

June 2012
E-newsletter

WHY SHOULD CONGREGATIONS DO PARENT EDUCATION?

Obviously, I am wildly biased about this issue. I have been a parent educator in my congregation for 33 years. Yes, for 33 years, every Wednesday of the month, every month of the year.

WHY IN A CHURCH? In my geographic area, there is wonderful parent education available in community education. Why should congregations undertake this as a ministry? Parenting is so much more than toilet training, please and thank you, and learning to share. Parenting is a quintessentially spiritual journey, for parent and child alike.

WHY PARENTING? Who else is going to teach you how to discipline, as discipling; model confession and absolution with your child; help your little one or your not-so-little one find God in their story and themselves in God's story? Who else is going to affirm the values and priorities that are so counter cultural, and so faithful? Who else will help you build a network of parents to brainstorm, support, celebrate, and journey together? Who else will support parents as they live the hardest, most important vocation in God's world - raising God's children to become all they were created to be.

WHAT DO YOU COVER? Find out what your parents would like to know more about and follow their lead. Discipline, communication, childhood fears, healthy eating, sleep, learning to share ... all of these and so many more will surface. No place else in their world is going to teach them how to pray and worship with their children, how to read scripture (yes, children's Bibles count!) with kids, how to do service together in Jesus' name, and how to braid God-bearing rituals and traditions into everyday life.

WHEN? Do it when parents are available and when you can find a facilitator to run the class. Do it for at least an hour; an hour and a half is even better. Do it regularly and frequently. Make it predictable.

WHERE? If there is room in your congregation, that is ideal. Comfortable chairs are lovely. Coffee or ice water is a hospitable touch. Name tags help the group to bond.

WHAT ELSE TO INCLUDE? You can certainly do a parent-child interactive class, and skip a nursery. Providing a loving, nurturing nursery for the children is a gift to parents. I have done one with parents, who are free to speak candidly about the challenges and heartaches, as well as the delights and triumphs of parenting. We cover lots of material and ideas. Perhaps most importantly, parents have "time off" to just be, to drink a hot cup of coffee, to enjoy time with other adults, to build great parenting skills, and to listen for God's presence in family life.

IN WHAT FORMAT? Do it as a class. Offer an ongoing parent support group. Create a series of adult forums. Consider a retreat or a family camp. Just do something. Do it regularly. Build community and network.

WHO CAN DO IT? I was trained as a high school English teacher, with only one college course on Child Psych. But I was a parent of three preschool children, who read like a maniac, wanted to do it better than I knew how to do it, and needed some company along the way. Find one or

two parents or other caring adults, who want to learn about parenting and support parents on the journey. Find a book to read together. Open with prayer and a devotion. Wonder together about what God might be doing with you and your children.

WANT TO EXPLORE OPTIONS? Contact Marilyn Sharpe.