

## Growing up in the Christian Faith and Life: Some Practical Suggestions

In my letter this month I argue for making participation in the life of St. Elizabeth's a priority for you and your family. The very first promise parents and godparents make when they present a child for baptism is to "be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life (Prayer Book, p. 302)." But how do we actually do that?

I believe that the first element is for parents, godparents, and grandparents to believe that God is an essential element—not an optional supplement, but an essential element—in a healthy, balanced, sustainable life. As a parent, godparent, or grandparent you will lead, and teach, primarily by example. How can you turn a belief in the importance of church into specific terms? Here are some thoughts. Parents often make choices, set goals and limits, and choose paths for their children based on what the parents believe to be best for them. Church is one of the areas in which parental responsibility might be in occasional tension with parental popularity. The time that you spend in clarifying your own belief in the significance of an active and continuing membership in church for your family might make it easier to make the right, if not always the popular, choice about your child's progress towards maturity in the Christian faith and life.

- **Enroll your children in the choir.** (which is not quite the same thing as asking them if they want to be in the choir...) Choir is something like the Advanced Placement track in Church School—regular singing of hymns and anthems plants the words and basic concepts of the Christian faith in children in a way which will be available to them for the rest of their lives. Think of all the pop songs, advertisements, slogans, and jingles you remember from your youth—this is an age when just about everything "sticks." Why not use that for a larger purpose?
- **Sign your children up as acolytes.** OK, so not everything about the 10:00 am service is riveting for primary, or middle, school children. Jesus spent most of his time working with adults, and our liturgy follows a similar principle. But being closer to the action, and having an important part in presenting the liturgy makes it more interesting. Young brains seem to be taking in new things all the time—putting them close to the center of the liturgy is one way children can begin to absorb the meaning of worship long before they can understand or articulate that meaning.
- **Ask your child to mark the service music** (the "S" numbers) listed on the music board behind the pulpit. There are usually plenty of bulletin inserts for this purpose. And when those portions of the liturgy occur, hold the book with them and sing together.
- **Ask your child to mark the psalm** in the Prayer Book or find the readings in one of the Bibles in the pew rack in front of you. Page numbers for Bible readings are always listed in the 8:00 am order of service on the first page of the bulletin. The Prayer Book and the Bible become less intimidating the more familiar they become.
- **Treat attendance at church the same way you would handle attendance at school**—when you are clear about what is at stake in active church membership, I suspect this will get easier. My invitation to you is to put church into the category of things you think are essential for your child, and then act from that conviction.

- **Consider the 8:00 am service.** If you have a scheduling dilemma, the early service is always an alternative to the 10:00 am service (except for the Confirmation class).
- **Include your children** when you serve as an **usher**, host **Coffee Hour**, come to the fall or spring Saturday **Work/Fun Days**—they can be full partners in these necessary elements of our life together.
- **Ask them what they did at church today.** As you are singing the hymns, reading the psalm, listening to the lessons and sermon, think about what you might raise with them later in the day or the week. What made no sense to you? What reminded you of an issue in your home or our larger community? Look at the Collect of the Day and pick out a phrase—or even a word—whose meaning you can explore with your child.
- **Learning good church behavior is a valuable life skill** Learning to sit still, paying attention to when to stand, and to kneel, knowing what it is to pray and to confess, learning to sing, even something new, in a group, learning to follow the service in the bulletin—these are stepping stones to maturity and potentially valuable life skills. I see many young people in our congregation who take appropriate pride in their ability to take part in an experience with adult expectations. Review with them in advance what appropriate behavior in church is and reinforce with approval when they show that behavior.

Many of you may know other specific elements to support your child's progress towards spiritual maturity. I would welcome your ideas as well.

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