

# VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



CORNERSTONE  
IS A MINISTRY OF  
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
FOUNDATION

## Forming Young Christians, Not Just Educating Them

by Sharon Ely Pearson

I am a cradle Episcopalian. Sunday School was the place for children and we worshiped apart from the adults. My memories include coloring pictures, singing "Jesus Loves Me" and "Onward, Christian Soldiers." I received Holy Communion for the first time when I was confirmed at twelve years old in 1967. We wore white gloves and "head doilies," along with our paten-leather shoes. We memorized the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and "My Bounden Duty." My "instruction" was complete, and many adults would consider my experience a model to follow in 2002.

However, of the 25 sixth graders who were confirmed with me, I remember seeing only two of them after confirmation. There was no connection between what we were taught and who we were as Christians. Today I see some of this same history being replayed in many congregations. Churches are worried about having the right curriculum to teach in their Sunday Schools – for if the curriculum is right, the children will come, and the church will have a future.

But education is not the answer. It was not for me, it was not for my children, and it is *continued on page 6*

*Ensuring a vital church for future generations means that we have a healthy church now, with all ages fully participating in the life of a parish. Here we explore the topic of Christian formation for children, and what vestries might contribute to this essential process.*

## To Exorcise the Ambivalence about Children

by Jerome W. Berryman ©

An exorcism expels by adjuration (to command solemnly or to urge earnestly). It gets rid of something troublesome, menacing, or oppressive. It frees from an evil spirit. I want to exorcise the dangerous ambivalence many adults in the church have about children.

Ambivalence is holding two conflicting feelings at the same time about a person or thing. The word points to a psychological construct, which came into our language from the German *Ambivalenz* via Freud, especially as used in his *Totem and Taboo* (1914). Freud said that the originator of the term was Eugen Bleuler, Professor of Psychiatry in Zurich. He quipped that Bleuler knew a lot about this, since it dominated his response to Freud's own work.

The views about children in a typical parish range from passionate and single-minded advocacy to an unintended blindness. In general a "practical" bottom line develops. It is that adult concerns come first, because children have no power, no money, no experience, and a lower level of verbal thinking than adults do. All of these observations are largely correct although incomplete.

### A false bottom line

The bottom line also recognizes that children are the "church of the future" and that they might bring their parents and other adults to church with them. We, therefore, need to provide something that attracts them and we need to teach them to be nice, to be quiet, to *continued on page 2*

*This Issue:  
Christian Formation*



# To Exorcise the Ambivalence

*continued from page 1*

learn biblical facts, and to be informed about the church. These are not the classical Christian virtues. They are not the beatitudes. Jesus never preached salvation by facts alone. Being nice and being quiet do not serve either children or adults well as prime values. Why can't people get past this bottom line, then?

## **Both delight and irritation**

Ambivalence is the answer. It paralyzes our best thinking about children. It represses both delight and irritation about them. It causes an unconscious acting out of the pain inflicted by holding two opposing feelings at the same time. Deep feelings *for* children stimulate deep feelings *against* children and vice versa, even within the same person. We are caught feeling the need to take responsibility for children and the desire to flee from them for our own freedom.

This oscillating ambivalence needs to be exorcised, because trying to ignore the pain it causes will not heal the distortion.

## **Integrating childhood and maturity**

Jesus understood all of this very well. This is why he integrated childhood in his definition of a well-seasoned maturity.

There are eight primary "chunks" of scripture in the gospels, which show Jesus with children and record what he said about them. Three propositions for a theology of childhood can be developed from them:

1. Our journey of life is like children playing hide and seek. Sometimes God hides. Sometimes we hide. Neither player would play hide and seek with someone who is not there. God is the *Deus Absconditus atque Praesens*, hidden and yet present. This theme integrates the Old and New Testaments as well as childhood and maturity. (Lk. 7:31-35, Mt. 11:16-19) (John 3:3-8)

2. It is the silent child who teaches by being present who does not talk about the nonverbal communication system we are born with. The child shows us the possibilities of such communication, which we have forgotten because of our reliance on adult language to shape our world. The ontological appreciation of children can reawaken our awareness of body-knowing, which is fundamental to our health and to giving the context for our words. (Mt. 18:1-5, Mk. 9:33-37, Lk. 9:46-48) (Mt. 18:3, Mk. 10:15, Lk. 18:17) (Mt. 21:15-16) (Mt. 11:25-26, Lk. 10:21)

3. The relationship between adults and children is so fundamental to the health of both that Jesus shows and tells us about being a blessing to children who in turn bless us by showing God to us by their presence. An ethic of mutual blessing, therefore, is a matter of life and death. This is why Jesus spoke with indignation to the disciples when they tried to keep the children from him. It is why he said that those who cause the little ones to stumble ought to have millstones tied about their necks and be drowned in the depths of the sea. Horrible as that is, it is better than misleading children about blessing, which can lead to an empty and playless old age instead of wisdom. (Mt. 19:13-15, Mk. 10:13-16, Lk. 18: 15-17) (Mt. 18:6-9, Mk. 9:42-48, Lk. 17:1-2)

## **A mutual blessing**

To exorcise the ambivalence about children, first, admit in all thinking and dialogue that children need adults and adults need children to be fully human, regardless of one's lifestyle. Children have much to teach us and we have much to teach them. The ethic of this relationship is mutual blessing.

Second, establish a mutual-blessing "program" in your church. It does not cost anything. It takes no time to organize. The results can be amazing. Whenever you see a child at church get down at the child's eye-level, if you can. If you can't, make a profound bow. Then say slowly, "I'm glad to see you." It will change you, the children, and the church.

If we do this, the larger church can begin to take the lead in discovering and promoting healthy maturity (entering the Kingdom) for adults by mutual blessing. This will help save our species and planet, both of which are endangered. If we don't do this, then it doesn't matter what we do anyway.

*The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman is Director of the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston, Texas. The author of the Montessori-based Godly Play curriculum, he is also the author of numerous articles and books. His newest series of books, The Complete Guide to Godly Play, scheduled for publication in the fall of 2002 by Living the Good News (800-824-1813), fully explore the above topic in four volumes and provides ample means for mutual blessing. Reprint with permission only.*

*Some Awesome Materials and Curriculums!*

The Episcopal Children's Curriculum

Living the Good News

Godly Play

Seedlings

Lesson Plans for Small Congregations

CandlePress materials

Beulah Land materials

*Call the Cornerstone office for details*

# Four Things the Vestry Can Do For Your Parish Children

by Suzanne Guthrie

As a young Christian I found that a Rule of Life provided a balanced structure in which to grow in love of God and neighbor. These four suggestions form a little Rule vestries can embrace to nurture the children of your parish.

## Prayer

Provide tools for children to develop a personal devotional life. **When they enter second grade, give them a Book of Common Prayer.** Encourage them to underline their favorite prayers and psalm lines and to write in the end pages prayers they love that are not in the book, their own written prayers, or lists of sad psalms, pilgrim psalms, penitential psalms. Show them the prayers for preparing for Communion and give them even more – how about using Psalm 84 while they are waiting for church to start? How about Psalm 150 after they come back from communion?

Provide workshops for parents and god-parents on prayer, meditation, lectio divina, silence, and observing the liturgical seasons in the home.

## Study

Provide a paperback study Bible in the translation you use liturgically for every family in the parish. **Provide a DK Children's Bible (approx. \$20) for every family (ideally every child).** Selina Hastings and Eric Thomas, *The Children's Illustrated Bible*,

DK Publishing. The DK Bible has excellent pictures, maps, artifacts, historical references, and the STORY.

Episcopal liturgy is a feast for the senses, but much of what happens in our worship is lost when we can't bring the chronological story of salvation into the liturgy personally. You might publish in your bulletin not only the lectionary citations for the coming week but corresponding pages in the DK Bible. Why not publish a reading program from Genesis to Revelation that everybody is reading at the same time? When your average six year-old can cite the qualities of 150 Pokemon characters, you are already missing the deep hunger for community of the biblical family members our children crave.

While many of our schools become more and more like prisons, the church can and should be a place of wonder, mystery, curiosity, learning, imagination and profound play in the deepest sense. Children are natural theologians. Provide a trip to an observatory. Find a parishioner with a microscope that can show the children brain cells or blood cells and let them wonder aloud at the glory of God. Let your parish be a school of prayer where children can explore Divine Love with mind and soul and heart. Let them sense that learning in the church is something to grow into...not out of.

*continued on page 5*



*How can we expect our children to know the Ten Commandments if we do not know them ourselves? Teach them the Commandments, the saints, the Doxology; sponsor a contest to learn Bible verses, give them their own Bible and tell them to mark it up.*

## Editor's Note

Preparing this issue for publication was a bit like learning about cell structure in high school biology. You think you see it clearly at first, but the more you study it, the deeper and more profound it gets.

That describes a bit of my experience in working with the writers for this issue. I have become convinced – and a bit astounded – at the extraordinary network of resources we have in the church for the Christian formation of children, not the least of which is the local parish community.

In addition to articles, several writers have also sent their favorite books, concise definitions of Episcopal curricula, websites with dynamic ideas and more. I wish we could print them, but space limitations prevail. If you would like copies of that information, call the Cornerstone office at (877) 644-9941 or email [VestryPapers@aol.com](mailto:VestryPapers@aol.com).

*-Lindsay Freeman*

**Next issue: Best practices of ministry**



## CHILDREN BELONG IN CHURCH

# Building Great Kingdoms

by Caroline Fairless

Stephen Charleston described his first few months as Bishop of Alaska as a proclamation of good news. And the news? "We have no money," he told his scattered congregations, flying from village to village, "We can do anything."

Such was my experience upon arriving as vicar of Holy Family Church in Half Moon Bay, California in the winter of 1992. No money, no resources – add to that a cadre of exhausted Sunday School teachers – and, therefore, an unparalleled opportunity. The image that came to mind was, and still is, of the building of great kingdoms with nothing but paper clips, wooden blocks and duct tape.

In our case, the invitation was to the design of a liturgy that could serve the entire community, including our children (there were few) and youth (one). "I've got good news" became the mantra and bedrock of our liturgical life. Our commitment was to design worship to which everyone would come, a classic example of a practice arising from need, the theological understanding coming later.

### A resounding "we will!"

What might it mean, I wonder, to say a resounding "we will!" to the baptismal question, "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" (BCP, p. 303). Life in Christ means little if we are talking about marginalizing children in the regular worship life of the community.

In her book *Callings*, Caroline Westerhoff writes, "we have no business asking promises of people that we will not assist them in keeping." How, then, can parents or godparents be responsible for the things asked of them – the upbringing of a child in the Christian faith and life? How diminished is the Christian life if it is not to include regular corporate worship? What does it mean, "by prayer and witness" if the witness is not to include all of the members of the Body?

Children belong in church with the community of faith. If our common liturgical

experience is not designed to include and make room for our young, then we must reconsider and redesign our worship so that it does. In that commitment lays the beginning of the journey, not the journey's end.

### Needing children among us

In celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr., nine year-old Matthew, in a Boston Sunday School, wrote this poem:

*He imagines a picture, a most inspiring image  
and like the soar  
of flames and the black wood and charcoal  
shot up  
of the scream of the man's cry  
and lying in the sky  
moaning in the wind  
near his death  
with the sound of the gun that shot him in the  
daytime  
But he keeps vision  
over America  
with his word.*

We need this child among us. We need this voice, not in some dark basement classroom, but within the body of worship. This is the voice of a visionary, a prophet, and we dampen it by our exclusion and segregation.

Take Raymond, whose habit it was to draw, with thick black magic marker, violent explosive scenes. One day he left a hole in the center of his page and filled it with Elmer's glue and gold glitter, writing underneath, "God is the light that cannot be touched, harmed or overtaken by the darkness of the world."

Or his younger brother Geoffrey, who, when he claimed his place at the altar for the first time, during the prayer of consecration, spoke in total outrage, "You mean He died?" When, I wonder, was the last time the rest of us were surprised by this death?

### Worship for the whole community

Is it possible to design worship that serves entire communities, including children and  
*continued on page 5*



*Almighty God, heavenly  
Father, you have  
blessed us with the joy  
and care of children:  
Give us calm strength  
and patient wisdom as  
we bring them up, that  
we may teach them to  
love whatever is just  
and true and good,  
following the example  
of Jesus Christ our  
Lord. Amen.*

The Book of Common  
Prayer, page 829

# Four Things the Vestry Can Do

*continued from page 3*

## Community

**Develop a plan to incorporate every Baptized child into every aspect of community life.**

Even a very small child can lovingly polish a chalice. Let your children be on the Altar Guild – teach them the prayers. Let them reverently clean the church alongside adults – listening to sacred music or using meditation techniques complimentary to work. Teach them about hospitality and let them help with coffee hour and dinners, ushering, and hosting guests. Teach them the etiquette of talking to everyone at coffee hour and other social skills. I met a child in the Virgin Islands that had a tuxedo from a wedding. When it was his turn to usher, he always wore his tux, to the delight and pride of the parish. Children given mature responsibilities will be mature.

Be sure to follow diocesan guidelines with regard to avoiding situations of potential sexual misconduct.

## Mission

**Include children in outreach.** Encourage participation in the soup kitchen rotation, food pantry, blankets for the homeless,

letter-writing. If your church does not have a program of mission and ministry to the wider community and the world, have them participate in another program – Habitat for Humanity, a neighboring church or synagogue program. Be sure to help them bring world and local issues of justice and peace back into their own prayer, study, and intercessions. Perhaps the parish community could have an intercession bulletin board on which there is a map of the world upon which to post newspaper articles, the Anglican cycle of prayer, prayers for peace, pictures and drawings.

You can see the above suggestions form a Rule of Life – from the interior life to exterior service, a plan for growing deeply and widely in Christian practice. Perhaps your vestry can compose an open ended Rule of Life to live and share in community together.

*The Rev. Suzanne Guthrie is the author of Praying the Hours and Grace's Window. She is a chaplain at Vassar College and leads retreats and programs throughout the United States. Suzanne is currently editing a book of hours and devotions for children.*



*General Convention has asked each diocese and parish to study "A Children's Charter" for the Church and how it impacts every ministry and program within the life of the church. For copies of the Charter or to learn about the many resources for children offered through the Episcopal Church Center, call the Rev. Robin Szoke at 800-334-7626.*

---

# Building Great Kingdoms

*continued from page 4*

youth? Is it possible for a church that understands itself as liturgical?

It is not only possible but invigorating and revitalizing. Transformative, in fact. It is possible to tell the biblical story as it is meant to be told – in narrative and dramatic fashion that quickens the heart and reminds us what it means to hold our own story within the tapestry of the God story.

It is possible to learn to pray from the deep places in our hearts, not as a cerebral exercise, but as Jesuit theologian Martin Smith insists, from the muddy places, "from the guts." It is possible to gather at the table for a meal in which we each have a part. Possible to clothe our sanctuaries with the visual and performing arts of the people.

Congregations across the country are rethinking their common liturgical life. Perhaps your congregation is one of them. Wherever you find yourselves in these essential deliberations, there are organizational and consulting resources to help.

*The Rev. Caroline Fairless is the founding Director of Children at Worship ~ Congregations in Bloom, Inc., ([www.childrenatworship.org](http://www.childrenatworship.org)), an organization committed to the design of worship that includes all ages. She is the author of Children at Worship: Congregations in Bloom; Hambone and Confessions of a Fake Priest. She is also the co-producer of the CD: New Voices/Ancient Words, all published by Church Publishing, Inc.*



**CORNERSTONE**  
**IS A MINISTRY OF**  
**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
**FOUNDATION**



**Director, Cornerstone**

The Rev. L. Ann Hallisey  
 (877) 644-9941

[ahallisey@EpiscopalFoundation.org](mailto:ahallisey@EpiscopalFoundation.org)

**Editor**

The Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman  
[VestryPapers@aol.com](mailto:VestryPapers@aol.com)

**Editorial Assistant**

Karen Greenfeld

**Subscriptions**

\$25 annually, sent in packages of 15 copies per issue. *Vestry Papers* is published 5 times a year: February, April, June, October and December.

Call the Cornerstone office at (877) 644-9941 to subscribe.

# Forming Young Christians

*continued from page 1*

not for our children now. I was not only educated in Sunday School – I was *formed* by my experiences in a Christian community. Having relationships with adults outside my family, participating in the worshiping community, and sharing my gifts with others were what formed me as a Christian.

*Christian Formation.* These words are being used more and more in place of Christian education. And it is the future of our Church. Healthiest and most energized of all are those parishes that view ministries with children as formational – not just educational. The Christian community promises to support the newly baptized in their new life in Christ. How?

**Participation and practice**

Christian formation involves participation and practice. First and foremost, children need to participate in the communal rites of the church. To see a child's tiny hand reach out for the bread of the Eucharist while being fed alongside an elder shows children they belong to a community, not just a family.

Second, all that we see, touch, taste, smell and hear as well as the arrangement of space in which we gather influences us. We shape our space, and it shapes us. Whatever rooms or spaces children gather in for worship, fellowship, or study, the space (and what is put into it) encourages or discourages particular actions and interactions. Our environment helps form us.

Third, the organization of our communal life forms us. By participating in service opportunities within the parish and in the greater community, children are able to live out the Gospel, making a connection between the

words of Jesus and our own actions in the world. Life in (and outside) the congregation should be a sign to the world of what life in God's reign looks like.

We learn to pray by the practice of prayer; we learn to care for others by the practice of caring. We learn to respect the dignity of every person by the way we talk and listen. As Maria Harris states in *Fashion Me a People*, "the church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program."

**Formation over a lifetime**

The Christian education of our children cannot take place in a 45-minute Sunday School lesson. It is learned, experienced, and lived in a Christian community that views itself as a whole formative process-taking place over a lifetime. It is continuous. It is integrated. The message of Jesus Christ and God's love and forgiveness will live in the child who experiences the meaning of living out the breaking of bread in a broken world.

Yes, I was educated in the Episcopal Church. But I was also formed, and continue to be so – through the power of the Holy Spirit in arenas of education, worship and living out the Gospel – all of them the bedrock for Christian formation.

*A former vestry member, Sharon Ely Pearson is the consultant for Christian Education for the Diocese of Connecticut. She is a certified Godly Play teacher, EFM mentor and a Master's degree candidate in Christian Education at Virginia Theological Seminary. She also represents the dioceses of Province One on the Episcopal Council for Christian Education.*

## Resources

- *Children: A Heritage From the Lord* (video with guide) – model dioceses program for Children's Ministries (Episcopal Parish Services)
- *Called to Teach and Learn: A Catechetical Guide for the Episcopal Church and Discovering Called to Teach and Learn* (Episcopal Parish Services)
- *Creative Christian Education* by Howard Hanchey
- *I Love to Tell the Story* by Lois Stephens
- *The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Education* by Joseph Russell
- *Offering the Gospel to Children* by Gretchen Wolff Pritchard
- *Fashion Me a People* by Maria Harris
- *Sharing our Biblical Story* by Joseph Russell
- *In Dialogue with Scripture: An Episcopal Guide to Studying the Bible* edited by Linda Grenz
- *God, Kids & Us: The Growing Edge of Ministry with Children and the People Who Care for Them* by Janet Marshall Eibner & Susan Graham Walker

– Sharon Ely Pearson