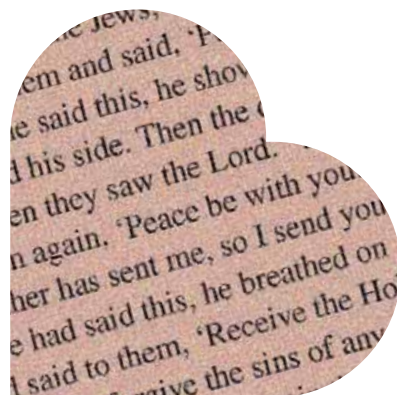
What would our church look like if we continually blessed one another with this powerful sign?

The sign of the cross, wordlessly traced on our forehead, proclaims the great promise of God!

Jeffrey Sackett  
Clear Lake, Minnesota

## We're All Foster Parents

Before serving in the church, I spent many years serving in public and private schools. In those settings I worked with children and youth whose learning needs did not always correlate with the systems in place. Students, teachers, and parents struggled with these situations and did not always find effective or satisfying approaches to the needs they tried to address. Increasingly, expectations for involvement in athletics, academics, and community



## Writers Wanted!

The content you see in this column is generated only by you, our readers. We are looking to you to contribute to future issues.

Most immediately, we need authors for our **January/February 2010 column, “Guardians of the Gospel.”** What has it meant to be a steward of the mysteries of the faith, to guard what has been entrusted to you (1 Timothy 6:20)?

**Deadline is August 15, 2009.**

**Written on the Heart** are real-life narratives about experiences in which a word from God—perhaps familiar, perhaps fresh—speaks with new or renewed power.

The editors will provide a theme or topic as a focus, although the announced themes will be suggestively broad. We encourage readers to share narratives from their own experiences that tell of real people, real life, real ministry, and the Word (written on the heart) that speaks in the midst of it.

Contributions will be reviewed and potentially edited for clarity, length, and appropriateness. We suggest a length of approximately 400 words. When requested or otherwise indicated, the name of the contributor may be withheld.

### To respond:

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—Visit our Web site at [www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/writtenontheheart](http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/writtenontheheart) to write new submissions and read current and past responses.

—Send contributions via regular mail to **Lutheran Partners, Written on the Heart, ELCA (VE), 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101—Stephanie Frey**



service have added pressure to already stressed young people and their parents.

In the midst of these competing demands, I have been inspired by several caring families who have opened their lives and homes to welcome foster sons and daughters. Their stories help me see hope for facing the challenge of raising kids in our time.

One family had children of their own, but found they had more than enough love to share with several sons and daughters who came to them through the foster care system. Their biological daughters, now adults, said they always thought they were rich. They may not have had all the toys and clothes their peers had, but they enjoyed the love and attention of their parents.

Mom and Dad did one other thing that made a difference: they worked on their marriage. Involvement and leadership in a faith-based, marriage-building ministry provided a source of stability and hope to many daughters and sons who came to their home during difficult times in their lives.

Another family who opened their lives and their home to foster children ended up adopting several kids with unique needs. With income that could have allowed them to live in more affluent neighborhoods, they chose instead to invest in building lives. They attended to the social and learning needs of the young people they adopted, investing time and energy in advocating appropriate learning settings and grace-oriented consequences that helped insure a place in community for all. Central to their involvement was a place of service and worship in the congregation.

A third family was comprised of a single woman who welcomed adolescents into her home. She managed to integrate her own service to the congregation with the advocacy and planning meetings of schools, courts, and social service agencies for each young person. Her relationship with each one wove together her respect for them as a person, expectations for appropriate behavior at home and in school, and a valuing of each young person's unique

talents and ability to contribute to the lives of others.

Raising kids is challenging at any time, in any circumstance. Maybe we all could see our role as foster parents—the responsibility to nurture and appreciate the gift God gives us in sons and daughters. After all, we only have a short time before they set out on their own to raise the next generation.

Chip Borgstadt  
Omaha, Nebraska

### The Prayers of Owen

In an attempt to teach our three-year-old, Owen, about gratitude and to foster his relationship with God, my husband and I do bedtime prayers with him. We encourage Owen to make up his own prayers each evening and make them personal conversations with God. Here's how it works:

My husband and I hold Owen's hands, or have him fold his hands. I say, "Dear Jesus, thank you for..." Owen then fills in the rest. Here's a typical one:

"Thank you for...trick-or-treating, curtains, green pillow, big teddy, sippy cups, Mommy, Daddy, running shirts, Arizona shirts, trains, windows, lights, Backyardigans book, pirate sheets, and changing table, too!"

You see, our pious, reflective son looks around the room and thanks God for whatever catches his eye. That is, with the exception of trick-or-treating. Although October has come and gone, trick-or-treating left such an impression that Owen thanks God for it *every night*.

My husband and I usually prompt him, "Are there any people you want to pray for?"

Owen has learned to respond, "Thank you for grandmas, grandpas, Baby Joel [his brother], and *all* the people who love me."

Jesus tells us in Scripture, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Reflecting on Owen's prayers, I have found myself changing and become more childlike in my own prayers. Owen notices the small wonders of sippy cups,

pirate sheets, and model trains. He knows that he is loved by many people, and he is grateful for that love.

Thus, I strive to fill my prayers with more praise, more gratitude. Owen doesn't come to God with a laundry list of expectations or hurts. He is simply still (or at least, as still as a three-year-old can be) and thankful for the things and people in his life.

Without question, we will expect more depth and maturity in his prayers as he grows. Yet, we pray that Owen will always be like a little child when it comes to prayer. May he always pray for others, always find gratitude, and always sleep peacefully under the loving watch of his heavenly Father.

Nancy Campbell  
Saint Leonard, Maryland

### Raising Servants

I work where the phones can be very busy at times. By the time I get home from work, I sometimes don't want to spend another moment on the phone. As a result, I do a lot of screening of our phone calls at home. It is convenient for me, but not for those who want just a minute of my time. Sometimes by calling back I have already missed an opportunity to help, to listen, to laugh, or to be encouraged by someone else.

Even as a full-time church worker, I missed opportunities in my daily life because I thought I was too busy. There have been times when I have seen someone in need, yet not responded. I have driven by someone with a flat tire, walked by someone in need of money or food, and even failed to help with a simple situation when I thought my time was more valuable than someone else's time.

Answering the call to be a faithful servant is not always convenient, and making the time to respond is not always easy. As a former youth director and associate in ministry, I remember one call in particular. It came in the middle of the night from Tim, one of our congregation's regular youth group members.

A high school student at the time, Tim had attended a party where he knew

alcohol would be served. At about 2 a.m. my phone rang. "Matthew," Tim said in a reasonably coherent voice, "I'm at a party and I've been drinking. I don't want to drive and I don't want to call my parents because they will be really upset with me. Can you come pick me up?"

Tim remained quiet on the drive home. I didn't want to fill his ears with clichés and he didn't want to justify his decisions that night. However, when we arrived at his home he asked me if I'd

be willing to walk him in because he wasn't sure how his parents would react. We did that together and the conversation went well, in great part because they were glad that he did not try to drive after drinking.

Although I made myself available, I did not have to mediate their conversation the next day. However, I did learn something that night. I learned to stay awake, spiritually speaking. In my call to serve Christ and his church then,

and now, I realized that there is no such thing as an ordinary day. Every day and sometimes every night can present the opportunity to serve others in need. The Holy Spirit guides us to these opportunities and gives our eyes and ears a chance to hear so that we can respond.

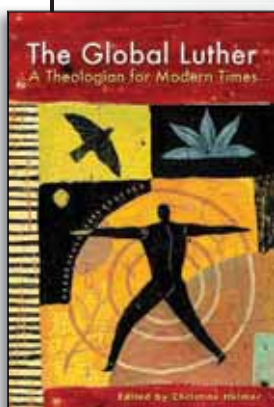
If I could influence the youth of today to memorize part of just one verse in the Bible, it would be in the book of Mark. The disciples had come to Jesus just as a storm was about to swamp their boat. Panicked, they woke Jesus and said, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Mark 4:39 says "Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."

Tim knew that he would be in trouble with his parents, yet somehow he heard the call, "Peace! Be still!" Even as I wished I could still be sleeping, I heard the call, "Peace! Be still!" In the calm following that moment, Christ spoke to both of us, kept us both safe, and deepened one family's relationship by instilling the value of honesty with one another.

I continue to be blessed by the events of that night and when I see or hear someone in need, I try to stop and hear those words from Jesus and—in the dead calm—respond faithfully.

Matthew Nelson  
Walla Walla, Washington

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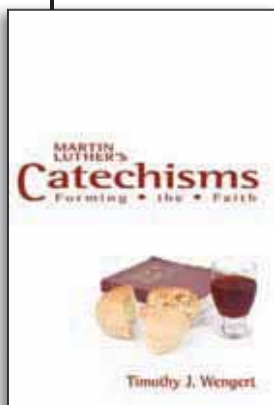
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This past November our family had the privilege of celebrating the life of my wife's father, Howard, who lived in Christ for 81 years on this earth and now lives with him in glory. For so many of us, life and death are familiar experiences. From the perspective of a pastor and his family, however, the death of a parent and grandparent is slightly more unique. My wife, Lexi, our daughters, and I found ourselves on the receiving end of pastoral care in Howard's death instead of the giving end. That in itself was quite different for us, and awesome. Countless times, we witnessed people "being Christ" for us and to us.

Watching our daughters' reactions to Howard's deteriorating health, his entrance into hospice care, and then his passage into the church triumphant offered us many insights. Our daughter



Creason, for the last two weeks of her grandfather's life, didn't want to hear us use the word *dying*. She needed to come to terms with her grandfather's dying and death. Soon my wife traveled again to Virginia to see Howard for the last time because the hospice caregivers knew time was short. Creason made a little videobyte on our digital camera for Lexi to share with Grandpa. In it, she said, "Grandpa, this is Creason. I know you are dying. I wish you a wonderful new life. I love you, Grandpa." Lexi held it up to Howard's ear that evening before his death.

Our other daughter, Chamberlyn, was pretty matter-of-fact in dealing with Howard's dying and death. At the family's first visitation the day before the funeral, Chamberlyn approached the casket, touched her grandpa's hands, and then made the sign of the cross on his forehead. It was a wonderful theological connection of the baptismal pronouncement, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Of course, all of us who witnessed this moment wept puddles of tears as Chamberlyn did this.

For our daughters, life and death are wonderfully intertwined. We have exposed them to situations of God's giving life and calling people to his side. We pray that they have little fear of illness and death because we have shared with them Jesus' wonderful promise of life everlasting.

The words of John 11 become all the more profound through children's eyes: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25-26).

David Schafer  
Westminster, Maryland

**Stephanie Frey** is lead pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Spring Grove, Minnesota, and editor of "Written on the Heart."



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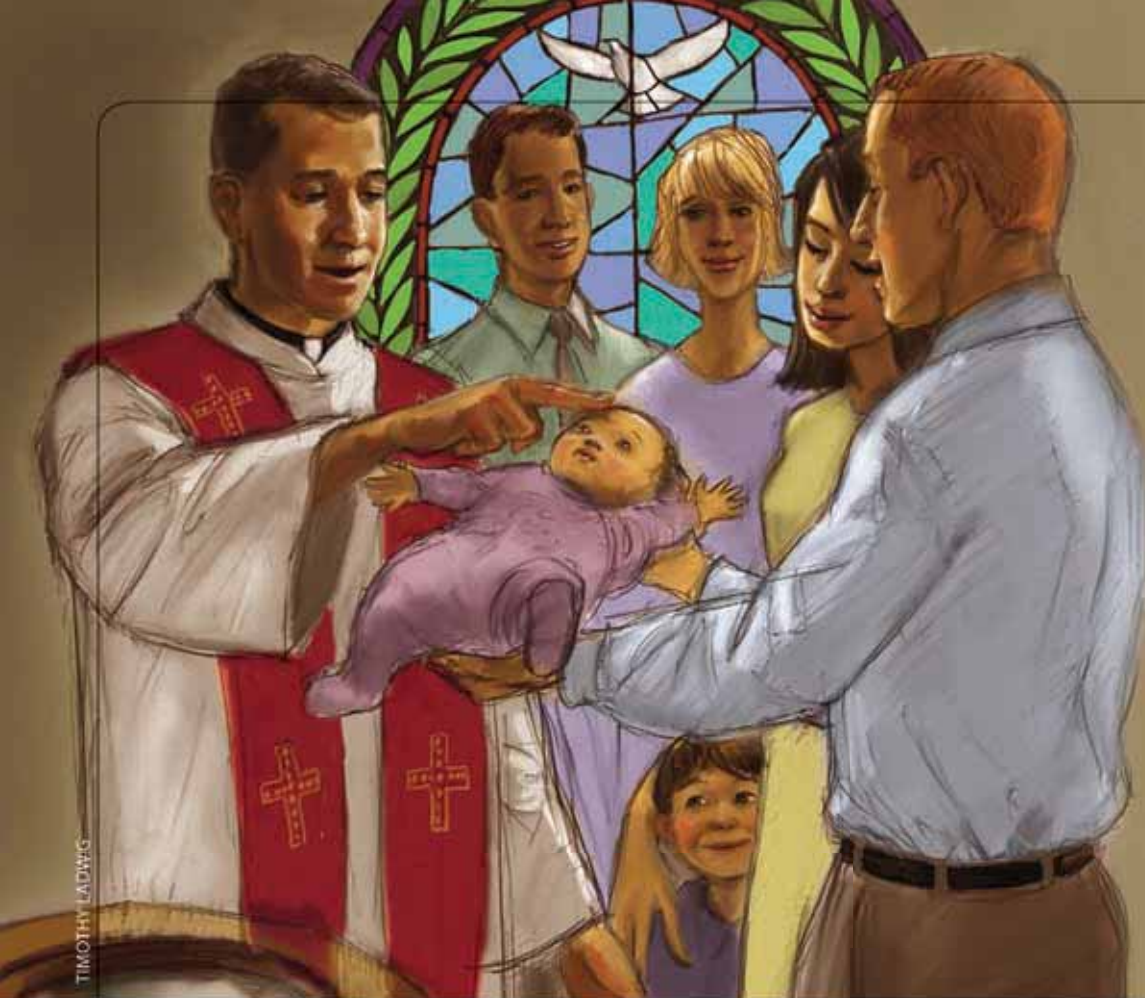
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ELCA Youth Gathering, San Antonio, 2006

# Biblical and Theological Perspectives: Resources for Raising Children in the Faith

Marcia Bunge

**Our author identifies some fundamental insights from the Bible and the Christian tradition about the roles and responsibilities of parents and the complexity and dignity of children as resources for raising our children in the faith.**

AS COMMON SENSE AND MANY RECENT AND innovative programs have shown, one of the most important ways to strengthen the faith formation of children and young people is by engaging and supporting parents or primary caregivers.<sup>1</sup> Practical theologians from a number of denominations are therefore focusing more attention on the importance of spiritual formation in the home.<sup>2</sup> Institutes and centers devoted to faith

formation of children and young people, such as the Youth and Family Institute, offer a number of practical resources “to equip families to pass on faith and live well in Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Many conferences and training workshops are devoted to helping pastors and church leaders work more closely with parents and families. Innovative religious educational programs now include more attention to the

role of parents and other caring adults in the faith development of children.

All of these theologians, programs, and initiatives recognize that faith formation is a cooperative effort between home and congregation and that faith is not really taught but “caught,” especially by speaking more intentionally about faith and carrying out religious practices in the home.



## One of the central ways that Lutheran theologians have emphasized the importance of parenting is by speaking of it as a divine calling or vocation.

As all of us—parents, grandparents, church leaders, and pastors—seek various ways to raise children in the faith, we can strengthen our efforts both at home and in our congregations by building upon some of the fundamental insights from the Bible and the Christian tradition about the roles and responsibilities of parents and the complexity and dignity of children. The Bible and our theological tradition contain wisdom that we can critically appropriate for today about adult-child relationships, the tasks of parents, and the strengths and vulnerabilities of children themselves. By taking into account biblically and theologically informed perspectives on children and parents, we will better orient and enrich our approach to faith formation at home and in our congregations—whatever particular religious education curricula or youth and family programs we choose to undertake.

This essay provides only a brief sketch of biblically and theologically informed views of children and parents, yet even these few perspectives alone remind us that we can build a strong approach to faith formation only by, at the same time, cultivating vibrant and complex theological understandings of parents, children, and adult-child relationships. Robust theologies of childhood and parenting will also strengthen other areas of our work with or on behalf of children and young people both here and abroad.

### Parents

If we take seriously the notion that faith formation must be a cooperative effort between home and congregation, then we can strengthen our approach to faith formation and better engage parents themselves by articulating a robust theological understanding of parents. Although we all certainly honor the work of parents, our language about parents and their role in the lives of a child's faith formation is sometimes weak. We commonly speak of parents as "caregivers" or "providers." Or we say that parents "chose" to have their children. Yet this common language does not reflect

the important and sacred role of parents. Mining some of the rich language from the tradition regarding parents and their roles can help strengthen youth and family ministry programs and help parents understand and articulate the depth and importance of their task.

There are many ways that Christian theologians in the past have understood the complex and sacred task of parenting, and they have spoken meaningfully about it.<sup>4</sup> For example, Horace Bushnell, a leading Congregationalist pastor and scholar of the nineteenth century speaks of the family as a "little church."<sup>5</sup> Although he sees the important role of the church in the faith development of children, he believes that the primary agent of grace is the family, not the church. "Religion never thoroughly penetrates life," he said, "until it becomes domestic."<sup>6</sup>

One of the central ways that Lutheran theologians have emphasized the importance of parenting is by speaking of it as a divine calling or vocation. Martin Luther reflected deeply on the central tasks and responsibilities of parenting, and he incorporated parenting into his view of vocation or calling as a whole. Although he knew that parenting can be a difficult task and is often considered an insignificant and even distasteful job, he believed parenting is a serious and divine calling. Parenting is one of the particular vocations that serves the neighbor and contributes to the common good.

For Luther, parenting is a calling that is "adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels."<sup>7</sup> In one often quoted passage, he says the following:

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool—though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith—my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

Luther further underscored the importance of parenting by claiming:

Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.<sup>9</sup>

According to Luther, as priests and bishops to their children, parents have a twofold task: to nurture the faith of their children and to help them develop their gifts to serve others.<sup>10</sup> He also helped parents in this task by preaching about parenting and by writing *The Small Catechism*, which was intended for use in the home.

Followers of Luther also spoke meaningfully about the sacred task of parenting. For example, August Hermann Francke, the eighteenth century German pietist from Halle, claimed that the primary goal of parents is to lead their children to godliness. They are to help children grow in faith, empowering them to use their gifts and talents to love and serve God and the neighbor and to contribute to the common good.<sup>11</sup> The significance of parents in the education and faith formation of children was also emphasized in the recently adopted social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Our Calling in Education*.<sup>12</sup>

### Children

In addition to building on these and other theological views of parents, any strong approach to faith formation must be integrally connected to a vibrant and complex theological understanding of children and childhood. New scholarship has already brought to light at least four important and almost paradoxical perspectives on children that are helping to build strong Christian theologies of childhood. These perspectives are outlined briefly below, and I have discussed them and others more fully and applied them to a range of questions regarding children in other publications.<sup>13</sup>

Although these perspectives and others are found within the Christian tradition, Christian theologians today and in the past have often viewed them in isolation from one another, resulting in narrow and destructive understandings of children and our obligations to them. Theologians have often focused on one or two such perspectives alone, failing to appreciate the range of Christian perspectives on children and critically retrieving them into a serious and full-blown constructive theology of childhood. Thus, even though the four perspectives outlined below are not exhaustive, they do remind us of the complexity and dignity of children and can help combat simplistic and distorted views of children in the church and in the wider culture. Furthermore, these four perspectives, when held together instead of in isolation, can help guide emerging Christian theologies of childhood and strengthen the church's commitment to children in a range of ministries.

*First, and most basically, children are vulnerable beings. They are orphans, "neighbors," and strangers in need of compassion and justice, and therefore*

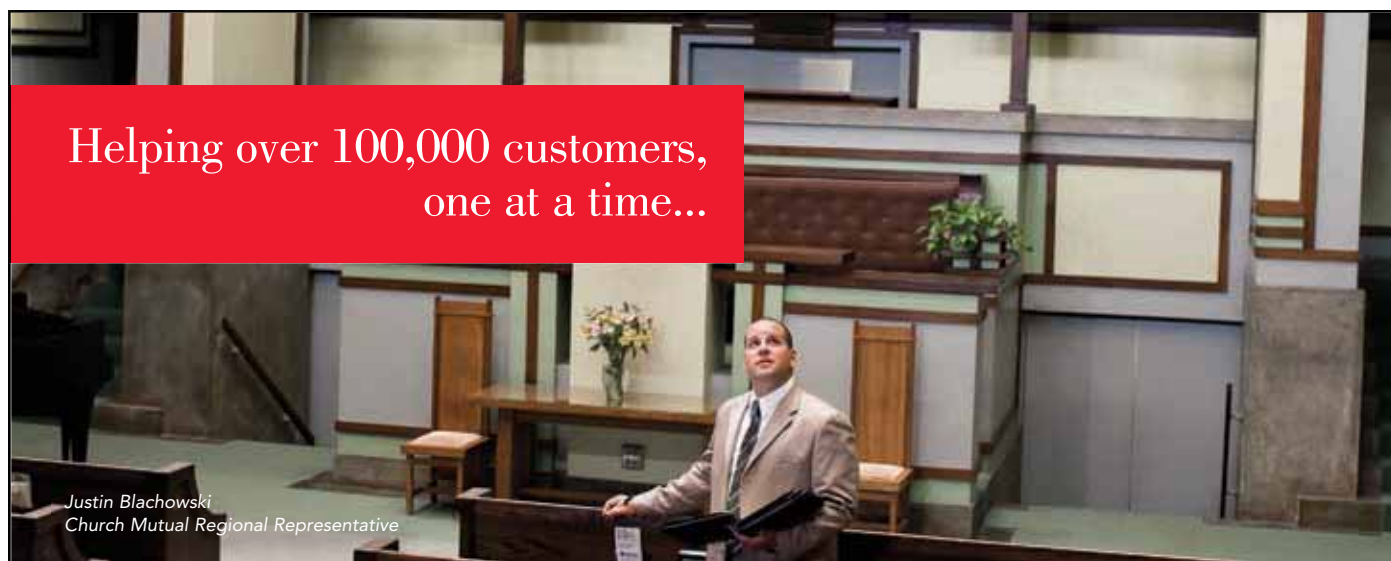
*parents and other adults are to protect them and provide them with their basic needs. Parents should provide children with their basic needs of food, shelter, love, and affection. When parents are unable to take up this task, or if they have died, then others in the community must help. Numerous biblical passages explicitly command us to help widows and orphans—the most vulnerable in society.<sup>14</sup>*

*The Bible depicts many ways that children suffer and are the victims of war, disease, or injustice. In the New Testament, Jesus also healed, touched, and blessed children. These and other passages clearly show us that all children, like all adults, are our neighbors, and caring for them is part of seeking justice and loving the neighbor.*

*Second, the Bible depicts children as gifts of God and sources of joy who are fully human and made in the image of God, and therefore parents and other caring adults are to respect them, enjoy them, and be grateful for them. Many passages in the Bible speak of children as gifts of God or signs of God's blessing. For example, Leah, Jacob's first wife, speaks of her sixth son*

*as a dowry, or wedding gift, presented by God (Genesis 30:20). Several biblical passages indicate that parents who receive these precious gifts are being "remembered" by God (Genesis 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:11, 19) and given "good fortune" (Genesis 30:11).<sup>15</sup> Related to this notion that children are gifts and signs of God's blessing, the Bible speaks of them as sources of joy and pleasure. Here, too, there are many examples.<sup>16</sup> Sarah rejoiced at the birth of her son, Isaac (Genesis 21:6-7). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world" (John 16:20-21).*

Children are also made in the image of God and are worthy of human dignity and respect from the start. The basis of this claim is Genesis 1:27, which claims that God made humankind, male and female, in God's image. It follows that children, like adults, possess the fullness of humanity. Regardless of race, gender, or class, they have intrinsic value. Although parents nurture them, they are



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not made in the image of their parents but in the greater image of God. The sense of the integrity of each person, including children, is also grounded in a view of God who intimately knows the number of “even the hairs of your head” (Matthew 10:30), forms your “inward parts,” and “knit[s]” you together in the womb (Psalm 139:13).

*A third dimension of the view of children in the Bible and the Christian tradition is that they are also developing beings, sinful creatures, and moral agents in need of instruction and guidance, and therefore parents are to nurture the faith of children and help them use their gifts and talents to love and serve others and contribute to the common good.* Parents and other caring adults are to nurture, teach, and guide children, helping them to develop intellectually, morally, emotionally, and spiritually. Several biblical passages speak about these responsibilities. For example, adults are to “train children in the right way” (Proverbs 22:6) and bring up children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Parents and caring adults are to tell children about God’s faithfulness (Isaiah 38:19) and “the glorious deeds of the LORD” (Psalm 78:4b) and to recite God’s commands to their children and talk about them “when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

*Fourth, the Bible also depicts children as models of faith for adults, sources of revelation, and representatives of Jesus, and therefore adults are to listen to children and learn from them.* Many Gospel passages turn upside down the common assumption held in Jesus’ time and our own: that children are to be seen but not heard and that the primary role of children is to learn from and obey adults. In contrast, the New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, representatives of Jesus, and even paradigms for entering the reign of God. In the Gospels we see Jesus embracing children and rebuking those who would turn them away, healing them, and even lifting them up as models of faith. He identifies himself with children and equates welcoming a little child in his name to welcoming himself and the one

who sent him. “Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus warns. “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Matthew 18:2-5). He adds, “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).

When incorporated into Christian theologies of childhood and held in appropriate balance and tension, these four perspectives have tremendous implications for combating simplistic and destructive conceptions of children and strengthening the commitment to them within Christian communities. For example, when held in tension, these perspectives could strengthen spiritual formation and religious education programs, restructuring them in ways that not only cultivate children’s growing moral capacities and responsibilities but also honor their questions and insights. Such programs would recognize the importance of teaching children the

faith as well as the role of children in the spiritual maturation of parents and other adults.

Taken together, these four perspectives on children also challenge Christians to renew their commitment to serving and protecting all children. If the church begins to view all children as made in the image of God, as fully human, and as orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of compassion and justice, then it would more readily treat all children, regardless of age, race, class, or gender, with more dignity and respect. The church would no longer tolerate or ignore the abuse or harsh treatment of children, including abuse that occurs within the church itself. Furthermore, it would work more diligently to become a stronger and more creative advocate for children in this country and around the world.

## Significance

This essay provides only a brief sketch of biblically and theologically informed views of children and parents, yet even these few perspectives alone remind us that one can build a strong approach

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to faith formation only by, at the same time, cultivating a vibrant and complex theological understanding of children and parents.

For example, on the one hand, if we think of children only or primarily as sinful and disobedient, then our view of parenting will be narrowly defined as punishing and physically disciplining children. On the other hand, if we think of children primarily as models for adults or sources of joy, then our view of parenting will be narrowly understood as learning from and enjoying children, and we will forget the responsibilities of teaching and guiding them.

The Bible and the tradition give us a much richer view of both parents and children. As all of us seek to support the children in our midst and to help raise them in the faith, we can encourage parents by plumbing some of the wisdom and language from the tradition regarding the importance of parents and their sacred calling. We can also strengthen our relationships to children themselves by keeping in mind the full humanity of children as well as

their need for guidance; their spiritual wisdom as well as growing moral capacities; and their strengths and gifts as well as their vulnerabilities and needs. Resources from the Bible and the tradition regarding parents and children also remind all of us—whether or not we are parents ourselves—that we need to work diligently on many levels and in many ways to nurture the faith of children in our midst and, at the same time, to be open to all of the ways that children themselves nourish and strengthen the spiritual formation of adults.

## Endnotes

1. This essay builds on sections of the following previously published articles by the author: "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and 'Best Practices' for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today," in *Dialog* 47 (Winter 2008): 348-60; and "The Vocation of Parenting: A Biblically and Theologically Informed Perspective," in *Understanding God's Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework*, ed. Douglas McConnell, Jennifer Orona, and Paul Stockley (World Vision: 2007): 53-65.
2. See, for example, Merton P. Strommen and Richard Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A*

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3. The mission of the Youth and Family Institute. See its Web site: [www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org](http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org).

4. For resources on various ways biblical and theological texts address parenting, see *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); and *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. by Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

5. For a full discussion of Bushnell, see "Horace Bushnell's Christian Nurture" by Margaret Bendroth in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 350-64.

6. Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861; rpt. ed., Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 63.

7. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (LW), eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 45:39.

8. *Ibid.*, LW 45: 40-41.

9. *Ibid.*, LW 45:46.

10. For a full discussion of Luther's views on parenting, see, for example, "The Child in Luther's Theology: 'For What Purpose Do

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We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for ... the Young” by Jane E. Strohl in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 134-59; William Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home: An Application of the Social Ethics of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1969); F. V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education* (The Lutheran Publication Society, 1889); and Gerald Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning*.

11. See Marcia Bunge, “Education and the Child in Eighteenth-Century German Pietism: Perspectives from the Work of A. H. Francke,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 247-78.

12. This statement was adopted at the 2007 Churchwide Assembly and can be downloaded for free at the following Web site: [www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Education.aspx](http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Education.aspx).

13. See for example Marcia J. Bunge, “The Dignity and Complexity of Children: Constructing Christian Theologies of Childhood,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality*, 53-68; “A More Vibrant Theology of Children,” *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (Summer 2003): 11-19; “Retrieving a Biblically Informed View of Children: Implications for Religious Education, a Theology of Childhood, and Social Justice,” *Lutheran Education* 139, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 72-87; and “Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children’s Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies,” in *The Given Child: The Religions’ Contribution to Children’s Citizenship*, eds. Trygve Wyller and Usha S. Nayar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007): 27-50. For a further discussion of children’s own responsibilities and duties, see also Marcia J. Bunge, “The Vocation of the Child: Theological Perspectives on the Particular and Paradoxical Roles and Responsibilities of Children,” in *The Vocation of the Child*,

ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

14. See, for example, Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:17-18 and 14:28-29.

15. The psalmist also says children are a “heritage” from the Lord and a “reward” (Psalm 127:3).

16. Other passages include Jeremiah’s recollection that the news of his own birth once made his father, Hilkiah, “very glad” (Jeremiah 20:15) and the angel’s promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth that their child will bring them “joy and gladness” (Luke 1:14).

**Marcia Bunge** is professor of humanities and theology at Christ College, the Honors College of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana. She edited *The Child in Christian Thought* (Eerdmans, 2001); has co-edited *The Child in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2008) and *Children and Childhood in World Religions* (Rutgers, forthcoming); and has written several articles on children and childhood.

## Best Practices

*Editor’s Note: Marcia Bunge published an article in Dialog: A Journal of Theology entitled “Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and ‘Best Practices’ for Faith Formation” (vol. 47, no. 4, Winter 2008, pp. 348-60). Her “Best Practices” section (pp. 354-58) includes a summation based on Scripture and Christian tradition of parental practices and responsibilities for nurturing the moral and spiritual lives of children.*

*What follows is Ms. Bunge’s list. For information regarding how to obtain her full article, go to [www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp](http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp).*

*She is currently working on a new book regarding the vocations of both children and parents that will build on these 10 best practices.*

1. Reading and discussing the Bible with children
2. Worshipping with a community
3. Introducing children to good examples
4. Participating in service projects and teaching financial responsibility
5. Singing together
6. Cultivating a reverence for creation
7. Education and vocational discernment
8. Giving attitudes toward the body
9. Listening to and learning from children
10. Recognizing the limits of parental authority



# LUTHERAN Partners

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Mealtime at ELCA Youth Gathering, San Antonio, 2006

# Pass the Peas, Catch the Faith—Please!

Linda Staats

**Congregations can partner with and equip the domestic church called “home” to help families share and teach the faith amid their busy and sometimes chaotic lives.**

AS A PASTOR AND PARENT, DAVID DRACH-MEINEL in Henderson, Nevada, reflects on the challenges facing families today, “Raising children in the twenty-first century has become increasingly complex. The choices parents and kids face have grown exponentially. Parents face pressure to involve their children in as many opportunities as humanly possible. The real challenge is to strike a healthy balance in all this.”

Michelle Petty, director of Children and Family Ministries at Resurrection Lutheran in Tucson, Arizona, comments, “Two hurdles families face are time and technology. Kids today experience instant gratification for most of their needs and wants. Their lives are in constant motion. When they are not in school, they are at activities, and when they are being shuffled between practices

they are text messaging, e-mailing, and watching DVDs—all at the same time.”

Many families are exhausted from coping day to day with the impact of the economic crisis, child care, aging parents, educational pursuits, health issues, special needs, addictions, hunger . . . daily concerns without end.

## Simple Daily Act

How can church leaders respond with lively faith and also take seriously the cultural and daily realities affecting people’s lives? How can the church partner with the domestic church called “home” without adding to the guilt and demands on time that too many parents already feel? How can congregations practice faith when people gather, so that people are equipped when they scatter? How does a congregation create

a cross+generational, caring community essential for passing on faith?

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7 adults are instructed to “write these commandments... on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night” (*The Message*). Not extra time, but all the time! Sounds easy, but certainly not simple.

Acts 2:42-47 describes the spiritual practices of Jesus’ first followers this way: “They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, their life together, the common meal, and the prayers... They followed a daily discipline of worship in the temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuber-



## Two hurdles families face are time and technology. Kids' lives are in constant motion.

ant and joyful, as they praised God" (*The Message*).

These words may not exactly describe mealtime in our own homes or those where caregivers squeeze in a hurried meal between jobs, chores, chauffeuring, homework, and bedtime. Mealtime is often overlooked or even avoided as a means to cope with daily stress. It is rarely understood as a time and place to practice one's faith. Yet, what is more basic than sharing a meal?

Research and mental health experts consistently tell us that rituals and traditions, like those around sharing a meal, ground us and give us a sense of identity and belonging. The simplest of daily acts are the glue that keep us together in the midst of chaos, crisis, and especially in those times when there simply are no words.

### Family Dinner Table

An article in the 2006 issue of *Journal of Adolescent Health* summarizes the research around the correlation between eating meals together as a family and the promotion of healthy adolescent development, "Frequency of family dinner is a protective factor that may curtail high-risk behaviors among youth. Family rituals such as regular mealtimes may ease

the stress of daily living in the fast-paced families of today's society."<sup>1</sup>

A survey of 18-year-old National Merit Scholars, across all ethnicities, gender, geography, and class turned up a common thread in their lives: the habit of sitting down together at the family dinner table.

Last January I had the privilege of joining families for a Wednesday evening dinner at Joy Lutheran Church, Parker, Colorado. The tables were set with tablecloths and flowers. A hearty meal was prepared and served on real dishes! There was a wonderful "hum" in the room as people sat at round tables and talked. Children were comfortable sitting with adults other than their parents. Singles and elders blended into the mix. There was a "buzz" about the special cake that had been baked to mark this night as "extra" special.

I know from my days on staff of a suburban congregation that this midweek meal might be the only time all week that busy adults and kids sit and share a meal. The staff planning the evening did not assume that people knew one another's names or how to pray or engage in conversation, let alone do faith talk. This was more than a chow line. There were

lots of thank yous as people were caught serving one another. Multiple generations sharing food around dinner tables later gathered around the Lord's Table in the youth-led worship. The oldest and youngest present were honored. The simplest of routine tasks and interactions had been well planned. Nothing was taken for granted.

Upon a closer look at the meal served at Joy, it was a time for passing the peas as well as passing the faith. The Four Keys for nurturing faith, developed and named by Dr. David Anderson of the Youth and Family Institute, were taught and modeled during the meal:

- Caring conversation: Sharing highs and lows or "Where did you see God today?"
- Prayer/devotions: Formal, written, spontaneous, silly, sung
- Rituals and tradition: Any consistent practice, serious or silly, that defines us as a family or congregation
- Serving one another: No such thing as chores. Only acts of service and care for one another, our community, world, and earth.

Some people departed the evening feeling affirmed, saying, "We do this at home too." For others it was a rare or new experience. They left encouraged, believing, "We can try this at home." And for those who normally eat alone or in their room or not at all, this was a time of grace.

### Equipping Families

In the midst of the challenges that our twenty-first century congregations and families face, let's consider the kitchen table as a "training table" for daily life in Christ. Isn't this exactly what Martin Luther did as he invited peers and students of all ages to share a meal in his and Katy's home? I am absolutely certain there was prayer, Bible reading, acts of service (I hope Martin helped clear the table), and lots of conversation, sometimes contentious, maybe even outrageous! Luther reminds us, "In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life."<sup>2</sup>

### Training Table Tips

- Begin a "Mealtime Is Faithtime" all congregation and household campaign.
- Create cross-generational teams or "families" for kitchen crews and eating. For example, designate each table of 12 tables one month of the year. Sit at the table of the month in which you were born.
- Provide table tents and take-home resources for prayers and caring conversations.
- Ask a local restaurant for discount coupons. Discuss how one practices the Youth and Family Institute's Four Keys in public.
- Like at camp, print words of thanks on cardstock for all to see and sing them to familiar tunes. Place words on Web site. Sing in worship following communion.
- Serve others. Recycle. Go green. Identify and meet local needs. Prepare recipes and sell copies of *Food for Life: Recipes and Stories on the Right to Food*, a collection of global recipes, stories, and table blessings highlighting Lutheran World Federation and the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Available from Augsburg Fortress (800-328-4648).

Stephen Bouman, executive director of the ELCA's Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission program unit states, "All mission is local, and mission is about relationship. Every congregation is a mission station for the sake of the world."<sup>3</sup> Every congregation is called to support families and equip households with tools for living their faith in the messiness of daily life.

Yes, our changing culture can easily engulf us and overwhelm us. But remember the power of mealtime in the midst of uncertain times. Obviously, Jesus did!

## Endnotes

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The Youth and Family Institute, [www.tyfi.org](http://www.tyfi.org)

**Linda Staats** directs *HomeGrown Faith* (see [homegrownfaith.ning.com](http://homegrownfaith.ning.com)). She recently began work as an assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Household Ministry in the Rocky Mountain Synod. She can be contacted at [linda@homegrownfaith.net](mailto:linda@homegrownfaith.net)

## Resources

Bringing Faith Home, [www.bringingfaithhomeonline.com](http://www.bringingfaithhomeonline.com)

County extension offices, for example "Family Meal time," Cooperative Extension Service, University of Hawaii at Manoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, Honolulu; [www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/New/newsletters/FamilyMealTime.pdf](http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/New/newsletters/FamilyMealTime.pdf)

Make Mealtime Family Time, [www.makemealtimefamilytime.com](http://www.makemealtimefamilytime.com)

North Carolina Synod's Family Table Devotions at [www.lutheranyouth.org](http://www.lutheranyouth.org)

Search Institute, [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

Taking Faith Home, [www.tyfi.org](http://www.tyfi.org)

## Web Alerts

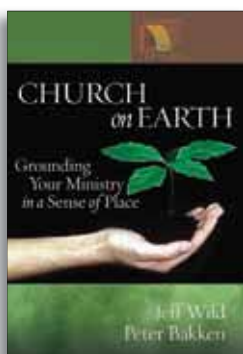
### Tech and Youth

Andy Arnold, a pastor and self-proclaimed geek, offers technologically savvy advice for making the best use of the Internet for building relationships with and among youth while avoiding potential pitfalls. Read "Tech and Youth: Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves" at [www.elca.org/lutheranpartners](http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners)

### Operation IDEA and God's Call

The Nebraska Synod's Operation IDEA, begun in 2002, is planting, growing, and cultivating a sense of call among our young people to consider service both in the church and our communities. Read "A Vocational IDEA Shaping Our Youth" by Lisa Kramme at [www.elca.org/lutheranpartners](http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners).

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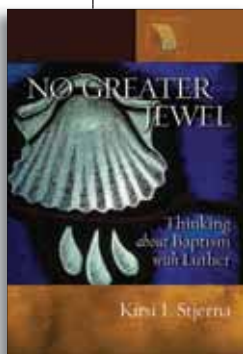
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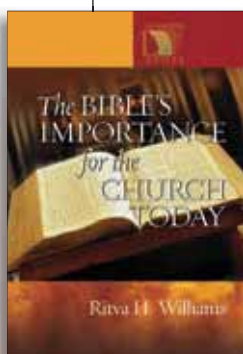
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# Ministry for the Sippy-Cup Set

Dawn Rundman

**Birth to three ministry, too often neglected by ELCA congregations, is a vital way to support young families in faith building—and helps congregations fulfill their own baptismal promises.**

WE'VE ALL SEEN A TRADITIONAL LUTHERAN baptism:

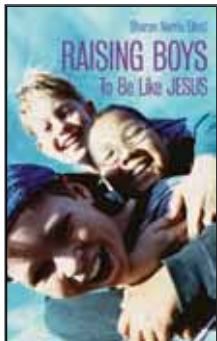
- Baby wearing the gown from three generations.
- Parents beaming despite lack of sleep the night before.
- Grandparents watching with teary eyes.
- Godparents, who drove in from out of town, holding their godchild with pride.
- Congregation reading the bulletin, learning the name of this new member.
- Pastor reading the words of baptism from page 227 (or 121, if they're still in the green book).
- Splash! Splash! Splash!
- Baby may wail or look with wide-eyed wonder or fuss a little or snore through the whole thing.
- Three splashes of water. God's word. We've just welcomed this little squirming person into the family of God.
- The family snaps pictures around the font with all different configurations of people holding Baby.
- The pastor gives the parents the candle and the certificate.
- Everyone goes out to brunch.
- And then, for most of these babies...

Nothing. No programming, no ministry, no staff person dedicated to early faith formation, no "Here's how to live out your baptism" tips, no parent classes, no Sunday school, no small groups, no playgroups, no Bible storytelling time, no prayer chains, no baptismal birthday celebrations. Only when the child turns three does the church formally welcome these children back into the congregation via Sunday school.

## Great Opportunity

What is going on here? Our church boldly welcomes babies into God's family. We proclaim the newly baptized baby to be a "fellow...worker with us in the kingdom of God" (*LBW* 125). We welcome the child "into the body of Christ and into the mission we share" (*ELW* 231). But an outsider looking at this practice of infant baptism might call us hypocritical. Initiation with great fanfare, and then no follow-through. In effect, we've said, "Welcome to the club, kid. See you in three years."

## Resources for Raising Children Today



### **Raising Boys to Be Like Jesus**

Sharon Norris Elliott; Foreword by Iva E. Carruthers  
In Jesus' example find sound advice for addressing tough parenting topics.

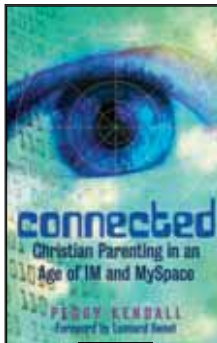
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### **Mothering Heights: A Novel Approach for Christian Mothers**

Keitha Smith and Susan Brereton  
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**In effect, we've said, "Welcome to the club, kid. See you in three years."**

The dearth of ministry for infants and toddlers and their families in the ELCA is a matter of concern, to say the least. We fail to equip parents to be the first priests for their children. We provide little support for those somewhat-hesitant parents who know their child is supposed to be baptized (maybe for the "fire insurance," maybe because the grandparents nag them into submission) but then don't attend church again until Christmas or Easter. We pass up the countless opportunities to begin faith formation at birth (or earlier) during the period of development when the human brain is most capable of being molded; when neural connections are forming at explosive rates; when development of language, emotions, cognitive skills, social behavior, and physical growth occur at rates that will never again occur in human development.

In short, if we want to make something stick (such as faith), why wouldn't we be viewing the first three years of life as the most remarkable opportunity to introduce children to the amazing love of God through stories, songs, parental support, fellowship, artwork, rituals, prayers, and other means of faith formation.

But our motivation is not just because targeting this age group for ministry is strategic or developmentally advantageous. Birth to three ministry offers every congregation the opportunity to live out Jesus' command to welcome a child. Birth to three ministry helps the congregation fulfill the promise it made to that newly baptized baby. And birth to three ministry taps into many people's gifts, sometimes in unexpected ways.

### **Where to Start**

Here are some ideas for opening up possibilities of birth to three ministry in your congregation:

*Connect with parents of young children.*

What do they need? Their responses may range from food and child care during events like Bible study to playgroups, Sunday school, or marriage retreats. Parenting young children can drain parents' energy, compromise their physical health, and challenge their marriage. The church is one of the few contexts

that can provide such a range of support to parents.

*Tap into resources in your congregation.* Chances are you have at least one member who is an early childhood educator or day-care provider. How could you involve her or him? Get to know what kinds of programs and early childhood education opportunities are available in your community. Do parents like playgroups? Ongoing parent classes? Periodic workshops or lectures on topics of interest? Connect those who have the gifts of child care and parent education with the parents who need them.

*Seek resources that support early faith formation.* Resources such as Milestone Ministry (The Youth and Family Institute), Faith Stepping Stones (Faith Inkubators), and *Splash!* (Augsburg Fortress) all include content specific for the birth to three period. You don't have to start from scratch—many ideas and resources are already available.

*Plan your response to frustrated members.* During worship, babies cry, toddlers move, and preschoolers talk. For those who seek a worship experience that is quiet and contemplative or who expect children to be seen and not heard, the presence of young children in weekly worship can be disruptive. A pastor's frequent, public welcome of infants and toddlers into the full life of the community is crucial for the success of birth to three ministry in your congregation.

*Get ready for babies and toddlers doing ministry.* The joyous squeals of an infant. The hug of a toddler. The manger scene drawn by a three-year-old. The gifts of hospitality, of wonder, of questioning, of joy. Children have marvelous gifts to offer our congregations if we are open to receiving them. We have much to learn from these young children if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven like them.

*Get ready to grow.* You're probably aware of congregations that are defying the trends of shrinking congregational size and lowered worship attendance. If you explore the reasons behind their growing membership, when *don't* you hear, "We have a lot of young families"? When you open up your congregation



to authentically welcome all followers of Jesus, young and old, parents of young children will notice. Parents of young children will join. Parents of young children will tell their friends, their neighbors, and the other moms in their playgroup. Parents have a keen sense of when their kids are welcomed by a place. (Just ask any parent if she or he would return to a restaurant without a high chair or kids' menu.) And their children know when they belong—no wonder “me too” is often one of the first phrases toddlers learn.

*Opening your doors to the sippy-cup set may feel like a risk. You may need to move out of your comfort zone into a place where you'll have to talk about diaper-changing stations and nursing areas. But the rewards of welcoming such little ones can be vast. Blessings to you in your ministry with infants, toddlers, and their families!*

**Dawn Rundman** is a senior editor at Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She specializes in resources for children, birth to three.

### Building Bible Literacy in Kids: Ten Ways

Helping kids and their families dive into God's word throughout the childhood years can be accomplished in many ways. Here are 10 to get you started:

1. **The Gift of God's Word:** Give age-appropriate Bibles and Bible storybooks to children. A range of options are available, from those for newly baptized infants to three-year-olds beginning Sunday school to third graders receiving their first Bibles.
2. **Equip Parents:** If the parents of young children feel inadequate in their own knowledge of Scripture, they may hesitate to read Bible stories to their kids. Model Bible storytelling during children's messages, fellowship time, and seasonal programs. Give tips in the bulletin, in newsletters, and at your Web site.
3. **Read the Bible in Public:** During worship, talk about reading the Bible, and then read the Bible. Yes, this sounds obvious, but how many times do kids see the lector carry a piece of paper up to the lectern rather than opening up a Bible to read the lessons?
4. **Tell Me a Story:** Retell a Bible story during the children's message. You can use your own words or read from a storybook. Reading the Gospel or the Old Testament text they'll hear in the service is a great way to give kids (and everyone else who's listening) a fresh take on the story.
5. **Read Any Good Books Lately?** Check out your book selection in the church library. A range of Bible storybooks that would be great additions in your library are available. (If your church does not have a library, consider starting a storybook collection for children.) If your church has worship bags, include board books with Bible stories and other faith-based stories.
6. **Bibles in the Pew:** Kids may see Bibles in the pew, but do they see anyone reading them? Invite everyone in the congregation to find Bible passages during the readings, the sermon, and other times when the Bible is read.
7. **Check out the Spark Bibles:** Augsburg Fortress has just released two new Bibles for kids. The *Spark Story Bible* is for kids ages two to seven. It contains vivid illustrations and 150 read-aloud stories that will make kids giggle, wonder, and say “Again!” The *Spark Bible* is an NRSV translation for third through sixth graders. It is packed with definitions, facts, questions, book introductions, four-color maps, and—an all-new feature—dozens of stickers for kids to put in their Bibles as they explore its pages.
8. **Equip the Nursery:** Some parents of young children spend lots of time in the church nursery. Provide Bible storybooks and story-based toys (Noah's ark, lambs, nativity sets) to create a faith-filled environment for children.
9. **Use Songs to Teach Stories:** Many kids' songs teach stories, from “Rise and Shine” to “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man.”
10. **Find the Stories in your Sanctuary:** Do you have colorful stained glass windows, paintings, sculptures, or other art in your sanctuary that tell the old, old story? Point them out to kids during children's messages, sermons, and other times so they can make a visual connection to the stories they hear.—**Dawn Rundman**



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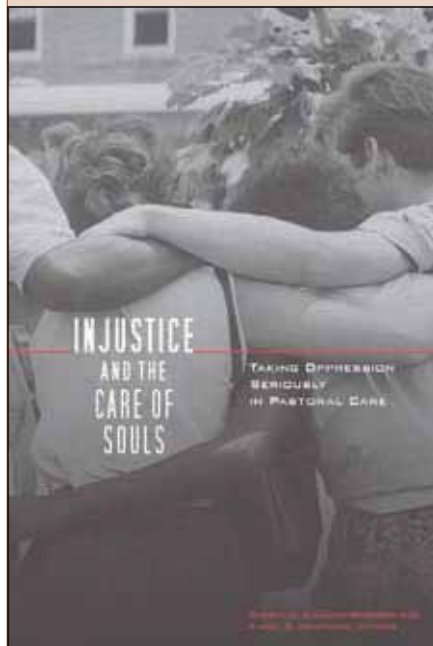
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# MEDIA REVIEWS Books, Web Resources

## Books

David von Schlichten, review editor

Raising children is awesome and aggravating, ominous and overwhelming, frantic and fulfilling (and that's all before the teen years). Thanks be to God for books that help us Christians raise children according to the promises we make at baptism.

One valuable teaching instrument is Martin E. Marty's **Baptism: A User's Guide (Exploring Christian Faith)** (Augsburg, \$14.99, 2008). With his signature combination of wit, accessibility, and far-reaching knowledge and erudition, Marty provides a nourishing introduction to the ancient and profound sacrament. With a dash of delight, he warns of the dangers of baptism. Baptism brings people into a new identity demanding risks in serving the neighbor and God. The book takes readers by the hand to reconsider the profundity and far-stretching significance of baptism, a sacrament that many Christians trivialize or even forget about shortly after the pictures are taken. Marty draws from the Confessions—especially the Small Catechism—to irrigate his reflections. He also provides questions for study and discussion. For pastors and laypeople who wish to rediscover baptism, Marty's book is invaluable.

The Bible is essential reading for the Christian raising baptized children, and **The Gospel of Grace: Tools for Building a Positive Understanding**

**of the Bible** by Mark Wickstrom (Beaver's Pond Press, \$13.95, 2008) serves as a helpful and amicable assistant, especially as a companion for those engaged in the Book of Faith Initiative. Wickstrom suggests that there are two main biblical hermeneutics. One is strictly literalist and contends that, if we readers discover that one part of the Bible is false, then all of it is. One falsehood causes a domino effect that leads to the exposure of the entire Bible as false. The other hermeneutic is selectivist, meaning that the reader interprets only some passages literally. The key image for this hermeneutic is that of a house that has as its framework the gospel of grace. In other words, for Wickstrom grace is essential to determining what passages in the Bible he interprets literally.

All throughout the book he draws from this house conceit. He contends that we Christians can approach the Bible as architects constructing our scriptural hermeneutic. For Wickstrom, the gospel of grace is the framework, while other passages may be more like rooms, having certain continuity but being that which we can remodel or repaint according to changing cultural norms. Still other biblical teachings may be like an old, ugly lamp, unappealing and no longer serving a purpose.

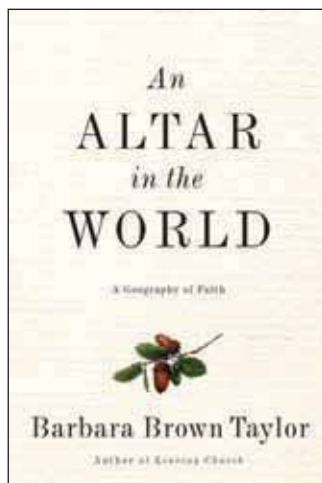
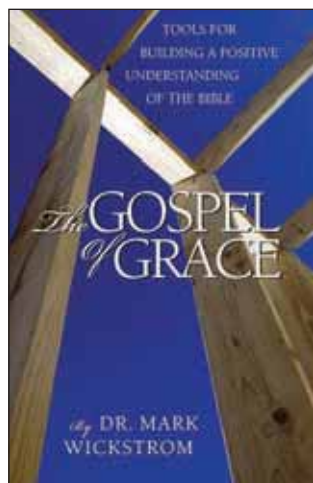
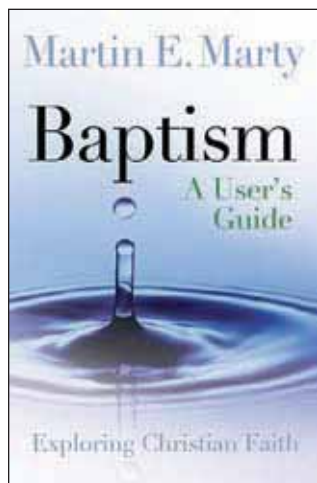
Wickstrom is careful not to force his conclusions about various ethical issues upon the reader, although it is clear that he believes that one needs to reinterpret biblical prohibitions in light of

the framework of grace. For instance, he believes that, according to this hermeneutic, practicing homosexuality is permissible for us Christians.

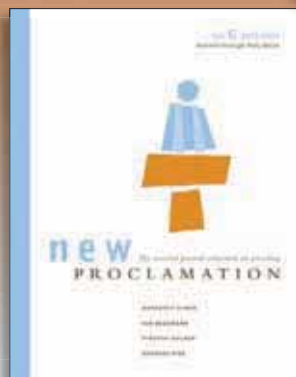
While one may disagree with Wickstrom's contention that we Christians can basically disregard certain passages, and while one may disagree with his conclusions about which passages contain timeless truths, nevertheless **The Gospel of Grace** does a concise and intelligent job of helping Christians understand better the different biblical hermeneutics. The book would provide salutary discussion for an advanced Bible study or for clergy and seminarians. The greatest strength of the book is the house conceit, a vivid image that can help biblical literalists understand the selectivist hermeneutic. It is indeed instructive to have such a book as we Christians scrutinize Scripture and then teach it to our children.

A third book that can aid in teaching us Christians about how to raise children as the baptized is Barbara Brown Taylor's **An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith** (HarperOne, \$24.99, 2009). With her usual poignant and wise eloquence, the world-renowned preacher and writer tutors readers in being attentive to God's presence and activity in the world, and not just in worship and other officially religious venues. Each of the 12 chapters focuses on a different practice of discerning God in the mundane. She avers that God comes to us humans in the physical, even the fleshly. She stresses

cultivating a more acute awareness of surroundings, of the miracles, large and tiny, which flutter and buzz around us. She encourages practices such as deliberately getting lost so as to discover new things, not worrying as much about destination and time. She reminds us of the holy value of saying no to others as part of keeping the Sabbath, and the spiritually therapeutic benefits of experiencing pain. To enrich and strengthen her lessons, Taylor draws from



# Preaching



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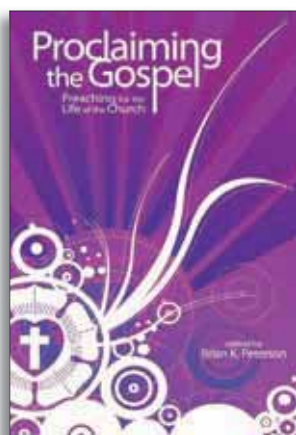
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Scripture. For instance, she meditates on Jacob dreaming of the angels ascending and descending. Just as he awakens and declares that he is in a holy place, so are we humans to recognize the holiness around us, now flickering, now blazing, now smoldering.

While the core principles of **An Altar in the World** are old, Taylor's enviable, graceful, and sensual style makes them new. This book will revive laypeople and, especially, pastors to appreciate with greater, holier attentiveness God and the world, and then to assist children in doing likewise.

Along similar lines is Eugene H. Peterson's **Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, \$24, 2008). Just as Taylor gives the reader lessons on experiencing God in flesh and everyday activity, the renowned Peterson (best known for his fascinating and stimulating paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*) guides the reader toward the holiness of everyday speech. Peterson contends that Jesus often speaks obliquely—or, in other words, a slant. (The book's title is from an Emily Dickinson poem that exhorts the reader to reveal truth indirectly.)

In the first part of the book, the author scrutinizes the travel narrative stretching from Luke 9–19 and the stories Jesus tells during this journey. These stories are not sermons but are indeed short stories, parables, and full of concrete, earthy, quotidian language. The book's second part meditates on Jesus' prayers, including Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, the High Priestly Prayer in John 17, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, and his prayers from the cross. As usual, Peterson is thoughtful, insightful, and poetic. His wisdom teaches the reader new ways to approach old stories and prayers, but the more important lesson is learning to embrace words with greater sensitivity and sacred selectivity.

We adults often do not embrace with adequate seriousness

and complexity the issues of children. These resources can expand our sophistication and sensitivity as we teach children—and they us—what it means to live as the baptized.

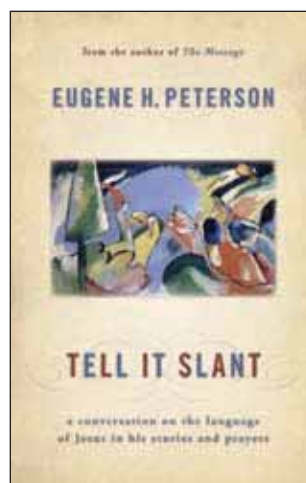
David von Schlichten is pastor of St. James Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Pennsylvania, and the book review editor of Lutheran Partners magazine.

## Guest Reviewer

Tracy Paschke-Johannes

"The cross is a multi-faceted jewel... which reveals the love of God like nothing else" declare Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears in **Death by Love: Letters from the Cross** (Crossway Books, \$19.99, 2008). Making their case for substitutionary atonement, Driscoll and Breshears argue that the pain and suffering of Christ's death are often ignored by theologians and laity alike. The authors write each chapter (similar to a Pauline letter), addressing it to individuals who are experiencing pain caused by a specific sin that either they have committed or someone committed against them.

The authors focus on the anguish of human brokenness before revealing Christ's role as healer to both the afflicted and the sin-filled. To the sex addict, Christ is Redeemer. To those tormented by past abuse, Jesus is Christus Victor. To a man left broken by his wife's infidelity, Jesus acts as a new covenant sacrifice. The power of **Death by Love** comes through as the authors address the high price paid by us (the sinner) and the even greater cost borne by Christ.





While a Lutheran readership may dispute the authors' distinctly Calvinist leanings, the book embraces the teachings of Martin Luther and the costly grace of Jesus. Even those who find fault with some of the authors' theology will find it helpful to consider the need to bring the sacrificial nature of Christ to the center of our teachings, including what we teach our children.

*Vicar Tracy Paschke-Johannes is the interim minister of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Muncie, Indiana.*

## Web Resources

**Jennifer and Seth Moland-Kovash,**  
review editors

## Internet Security

As parents and church communities strive to faithfully raise children in the twenty-first century, some challenges are the same as they have always been and some are new. Specifically, given this column's topic, we want to address the changing challenges that parents face with regard to Internet security. Don't have children of your own? While you might not be setting rules or guidelines, being able to have a conversation with

nieces, nephews, students, neighbors, and others can build relationships and allow for knowledge and information to be shared—both ways!

As with all aspects of raising children, communication and knowledge are the keys. Know what your children (or the children of your congregation) are doing online and set appropriate boundaries. Instant messaging (IM) may be a good way for your kids to socialize and even collaborate on homework assignments, but limits are appropriate. These limits can include the amount of time each day and the hours of the day (for example, no IM-ing after 9 p.m.). Some filtering software (see below) will allow all online chats to be recorded so you will be able to read them later. Make the decision appropriate for your family and make sure everyone understands the rules.

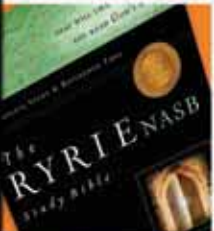
Many of the same questions and conversations apply to the use of cellular telephones and texting (while acknowledging that these technologies are not exactly Web resources). If and when your teen or preteen has a cell phone, you should be setting clear boundaries and rules about phone usage and text usage. These boundaries include payment plans as well as the time and usage questions laid out above.

Do the children in your life use Facebook, MySpace, Xanga, or other social networking sites? Again, they can be great tools. Our own congregation has a Youth Group Facebook group, and we as pastors communicate with adults and kids alike through Facebook. But look together with your children at their profile. Guide them to make appropriate decisions about privacy settings as well as the information they share. Would anything on their profile reveal their identity to a predator? Are there pictures of home and school that would be identifiable? Is there too much information with regard to address or phone number? Again, talk about these things and help your child make the appropriate decisions. Beyond safety, be aware of the potential for cyberbullying.

One tool that many parents use to help them to protect their children and to enforce the rules is filtering software. Many choices are available on the market. One very helpful overview and collection of reviews of some of the most popular choices is available at TopTenREVIEWS, [www.internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com](http://www.internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com). This comparison chart and similar research can help you make the appropriate decision for your family and for your computer setup.



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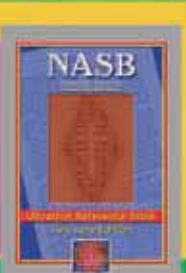
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Here are a few key questions and definitions that might help navigate the choices:

- Make sure you invest in filtering software that will work with your computer and browser. Some filters will only work with Microsoft Internet Explorer. If you or your family use the popular Mozilla Firefox browser, for example, not all filters will do the job.
- Decide whether you require filtering software that can block or filter chat sites, IM portals, and other specialized ways of interacting on the Web.
- Personal information blocking is an important feature for all of us. This prevents Web sites from collecting your personal information (name, address, credit card information) in automated ways that you wouldn't otherwise know about.
- "Dynamic categorization" may be a helpful feature. This allows a site to be filtered not only based on its address and what may be available there at one time, but the filter also changes as the site changes. For example, *cnm.com* may be completely appropriate at one time of the day but may be inappropriate at another time when the top news story of the day changes.
- As with most things, you get what you pay for, but also pay attention to how customizable the filter list is. The primary way these filters work is via keywords. How customizable is the

keyword list? For your child and your family, some words may be objectionable for some that are fine for others, and vice versa. Use these filters as tools and make them work for you.

- Check into the overrides available. Again, these tools are no substitute for an active and involved parent. Your child may be doing legitimate research for science class and be unable to access important information because of keyword blocks. How easily can you open things up to allow legitimate use?

The key in all of this, whether in filtering software, in social networking, or in chatting and IM-ing, is to use the Internet as a tool for research, communication, and community building. Parents, pastors, and congregations are still responsible for raising children in the twenty-first century and for teaching them how to protect themselves and to make faithful decisions. Opportunities and tools are available to help you do that in this technological world. The same basic tools of rules, trust, and communication serve as they always have.

**Jennifer and Seth Moland-Kovash** serve as co-pastors of All Saints Lutheran Church in Palatine, Illinois, and editors for Lutheran Partners and Lutheran Partners Online. More online resources can be found at [delicious.com/lutheranpartners](http://delicious.com/lutheranpartners).



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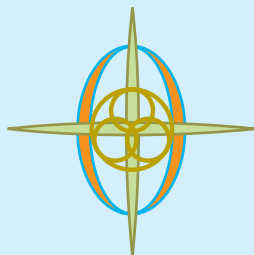
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# BOOK END



## New Orleans Moments

In a couple of weeks, “Jesus, Justice, Jazz” will be on the hearts and minds of ELCA youth who will be convening in New Orleans July 22-26 for the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering. Approximately 37,000 youth and adult leaders are registered for an event which is especially marked with opportunities for service and learning ([www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Youth-Ministry/Youth-Gathering.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Youth-Ministry/Youth-Gathering.aspx)). New Orleans has been a gathering spot for Lutheran young people in the past, including 1976 and 1997. In 1976 approximately 26,000 young people and adults leaders met at an “All-Lutheran Youth Gathering” housed in the Superdome Aug. 11-15 (photo shows floor of Superdome). Youth from The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod joined hands for this inter-Lutheran event. A similar pan-Lutheran youth event was held in 1973. (ELCA Archives and *The Wet Walk: Journey Book*, 1976)

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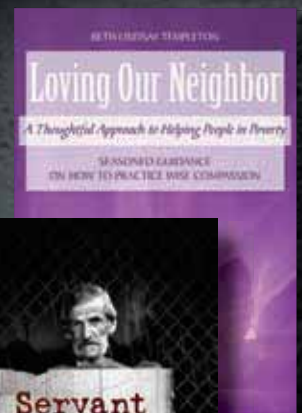
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