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Called To Community: A Scriptural Model Of Religious Education For All Of God's People With Special Concern For The Mentally Retarded

Brenda Richer
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CARROLL COLLEGE

CALLED TO COMMUNITY:
A SCRIPTURAL MODEL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
FOR ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE
WITH SPECIAL CONCERN FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

BY

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MARCH, 1981

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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for

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Psalm 37:5: "Commit to the Lord your way; trust in him and he will act."

Thank you, Lord.
INTRODUCTION

"I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33)

"You are the heirs of the covenant." (Acts 3:25)

You will note the personal nature of much of this paper. I am a person who is constantly relating to and drawing forth a response from others as I reflect. Since I am in the image of God and it is his nature to reveal himself and to be in an "I - thou" relationship with his people it is rather natural that this paper be of a personal, relational nature. We are called to relate, called not to isolation but to community, a relationship of persons to each other and to God.

The New American Bible is the scriptural translation selected for reference in this paper.
CHAPTER I

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION;
WHERE AND WHEN DOES IT TAKE PLACE?

Religious education for many conjures up the image of children receiving "religious instruction." This is an extremely limited horizon associating religious education with childhood and crippling the possibilities and potential for Christian maturity as well as the authentic Christian community to which we are called as the Body of Christ.

Children will perceive this crippling outlook and will themselves value religion as an asset for immature people, much like we convince a child to eat his spinach because it will help him grow, presuming that adults neither have the taste nor the need for it. Children recognize such attitudes for what they are and become skeptical of parents and teachers whose "religious policies" for their children do not coincide with their own personal practice and lifestyles.

Rather, religious education must be presented in such a way that the revelation of God himself in the history of man is not a "thing" outside of himself, but that God is, was and always will be revealing himself in the present conscious experience of people. Revelation is a constant personal relationship between God and his people, Jesus being the recipient of God's self-gift. Through his life, death and resurrection we come to understand the personal, relational nature of God.
Gabriel Moran says in his book, *Catechesis of Revelation*:

What must first be made clear is that the history we speak of in reference to Judeo-Christian revelation is not a collection of facts recorded in the past and handed down in books. Man is the being who makes history and history is man's self-understanding in time. Because history is not a collection of things outside man, because man is his history, then to say that God has entered history is to say that he enters into a personal relationship with man, that is, with every man in the structure of his real life situations. There is history in Christian revelation and there must always be history in catechizing, not because God chose a good gimmick, but because God chose man. To learn of God's revelation is to discover God and man together, not an abstract humanity but the present person in the self-awareness of his own historical existence. Each person recommences with fundamental and unpredictable newness the dialogue with God. Just as the Jews of old discovered God in their historical experience, the Christian student of today can discover God only through the experience of his own situation of space, time and community. The history in which God reveals himself is not only that of the Jewish people in the dim past, but that of the child in 20th century America.

For children, as well as adults, this experience must become personalized through their experience in a believing community in which everyone and everything in creation is capable of being a revelatory instrument of God. Revelation does not take place in a book but in the conscious, free experience of people in community. For most people to discover the God of Jesus is to discover him in the love of another human being, in the face of a believer, or in the longing of their own hearts. The experiences are clarified and personalized when the message is delivered and experienced. That God is love, that Jesus is the presence of God in our human community, that this God is a personal, caring, sharing, relating God who desires to be one with his people, who desires that we know him and freely respond to his great love are signs of his relational nature. The covenant rela-
tionship, "I will be your God; you will be my people," is an "I - thou" relationship of interpersonal communion.

When it is said in religious education that we should begin with the concrete we need not only think of something material and imaginable, but also of the personal experience of the person in relation to others. The meeting between persons is the concrete experience on which religious instruction is based, and through which we come to understand a personal God through Jesus Christ. We must not simply tell children that it is a good thing to worship God; they need to see and experience a Christian community which manifests unmistakably that it means something.

A child need not be told that love is the greatest of all virtues; they must see it in the flesh. They must experience it in the larger faith community of adults and children, and among themselves, their peers. Unless children see the words we mouth expressed in the lives of teachers, parents and the community of believers, all verbalism will be futile.

Joseph Russell, in his book, Sharing Our Biblical Story, indicates the need to not "teach" the faith, but to help both child and adult feel themselves to be part of the revelation of God's creative action in the whole history of man through sharing the faith story. Through Scripture, liturgy and the mutual sharing in community, faith is learned as it is experienced within the community. The story of God's revelation of himself, his dialogue with man and his creation, becomes the history of our people, a people of faith, past, present and future. His presence is revealed in our individual life story as well as in the biblical "salvation history" of God's people.
What is religious education all about? It is a means of relating God's revelation of himself to us, his openness to us, and enabling others to make a response to him.

It is not faith, not a rival to faith, but a compliment to it.

It aims to give some precision to our concepts of God so that we can articulate our faith experience with a God who is constantly revealing himself in history through events and the lives of his people.

It is not simply an academic discipline nor simply an intellectual assent to a body of doctrine, but it is the pointing out and the living out of a way of life consistent with the Gospel and consistent with the relationship to which we are called with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In considering this way of life consistent with the Gospels the question of value emerges. Value may be expressed as an ideal which ought to be pursued. There are two aspects to value:

1. the intellectual aspect concerned with knowledge, and
2. the affective aspect concerned with the experiencing, living, and acting out of that knowledge.

Values do not exist in a vacuum; both aspects must exist in a "creative tension" if one is to have values. Values are not imposed externally but freely chosen from an inner locus of control, knowledge and conviction. Our present and our future are not part of a plan mechanically manipulated by God, but are born out of our free response to God. This should indicate to us that we are not provided with a magical bag of tricks, or answers to every situation, but that since every situation is a possibility of the revelation of God it is
necessary to freely respond to God in that situation, allowing the transformation of our minds and action to open the door to greater understanding and deeper meaning of the revelation of God in our own experience and that of our students.

When and where does religious education take place? Religious education will come from the faith community, from the people God is fashioning in his own likeness as a community of faith, hope and love. It will happen whenever we delight in the revelation of God to us in creation, in relationships, in our own personal histories as we see the truth of our own historical lives and that of the community in relation to God. It will happen when we affirm the uniqueness of each individual, for in Christ each person reaches full awareness of himself, his destiny, his undreamed of potential as he becomes all that God has in mind for him to become. It happens in dialogue, in the sharing of a personal message, in every act of love and fidelity, rather than contempt or rejection. It happens when we see the whole of man's world as expressive of God's revelation in Christ, when everything by the grace of God becomes capable of revealing the presence and the life of God in our history and in our present-day life, now, today. It happens whenever and wherever we proclaim Jesus as Lord by word and action and live our lives consistent with the Message in classrooms, on the streets, in our homes, in the Christian community and among friend and stranger. Religious education takes place at all times and in all places. It is the way of helping each person live their whole life in Christ (Romans 10:8-15).
FOOTNOTES

Chapter I


2 Ibid., p. 77.

3 Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER II

LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME

MARK 10:13-16; MATT. 18:1-5

The attitude of the disciples in this Gospel story seems to be that the Lord's time was far too valuable to be wasted on children. The Greek text says that the people "kept bringing" the children to Jesus. Had they been turned away before? Were the parents becoming insistent that their children share in the message of this man and receive his blessing? Jesus' response was indignation that anyone should keep the children from him, and he issues the prohibition to "stop forbidding" them to come to him. He did this because the kingdom of God, present and spiritual, is made up of such persons. While the age of the children is suggested by the words, "...he took them up in his arms and blessed them," we are also admonished in Matthew 18:1-5 that except we ourselves become as little children we shall not enter the kingdom of God. It seems important to recognize that we are all children of God by adoption and grace (Ephesians 1:4-5), and as children we must always remain open to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in our fellow man, in creation and in history.

What are some of those child-like qualities that are to be nurtured in children and adults alike? The ability to live in the present, not to brood over the past and stew about the future; the ability to enjoy wholeheartedly what one is doing at the moment; the ability to become excited over small things; the ability to be optimistic, to face difficulties with hope and courage; the ability to be unashamed of one's emotions, to accept them, to express them instead of suppres-
sing them; the ability to be open to the possibilities of
the present and the future.

The television programs of today are most suggestive of the models our children are emulating. Ask any child what his favorite program is and you will have an idea of the model he has chosen for himself. As Christian parents and Christian educators we must present the model of Jesus to others in our own lives, in our action, in our teaching. That model is one of radical openness and relationship to the Father, whom Jesus called "abba," daddy. It is one of radical openness and relationship to others and to his world. Though the Hebrew people had an understanding of God as Father, Jesus was the first to so boldly address the Father as "daddy." In indicating his own constant state of intimacy with God Jesus showed us that God wants to be intimate with humanity. The model of Jesus expresses in his own person what is less realized in every human being, the potential of every person to be radically one with God and with man. Jesus models for us the God for whom we are searching and the God we desire to reveal to children and to the world; a God of pathos, caring and pouring himself out; a relational God totally involved in his creation, in our lives; a God in dialogue with his people as we become a community of faith, hope and love; a God who calls us to intimate personal relationship.

This is the model we desire for our children, a model of powerless love which does neither manipulate nor destroy the uniqueness of our personhood, but enriches us and empowers us to fulfill our potential of oneness with God and others. It is this God that we desire to reveal and model in our lives and in our teaching.

As Jesus is the model of a life of openness to God and man, he is also our teaching model. Jesus was a master
teacher. His parables of the sower and of the growing seed indicate his awareness of the development of understanding and readiness to learn. Jesus' own life was one of growth and development as the Scripture indicates in Luke 1:80:

"...the child grew and developed in body and spirit."

Once a seed is planted, it grows by itself, just as the growth of the kingdom of God eventually grows within once the seed has been planted. God plants his kingdom in us and in his creation. Sometimes the growth seems slow and imperceptible, but God's kingdom is happening nonetheless. It is God's creative power in us that brings life to fruition, that brings us along developmentally in our understanding of ourselves, our world, and of God's revelation of himself through Christ in his creation.

"The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit; first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain."¹

That is the history of the covenant relationship in the Judeo-Christian tradition. A God who says, "I will be your God. You will be my people;" a God who plants the seed of his Spirit within man and breathes life into him; a God who gives totally of himself, becoming man for our sake, so that in Christ we can become the full-grown grain.

It is the story of the child that Jesus blesses when he says, "Let the children come to me," and he nurtures the seed of the kingdom within them so that they may grow and develop and bear more fruit. The following are the characteristics of Jesus' teaching ministry which nurture this growth and development:

1. He loved each person he encountered and showed concern for their needs and interests.
2. He instructed at the student's level of knowledge and experience.
3. He did not teach only the highly motivated or "well-
behaved."
4. He was not afraid to believe in people when others ignored or despised them.
5. He did not squelch the personality of those he taught; he recognized their individuality and personal potential.
6. He taught through example and experience.
7. He taught not only to impart those facts which must be dormant in the minds of his people, but also to transform their lives.

In examining the teaching methods of Jesus, there are four basic learning processes exposed: 1. the starting point, 2. a significant experience, 3. reflection, and 4. assimilation. The characteristics of his teaching ministry correlate with the basic learning processes:

1. The Starting Point

The starting point is the sum of all past learning. It is the person's present state, the developmental stage of a child, the psychological and inner readiness and openness to learn at any age.

Jesus loved each person and showed concern for their needs and interests. (Do we show unconditional love for our students, or do we set conditions and limitations on our love? Do we take time to know them, their needs and interests as individuals?)

He instructed at the student's level of knowledge and experience. (Do we recognize the stages of inner readiness for learning a skill or the more special aspects of learning and living a faith relationship? Do we offer a program of religious education that is in touch with the developmental stages of the student? Are we aware that in-
structing at the student's level is necessary, whether that student is 3, 13, 38 or 83?) Psychology and the social sciences have given us much knowledge of the stages of development over our entire lifespan in the areas of cognitive, affective, psycho-motor, as well as the moral and spiritual dimensions. It would be wise to investigate these studies since we know the model of Jesus to imitate in teaching to the student's level.

Jesus did not teach only to the highly motivated or the well-behaved. (Do we cultivate relationships with students who are interested in what we have to say, ignoring those who seem lazy, apathetic, disinterested? Do we look for the teachable moment at all times and in all places, reminding ourselves of Paul's exhortation to Timothy to "... teach the word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance, in season and out, when it is convenient and when it is not." (II Timothy 4:2, LB paraphrase)? Do we, by example, show a model of behavior to our students that is worthy of imitation, and do we firmly but lovingly work with them to change by their own free choices those behaviors that are not consistent with the model of Jesus, the model of love? Have we provided the stimulation and experiences to motivate learning and reinforce changed behaviors?)

Jesus was not afraid to believe in people when others ignored or despised them. (What have we done to meet and affirm the basic needs of every person, child and adult alike?) Abraham Maslow has defined a hierarchy of needs common to every individual:

1. Physical needs - hunger, warmth, rest, physical proximity to others
2. Security and safety - freedom from danger, defense
3. Love and belonging - acceptance, affection and approval from family, friends and significant others
4. Self-esteem - a sense of worthiness, independence and trust in ourselves
5. Self-actualization - reaching and growing toward our potential; we have a framework of values, a faith to love and understand by, and the dichotomies of our lives become resolved as our lives express wholeness of person.

Scripturally, all these needs are to be met in relationship of man and his creator and his fellow man. While we are warned against looking for false security in the wrong places, Jesus himself acknowledges these needs when he heals and takes care of physical needs (healing - Matthew 15:29-30; feeding of the 5,000 - John 6:1-15), when he urged his brothers to go to the Festival of Shelters, but he remained behind because the time for him had not come to expose himself (John 7:1-9), when he blesses the children (Matthew 10:13-15), when he gave us his commandment to "love one another just as I love you" (John 15:12), when he went to the home of Zaccheus, spent his time with sinners and prostitutes, when he healed blind Bartimaeus, when he speaks of the kingdom of God being present, here and now, within his people.

Jesus did not squelch the personality of the people; he recognized their individuality and potential. He did not use such cliches as "terrible twos," "Kids that age are self-conscious," or, "He's already set in his ways." (Do we allow students the freedom to make choices, to explore a subject or activity, to discover new things in unexpected ways, to experience for themselves the consequences of positive and negative actions? Do we praise the students' efforts and actions, rather than evaluating their characters?)

Jesus recognized that individuals were at various stages of learning readiness. He approached people through their personal needs, yet met their ultimate spiritual need and gained their discipleship. He allowed time for choice and change, understanding that all persons do not learn the
same lesson in the same length of time or through the same methods.

Educational psychology has outlined developmental characteristics at each age level. These will be explored in another chapter. This is not to say that these similarities in developmental sequence override the uniqueness of the individual. We must remember some of the scriptural texts which remind us of our uniqueness and potential:

Isaiah 43:1 - I have called you by name and you are mine.
Isaiah 49:14-16 - ...I have written your name on the palms of my hands.
Romans 5:2 (LB) - And we confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has in mind for us to be.

2. Significant Experience

An incalculable number and variety of experiences form the basis of our learning. An experience which moves us, stimulates us, requires reflection and eventually decision is a significant experience. From the characteristics of Jesus' teaching we find in addition to unconditionally loving each person he encountered and meeting their needs personally at their own level, which was undoubtedly a "first" in the lives of many whose lives he touched, he taught through example and experience. If we believe that everyone and everything in creation is capable of being revelatory of God in our lives then we, along with Jesus, must not fear to use the "stuff of our lives," the concrete experiences, as tools of our learning. All learning is experiential. Modelling is an important aspect of teaching in that others find through imitation the cause and effect relationships of constructive and destructive behaviors. Jesus' radical commitment of love for the Father and for
his fellow man is the perfect model to imitate and model ourselves as we desire to be in a right relationship of love with the Father and others.

We see Jesus' example of love in his relationship with Mary Magdalene, in his love for the children, for the underdogs, especially taxcollectors and sinners. As a master teacher, Jesus knew how to shake people out of established patterns, to look at life and situations in a new way. He wove the daily experiences of the people into parables and stories which reflected his own relationship with God and man and which challenged others to reflect and decide to take upon themselves the lifestyle that the master teacher proposes in his parables and stories. We see his example of teaching through experience in the parables of the Sower, the Unforgiving Servant, the Lost Sheep, and throughout the entire Gospel in his teaching and in his healings.

Do we model the unconditional love of Jesus for all people? Do we use the experiences of children and adults alike as revelations of the presence of God in our lives? Do we provide actions and concrete experiences which stimulate thought, response and reflection and challenge others to choose, to evaluate and to change when necessary?

The "concrete" experiences may become actual, significant experiences in the life of the student; it may mean structural experiences such as simulation games or drama. It may mean hands-on activities for young children, group dynamic games for others. It may be more traditional methods which stimulate a response and significant experience for some; a photograph, a picture, a story, a Scripture. Whatever the method used, it must coincide with the student's starting point and touch his life at a point of need or inner readiness for learning.
3. Reflection and 4. Assimilation

Reflection is a period of thinking, mulling over, and weighing the effects of an experience. It may demand dialogue with another, or dialogue with one's self in that we step back to take another look at ourselves in the light of our past experiences and our present significant experience. Reflection may be a sharing time, a witnessing to what the Spirit through Christ is doing in our lives, and confirming it within ourselves as a reality. Reflection may be prayer, whether an inner dialogue or a spontaneous and vocal response to the action of God in our lives. It may be a slow response or an immediate, "Aha," depending upon the starting point of each person. In any case, it's a response to the question, "What is the real meaning of what has happened to me?"

Assimilation takes reflection to its culmination in that it, above all, demands freedom and choice. Freedom to accept or reject a significant experience as meaningful and the will and desire to reorient our thoughts, actions and lifestyle in accordance with our new insight are all a part of this. It may be a confirmation of a life already being lived out or a new commitment to a new model or a new set of values.

Jesus taught not only to impart those facts which might be dormant in the minds of his pupils, but also to transform their lives.

Gunther Bornkamm, in Jesus of Nazareth,\textsuperscript{5} says that Jesus liberates us from the minute rules and details with which we have petrified the will of God. Jesus detaches the law of God from the traditions of man. His teaching hits the mark: "be reconciled;" "go with him two miles;"
"love your enemies;" leaving room for no "ifs" or "buts." He reaches for the heart of man, transforming lives and making them whole.

Do we accept the fact that assimilation is the most difficult step in the learning process for many learners? Do we praise and encourage, offer counsel, and provide opportunities as concrete and experiential as necessary for the living out of ideals, convictions and new truths learned? Do we recognize that to assimilate an idea is to grow continually in understanding of what it means, not in the ability to memorize and repeat it back?

Learning and knowing have distinct and separate qualities. To know is to be intellectually aware of a fact, whereas to learn is to integrate that knowledge and allow it to influence our behavior, to shape decisions and actions. In the examples of Jesus there are several learning principles expressed:

1. Look for the teachable moment. Many of Jesus' teachings appear to be unplanned and random, depending upon the needs and readiness of the people to learning.
2. Much learning is student-initiated. Jesus was alert and open to the inquiries of his people.
3. Learning is most likely to occur in real-life instances, from nature, from example. Individual needs are met on an individual basis.
4. Learning is reinforced through the senses and physical action. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, are easily identified as we read through the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels.
5. Questions which cause one to pause, search, reflect, or silence are used skilfully. They reach to the heart of a person, draw out answers already within, awaken dulled consciences and call forth action.
6. Learning arises from motivation and problem solving. Struggle is often an integral part of learning. Several healings took place as a direct result of a struggle to determine who this man was, what he might do for them, and how to get to him. (John 9, Mark 10:46-52)

7. Learning is often non-verbal. Verbosity is often a problem in religious education employing much religious jargon. A simple presentation of Scripture, or directions, a question and a concluding statement are often enough to stimulate faith. "Do you want to be healed? Go wash. Your faith has made you whole." These are simple and direct and require little verbalization from teacher or learner.

8. Learning involves change and reflects relationships. Those whose lives Jesus touched were never the same and that change was reflected in their relationships with God and others.

David Du Plessis, pastor, author and lecturer, has said, "God has no grandchildren, only children." No one comes to the Father through a cultural institution or on the apronstrings of the faith of a parent, grandparent or friend, for we all must make an individual commitment to the covenant relationship which God has established with his people. You will be my people, and I will be your God. The believing community provides the teaching and the environment which nurtures faith, but it is the individual who must make the move from affiliative faith, which is the identification and experience of an individual within a community of persons sharing a common story and self-conscious identity of faith, to owned faith, which is exemplified in the words of Thomas the Doubter, "My Lord and my God," (John 20:28) and of Peter after a long affiliation and experience of community with Jesus and the other disciples. "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29). Jesus has shown us the depths of this relationship
in his life, death and resurrection. He has said, "Let the children come to me," and he tells us we must all become as little children, open and committed in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ as he leads us to the Father, as he models the Father's love for his creation and continues to reveal himself. "Jesus is the sacrament of God, the best revelation we will ever have of what God is like.... He knew the Father, and he came into the world with desperate urgency to tell us that we, too, could call the Father, 'Abba,' that we, too, could live as if we were his playful children."^7

God's nature is not to be silent, but to speak through each of us to another the Scriptures, through the person of his Son, through his tiny ones, through the events of our personal history. We are saying to our children, to our students young and old, "Come, I want you to meet my Father; he is your Father also."

Chandler W. Sterling, a former Episcopal Bishop of Montana, wrote an epilogue to his book, The Arrogance of Piety, as follows:

"It came to pass in those days that Jesus and his disciples were walking down a country road. It was late in the day and evening was nigh. And they were to be at a certain rich man's house for dinner. They had been delayed because of the press of the people around Jesus in the village, hence they were in a great hurry.

As they went rapidly along the road, they came to some children who were singing and dancing beside the road. Jesus left his disciples and joined with the children in their play and in their dance. The disciples were greatly annoyed at Jesus for taking time for this foolishness when they were already late to the rich man's house for dinner. Certain of them cried out and said, 'Master! It is late in the day and we are expected at the mansion for the feast. Come! Stop playing and dancing with children!'

Jesus slowly returned to the little group standing impatiently on the roadside awaiting him. Wiping his fore-
"head and his face and dusting off his clothes, he turned to his disciples and said, 'My Father and I danced the world into existence. Why won't you dance with me?'"
FOOTNOTES
Chapter II

1Mark 4:28-29.


One day while Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush. Moses is called, and he answers, "Here I am," and the Lord speaks to him and says, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" And he asks, "Who shall I say sent me?" And God replied, "Tell the Israelites I AM has sent me to you." Later in the dialogue with the Lord Moses again argues, "If you please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor recently, nor now that you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." But the Lord said to him, "Who gives one man speech and makes another deaf and dumb? Or who gives sight to one and makes another blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Go, then. It is I who will assist you in speaking, and I will teach you what you are to say."  

And Jeremiah was called thusly: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I dedicated you a prophet to the nations. I appointed you." "Ah, Lord God," I said, "I know not how to speak; I am too young." But the Lord answered me, "Say not, 'I am too young.' To whomsoever I send you you shall go; whatever I command you, you will speak. Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.
And Jesus said, "Come with (after) me and I will make you fishers of men." 3

How were you called out? Most of us are called out protesting our inadequacies to perform the task at hand. Year after year, in parish after parish, priests and pastors and parish workers make heroic efforts to get a religious education program off the ground for another year!

What's our excuse? Oh, but I'm a poor speaker! I'm too young! I can't speak in front of a group! I'm not a trained teacher! Leave it to the professionals, to the clergy, to somebody (anybody) else!

But the Lord is serious about his call to the Moseses, to the Jeremiahs, and Jesus is serious about his call to become fishers of men. Today we are still being called forth, and God, as present as ever in the lives of his people, calls us forth as teachers according to his purposes, and not according to our excuses!

Furthermore, the promises he made to Moses and Jeremiah are there for us as well; promises of power to speak his message and to make him known. "I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk; I will counsel you, keeping my eye on you." (Psalm 32:8) "As generous distributors of God's manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received. The one who speaks is to deliver God's message. The one who serves is to do it with the strength provided by God. Thus, in all of you, God is to be glorified through Jesus Christ; to him be glory and dominion throughout the ages." (I Peter 4:10-11)

"God is at work within you, helping you to want to obey him, and then helping you to do what he wants." (Philippians 2:13)
What have we chosen to be? Imitators of Jesus, teachers through imitation. Jesus' most common command was, "Follow me," or "Come after me." In the rabbinic language of discipleship that means one who takes Jesus' example seriously and follows it. It indicates someone who does or is willing to do as Jesus does. As the disciples followed and took Jesus' example seriously, so must we, as religious educators and people of faith. Jesus' call was not just to follow, but to "do what I have done."

Jesus gives many concrete examples of how we are to "do likewise" in his freedom from dependence on material and monetary gain in his unconditional and non-violent love for all of God's people, in his prayer life and intimate relationship with the Father whom Jesus addressed as a child would address a beloved and intimately known earthly father, "Abba," daddy.

Reflect a moment on how amazed we are to be chosen and singled out in love. Think of someone who may have sought our friendship. Think of the joys of a deep and intimate relationship when you choose and were chosen by another. Reflect on the fact that someone chose to love us, even knowing our weaknesses.

From the beginning God chose Israel; Israel was his by choice, by election. It was a source of amazement, but the reason is simply expressed, "He has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a people peculiarly his own,... not because you are the largest of the nations,... it was because the Lord loved you." (Deuteronomy 7:6; 7:8) God's call continues, and he chooses those he wills for reasons hidden from us in his amazing love. But chosen we are when God touches lives through the person of Jesus and his Holy Spirit, and raises up in a community of believers those
who are especially to speak the message of love and salvation that Jesus spoke to us for all time.

All of us in religious education need to know and experience that before the world was, God knew us and chose us for his own, that he has carved our names in the palms of his hands, that he has called us out and set his seal on our hearts and, like Jeremiah, says, "See, I place my words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1:9)

Jesus continued the process of choice and election when he chose his disciples, and in the course of his relationship with them and others said, "Come to me." Follow me; take my example seriously. Do as I do. "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart." (Matthew 11:29)

We must open our spirits to his Spirit, that we may learn and be imitators after his model, and we must open ourselves to the Scriptures, the Word of the living God, and dwell on them as our story too, the story of my personal history as well. We must avail ourselves of current knowledge that may put us in touch with people at the "starting points" in their lives. We must, above all, love as Jesus loved, and turn from our old ways of educating to facts and institutions to building a community of faith because we have experienced it ourselves and we have responded with a commitment to Jesus Christ, and to order our lives to live as his apostles and disciples in the world.

Religious education does not take place outside the faith community. "Schooling" may take place, but what we are about is enabling and supporting an environment, a community of believers, that expands faith, that makes and calls forth in others a radical life as followers of Jesus Christ and his vision of a kingdom present and future where God is working his purpose out and drawing all people to himself.
As persons of faith our option is not just to proclaim but to act with God in history in order to free people to become fully human; to bring justice, peace, wholeness and unity; to bring community and the well-being of all people into reality.5

We must follow Jesus' model of union with the Father and become people of prayer. Our thoughts, our words, our actions need to be in line with the purposes of God for all of his people. Unless we maintain that union with God through prayer and listening we labor in vain. We have been chosen because God loves and love demands intimate relationship with another. Our relationship must grow to the "Abba" relationship with Jesus in prayer and union with God.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I know the ones I have chosen," (John 13:18 - JB) and again, "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit." (John 15:16)

As the chosen of God, what will our response be when the voice of the Lord says, "Whom shall I send?" Let us pray that with Isaiah we will be able to say, "Here I am; send me," and will go out to bring forth fruit.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

1Exodus 3 & 4:12.

2Jeremiah 1:4-8.

3Matthew 4:18-19.


CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Three aspects of the Christian community will be examined briefly: 1. What is the Christian community like? 2. What is the purpose of the Christian community? 3. What are the gifts of the Christian community?

The Christian community came into existence as a result of the experience of the disciples and followers of Jesus as they reflected upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It was through the resurrection event that Jesus became recognized as the Christ who is the Lord. Gradually the Palestinian, the Jewish-Hellenistic and the Hellenistic Christian communities developed the understanding of the relationship of Jesus and God the Father, Jesus as Son of Man, Jesus as Lord, and later through the writings of Paul, we find the bridge from Jesus as Lord to Jesus as God as the early Church proclaimed about A.D. 70.1

1. What is the Christian Community Like?

a. Unity of essentials is one of the hallmarks of the Christian community as related in Acts 4:32. The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. They shared a common memory and experience, that of the presence of the risen Christ and the experience of Pentecost which enabled them to witness with power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, to preach, to teach and heal with the tradition and authority of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy
Spirit. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord forms the essential identity of the community. Beliefs, understandings and values further defined the unity of the community of believers as they strove to live lives worthy of the designation, "saints," as they were commonly called by Paul. He writes in Ephesians 4:3-6, for example:

"Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all."

b. There must be a meaningful interaction of intimacy, fellowship and caring among the members of the community. A level of trust must be established and maintained so that each person is able to experience acceptance and belonging within the community. The hierarchy of needs which Abraham Maslow expressed was fulfilled within the Christian community, from the fulfillment of physical needs of food, shelter and warmth to the level of self-actualization (becoming fully human) in which we continue to grow to our potential while fulfilling the purposes of God as we internalize a faith by which to live and understand. The Christian community was then and must continue to be a caring, sharing fellowship. St. Paul says in Colossians 3:12-17:

"Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in Psalms, hymns and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus."

I Thessalonians 5:14-20 reminds us to:
- respect those in authority
- remain at peace with each other
- admonish the unruly
- cheer the fainthearted
- support the weak
- be patient toward all
- do not return evil for evil
- seek the good of all
- rejoice, pray and give thanks always
- do not stifle the Spirit; test everything; retain what is good

c. The Christian community exists in the integration and interaction of three generations, past, present and future, which may be called the generation of memory, the generation of the present, and the generation of vision. Vision does not exist without a memory and neither exists without the action of the present which confronts the community with the reality of the moment.²

The generation of memory is recalled in Romans, chapters 4 and 5, and 9 - 11; the entire Book of Hebrews recalls the history of the Hebrew people, a history which is ours by adoption and grace, through our faith in Jesus Christ in which we are made children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of God. The generation of memory underlies our traditions, understandings, values and present ways. It enables us to live out and pass on the story of the salvation of God's people yesterday, today and tomorrow. It forms an identity and gives us roots, as the people of God, as we recognize his presence and revelation in history and in the person of Jesus, an eternal drama in our midst.

The generation of the present demands both faith and action. James' Epistle is adamant in claiming that, "... faith without works is as a body without breath." (James 2:26)
He reminds us of Abraham, whose faith was justified by his willingness to offer his son, Isaac, on the altar. We might well recall the explicit faith of Jesus in the will of the Father, author of life and creation, when he freely chose death on the cross, the action which freed us from condemnation and opened for us the gates of eternal life and union with the Godhead.

The generation of the present stimulates and challenges us to conversion of heart and mind, to radical commitment to God and man. It challenges us from "faith given" through nurture in the generation of memory to "faith owned" and the transformation of the thinking, feeling, willing of our lives in accordance with the community of faith and the fulfillment of God's purposes. We are stimulated to action in bringing about the reign of God in the present as we work toward justice, freedom, equality and peace for all people. As we tend to learn in the concrete, so must our actions be in the concrete, and extend far beyond the mouthing of words to the care and affirmation of all of God's people.

"In the beginning God created." (Genesis 1:1)

"God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

"God looked at everything he had made and he found it very good." (Genesis 1:31)

The Christian community witnesses to the vision God has of a world of peace, harmony and wholeness. As in past history, we continue to set man's vision above the vision of God, and we flounder in a sea of poverty, hunger, war, alienation, social injustice and environmental decay. As God did in history, he continues to raise up prophets among us to remind us of his vision and to call us into covenant with him to live as a community and generation of vision. Jesus modeled
for us the visionary community in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) and he calls us to be salt, the catalyst which cleanses and purifies and adds savor to lives, although not without some discomfort to those of us in "comfortable pews."

Have you ever felt salt in a wound?

The generation of vision places demands on our lives; a call to action that God's purposes may be fulfilled and that we may be ready for God's coming community for which we and all the saints await as God draws all things to himself. The community of faith has a story to tell, the story of God's revolutionary, historic, social activity. A community of vision and faith is judged and inspired by that story in every aspect of its individual and corporate life.

2. What is the Purpose of the Community?

The covenant-dialoguing relationship we have with God indicates that we are created for community. We do not exist as Christians in isolation, but in community, and thus the purpose of the community is to be in a community relationship with both God and man, to build each other up in the body, to equip us for ministry in the use of the gifts and abilities we have been given for the edification of the whole Church, to minister to those within the community of believers and to serve as faithful witnesses to those outside the faith community. We are to be a learning, growing, witnessing community, eager to share our experience of faith and life, eager to pass on the Good News of Salvation to our children and our children's children and to all who have ears to hear. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him?" (Romans 10:13-14) "Be rooted in him and built up in him, growing ever stronger in faith, as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude." (Colossians 2:7)
3. What Are the Gifts of the Community?

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us. One's gift may be prophecy; its use should be in proportion to his faith. It may be the gift of ministry; it should be used for service. One who is a teacher should use his gift for teaching; one with the power of exhortation should exhort. He who gives alms should do so generously; he who rules should exercise his authority with care; he who performs works of mercy should do so cheerfully." (Romans 12:4-8)

"It is he (Christ) who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ ... through him the whole body grows, and with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

"To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the power to express knowledge. Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one and to another the power to distinguish one spirit from another. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues." (I Corinthians 12:7-10)

Nothing in Scripture indicates that only a chosen few are gifted by God, but rather to each person is given gifts that differ according to God's design and for the common good of all. One of the responsibilities of the community is to help one another discover, affirm, develop and use their gifts, for all the needs of the community are met within the community through the indwelling Spirit.

There are many sources of in-depth studies of the gifts of the Spirit, such as those by Dennis Bennett, Robert Hall, Donald Gelpi, Morton Kelsey and George Montague. But our purpose is not to expound on them, but to stress the fact that the community of faith is graced by these gifts. One of
the reasons our parish communities lack power and suffer declining membership is not for lack of spiritual gifts within their body, but for lack of use - spiritual atrophy and eventual paralysis! Like our muscles, the gifts each member of the body has been given must be exercised. All of the gifts are given to show how the presence of God penetrates and energizes our entire lives.

"You are the people of God. He loves you and has chosen you for his own." (Colossians 3:12)

As one of God's chosen, what gift do you feel he has given you personally? The following exercise is intended to help you and those in your faith community to identify the gifts each has been given:

a. Reread Romans 12:4-8. To what degree do you feel strong or weak in the various spiritual gifts? Rank yourself from 1 to 10, 1 being very weak and 10 being very strong.

1. Prophecy: Speaking God's message
   God has given me a gift for communication. When I explain the Good News, God seems to bring about insight and understanding.

2. Ministry: Service
   God has given me a special gift for helping out when a need arises. I am sensitive, and respond to the needs of others easily.

3. Teaching:
   God has given me the ability for helping and stimulating others to learn. I am good at motivating others.

4. Exhortation: Encouragement
   God helps me to see the best in others and to compliment them - to point out their strengths and to call forth the best in others.

5. Alms: Generosity
   God has given me freedom to share myself with others. It is easy for me to reach out, to touch, and to care whenever there is a need.
6. Authority: Leadership
I find it easy to organize, take responsibility and direct others. Others seem to accept my authority and leadership.

7. Mercy: Kindness
God has given me the ability to be compassionate; I can enter into people's pain, feel with them, and minister to them.

b. Consider the following:

1. If God were to grade you on the use you have made of his gifts, what would he give you? (Choose one.)
   A+  A−  B+  B−  C  D  F

2. What would you do about affirming your own gifts? (Choose one.)
   (a) think I have no gifts  (b) downgrade my gifts
   (c) overestimate my gifts  (d) pooh-pooh the idea of spiritual gifts
   (e) try not to think about it

3. If you are in a small group, think about the gifts of members in your group. Write down one gift beside the name of each person. Gather together at the end of this session to share the gifts you see in one another and why.³

All members of the community are called upon to identify, affirm and use their gifts, and since the community is composed of those of every age, we must see to it that no one is neglected; not the elderly or the handicapped, not the middle-aged executive, the working mother, the teen in the midst of the challenges of adolescence, nor the young child who has gifts of his own and models our action of using our gifts, and ministering to one another in love.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV


CHAPTER V

THE ACTION OF THE COMMUNITY:
A MODEL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The characteristics of the Christian community at Jerusalem are outlined in Acts 2:42-47:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common;... They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved."

My thesis is that while this may be characteristic of an ideal community with reference to communal living, it easily forms a model of religious education which is applicable to persons of all ages, and may be further illustrated by dividing it into four integral parts:

1. Prayer and praise
2. Sharing and singing
3. Teaching and Scripture
4. Eucharist/Breaking Bread together

Before pursuing this model, two lines in the Acts 2 text invite some reflection. First, "A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles." These wonders and signs, or miracles, were under-
stood by the Hebrew mind as manifestations of the presence and power of God. Since God was the force behind every happening, then these signs, wonders and miracles were a more "unusual" intervention or manifestation. A miracle, simply expressed, is God meeting the needs of his people. Jesus daily met the needs of the people by his healing touch, by his liberating the people from the bondage of sin, sickness and evil. His requirement was faith, a basic openness to God and to the new possibilities and powers available for life in the kingdom of God. This same power and authority he conferred on his disciples because they had the essential characteristic faith which was required in order to continue the healing ministry of Jesus after his death and resurrection. They were not only modeling the action of Jesus, but acting by the same power as he did as they manifested God's presence in the world.

No wonder the early Christians were filled with reverent fear, or holy fear, as Isaiah lists the gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:3), that is the fear of God that comes from the realization of his power, as well as of his love for man; the knowledge of God as being "wholly other." This "wholly other" quality of the divine generates both fear and fascination, attracting us to God.

Furthermore, in Acts 2:38, Peter says, "You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." By our baptism in the name of Jesus we are not only professing faith in him as Savior and Lord, but his name is considered a substitute for the person. Thus we act or receive in his place as Christians. The invocation of the name of Jesus empowers and saves. The one who pronounces the name speaks with the power of the one identified with that name, Jesus.
Thus, we profess by faith the name of Jesus; we are forgiven and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians were known by the manifestations of the Spirit as mentioned in I Corinthians 12:4-11; in fact Paul, in Acts 19:2, not seeing the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, asks some believers if they have received the Spirit since they believed.

No wonder the Scripture adds, "Day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved." This Christianity was no mere spectator sport; it was active participation in the life and power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit!

We might well ask ourselves, "How many were added to our numbers today? What are the gifts manifested in my faith community? What are my gifts? Have I left my gift unopened upon the shelf or have I truly accepted it and made it my own by manifesting the presence of God and the power of God in the name of Jesus?" Let us now examine the model for religious education.


Henri J.M. Nouwen says, "To pray means to open your hands before God." So many of us live with clenched fists or hands tightly clasped in what we have known in our culture as the posture of prayer. Prayer is not easy when defense and resistance are high, for prayer is opening ourselves to a relationship which enters the very center of our being, a relationship with God, the source and foundation of all that we are and will be. Prayer is movement from individual introspection and egoism to transcendent awareness; prayer is not looking at ourselves as apart from the
presence of God. Prayer is being attuned to the divine in our lives.

Prayer is thinking about God, talking to God, listening to God, and being open to God's presence in all things, in every aspect of our lives. Nouwen says that prayer "... means slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend, but as a gift to receive. Above all, therefore, prayer is a way of life which allows you to find a stillness in the midst of the world where you open your hands to God's promises, and find hope for yourself, your fellow men, and the whole community in which you live."²

Some reflections on prayer for religious educators:

- Through prayer we help others to develop a healthy concept of God and his unconditional love for each of us.

- In prayer we hope to build a positive, affective awareness of the presence of Jesus.

- In prayer we can provide constant opportunities for reflection and sensitization to one's self, to others, and to God.

- We must encourage and provide a wide variety of experiences for spontaneous response in prayer.

- True spiritual experience cannot be taught, only evoked. We can invite others to participate, but we cannot create for them the experience of God.

- We must let the stories of our people, the symbols, the experience, speak for themselves.
In order to encourage and provide a wide variety of experiences in prayer, some suggestions and reflections follow:

a. Prayer as Centering

For the Christian, centering prayer emanates from the text in Genesis recalling that we are made in the image of God and that God looked at everything he had made and it was very good. Centering prayer takes us into ourselves, sensitizing us to feel and sense the unity of ourselves as body, mind and spirit. Centering experiences move out of the area of language and thought into the area of feeling, sensing, intuiting and loving. Centering is the beginning of contemplation.

An exercise in centering that may be used at all age levels might progress as follows:

Begin by seating yourself comfortably in a straight chair, feet flat on floor, and hands resting on your legs, palms down, eyes closed. Listen to the sounds all around you - sounds that are near or distant - big sounds - small sounds. Now listen to the sounds without identifying them; let them surround you as a whole and rest in them.

Next, listen to the sounds of your body. Cover your ears and listen to the sound of your body. Put your hands down and listen to your breathing. As you breathe in, imagine yourself breathing in the power of God. As you breathe out, imagine all of your negative feelings, fears and hurts leaving your body. Finally, feel the sensations of your body. Feel as many distinct areas of your body as you can, from the hair on your head to your toes. When you've gone from head to toe, begin again, remembering to feel the sensations, not think body parts! This may be done in three
separate exercises, and should be repeated regularly as one grows in the ability to center and reflect.

This exercise takes its name from Song of Songs 8:6 - "Set Me as a Seal on Your Heart." After quieting yourself for a moment, choose a simple word such as Jesus, Abba, Lord, etc.. Dwell on that word and let it move from your head to your heart; from language to the intuition of love. Begin quietly to move about, all the while maintaining your word deep within your heart and soul. As you become comfortable with this "Seal upon Your Heart" try to maintain it as you engage in conversation. Reflect afterwards, were you able to keep your word going quietly within? For some, it may help to make sound or activity associations so that the word you have chosen becomes habitually recalled.

This exercise may be presented very simply to young children. Think how often our very young children remind us of the blessing before meals, they have made the association! They love the ritual, the security of repetition. How easy to help a child develop the habit of a Seal upon Their Hearts; a simple Jesus, or Jesus loves me, when they hear a clock chime, walk upstairs, or turn off a light. Keep it simple, and keep up the repetition.

b. Prayer as Imagery

In the last few years a great deal of research has gone into lateralization of the brain, or the specific functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. For the most part, prayer is a right brain activity, and most particularly so when we move from petition, intercession and confession to praise and adoration, and into exercises of centering and imagery when language becomes non-essential, when we move from verbalizing every need before God to just being present before God. An experience in imagery may be led by
another, who takes us on a journey as we close our eyes and visualize, placing ourselves into that very situation.

The Gospel story of Jesus and the children (Matthew 5) is an excellent source of imagery for children and for adults who, first picturing themselves as a child, go in that journey to Jesus. It is important that the "narrator" make this a personal story. Imagery, when led by those with the ministry of healing, is used very powerfully in the healing of memories. The very presence of Jesus touches and heals the hurtful things of our past, freeing us from the burdens they have cast on our lives and making people whole.

c. Prayer as Art, Music, Drama and Movement

All of these forms may become acts of prayer in themselves or may stimulate us to prayer.

Prayer may be evoked by our response to a work of art, to the feel of pottery, to the visually stimulating watercolor that creates in us a sense of awe, of the presence of God in all things, of the wonder of his creation, of joy in the gifts he has given us to create things of beauty. Prayer may be evoked as we listen to Bach's B minor Mass, as we hear the song of a lark, the song of a child, or as we raise our own voices in song. Prayer may be evoked in dissonance as well as in consonance. Many Christian records are available for children and adults that bring us to experience prayer in a new way. Art and music may be combined in many ways as prayer experiences. A simple experience involves passing a single sheet of paper and markers from person to person as music is played, and each responds on paper, adding one's own response to those that came before.

Art, pictures, slides and photographs are excellent sources for providing the basis of spontaneous response of
feelings which may be formed into a litany or prayer intentions.

Response in movement, dance, drama and role plays may also be prayer experiences. Young children, in particular, are moving constantly. We can direct some of that movement into prayer experiences through the use of the whole body in drama, song and rhythm. Finger plays and actual sign language for the deaf may also be excellent expressions for prayer experience. Jesus himself is our best example of the use of drama in teaching. His stories and parables are real life situations which shake people out of old patterns, allowing them to see new possibilities. Imagine the drama involved in the situation when Jesus stripped himself of his own garments, filled a washbowl, and began to wash his disciples' feet. Would they ever forget that lesson in humility and the meaning of servanthood?

Imagine the drama at the tomb of Lazarus and in the story of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). The drama of an argument over who was the greatest, and the surprise of those who witnessed Jesus taking a child upon his lap saying, "Whoever welcomes a child such as this for my sake welcomes me." (Mark 9:37)

Ancient story-tellers involved their listeners by becoming totally involved in their art. Body movement, dance, facial expression, mime and music brought out the meaning of the story. In the same way today, it is valuable in the telling and listening experience, in the involvement it stimulates in the listener as a teaching device, and as a response or experience in prayer.

d. Spontaneous Prayer/Formal Prayer

Formal prayer gathers together and expresses the faith of the people of God and the entire Church over centuries of
history and tradition. It allows the Christian community to pray in common, "...being of one mind and spirit," as Paul the apostle says. Formal prayer may form a habit of prayer in us and provide the words and ideas when they don't flow easily from us.

However, I want to plead the case for spontaneous prayer, and that to begin at a very early age. Too often it seems that religious educators and parents themselves hide behind the security of formal prayers; they are non-threatening; they are "safe," and, if we choose, we can even maintain a distance from a God who wants to be in a close, personal relationship with us - and that requires commitment of a radical nature on our part! When we love someone, we find our own words to tell them of our love. Spontaneous prayer is a love affair with our God!

I would offer some thoughts on spontaneous prayer with children, which are applicable to adults as well, since we are all to be as little children.

- Their experience is what they know best, and needs to be shared freely in prayer.

- Every encounter and event is a situation in which God is speaking.

- Sensitize children to the presence and absence of others, to their own needs and to the needs, joys and sorrows of others.

- Dwell on praise; encourage reticent children to simply say, "Thank you, Jesus." "Yet, Holy One, you who make your home in the praises of Israel, in you our fathers put their trust." (Psalm 22:3 - Jerusalem Bible). The King James version says, "God inhabits the praises of his people." Surely we must then
prefer praise. In praise we break out of egoism and narcissism into an expression of relationship with an involved God. Life becomes a gift through an attitude of prayer and praise.

- Not only offer praise to God, also praise and reinforce the children when they pray spontaneously. Give them a simple word of thanks and encouragement, with enthusiasm. Our own enthusiasm for prayer, or lack of it, will be obvious to children.

- Be instant in prayer (Romans 12:12 KJV). Meet a need for prayer immediately. Do not say, "When prayer time comes..."

- Touch as Jesus touched; remember our basic need to be loved and accepted. Touch also in healing prayer as with the authority of Jesus. Children will often be eager to lay hands on one another in prayer; encourage it.

- Pray for and with children by name, for God has called each of us by name (Isaiah 43:1) and has written our names on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16).

- Expect answers and share the answers to prayer.

Spontaneous prayer may be stimulated by a picture, a song, Scripture, by an object, by an event, a story. One exciting way to spark prayer is with a Good News Litany. As each child comes in the door ask him to tell of one good thing that has happened that day (or week). Write them down for use later in a Good News Litany with a simple response such as, "Thank you, Jesus." Or recall the Good News in spontaneous praise sentences.

2. Sharing and Singing

"Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in
"psalms and hymns and inspired songs. Sing praise to the Lord with all your hearts. Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ."
(Ephesians 5:19-20)

Sharing involves us in the telling of our own faith story as the people God is fashioning in his image and likeness. It is the story of our people in history; it is the story of the response of our people and ourselves to the person of Jesus; it is the story of our life each day as it is lived in the presence of a loving and involved God.

We share the stories of the heroes of our faith, Abraham, Moses, all the patriarchs and prophets, the stories and sayings of Jesus the Christ, the stories of the people of Corinth and Galatia and all the lands of the Bible. We share the stories of the people of God in our own times, of Damien the Leper, of Martin Luther King, of Mother Theresa. We tell the story of our own lives. We must each be convinced of the uniqueness and value of our own faith story and of the great and small miracles that occur each day as we live in relationship with God and man and our world.

We forget too often that we are being fashioned in the image of God in the little things as well as the great as we become the holy people of God. Naaman would have missed out on a healing had he been unwilling to do such a simple thing as wash seven times in the Jordan (II Kings 5). We look for the pomp, the flashy, to reveal God. He is revealed in the simple, a child in a manger bed, a touch of a garment, mud, water, bread and wine.

In order for our children to have faith, the story must be shared. What has the Lord done for me, for you? In the early Christian communities members were encouraged to give accounts of their faith in Jesus as their Lord and
Savior. They were anxious to share their experience and their joy, and they were unafraid, even unto death, to witness to their personal experience of the Lord Jesus. The legacy of their experience and the sharing of their faith story is the New Testament.

Today we need Christian people willing to minister to children and adults in sharing their personal experience of conversion and following Jesus' Way. Many are willing to teach textbook religion; what we need are Christians willing to share their journey to faith. "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." (John 12:21) remains the quest of many searching for the Way. We of faith must share, listen and affirm others who share their story and those who seek, all the while giving thanks and singing praise to the Lord with all our hearts.

3. Teaching and Scripture

"All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, correction and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3:16)

"The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and remind you of all I have told you." (John 14:26)

In Jesus as Teacher, Joseph Grassi says:

"The Christian didaskalos or teacher is a person who lives and acts in the name of Jesus so intensely that he or she is a living successor of Jesus himself."3

For the teacher, one must first be a doer of the word and not a hearer only so that we may be examples worthy of imitation after the life and example of Jesus. The highest form of teaching is by example, as illustrated in the saying of Jesus, "No pupil outranks his teacher, no slave his master.
"The pupil should be glad to become like his teacher, the slave like his master." (Matthew 10:24-25) For, "Woe to those who set a bad example as teacher, for they shall be 'least in the kingdom of God.'" (Matthew 5:19) For Christian teachers, the rule is to do, then to teach.

To assure us that his teaching and example would continue in the community after his own death and resurrection, Jesus gave us the promise of the Holy Spirit who would continue to instruct and empower the faithful, and thus the early Church believed that the Holy Spirit who gave power to Jesus' teaching and ministry was now present in themselves through his promise. "You will be baptized in the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5) and that this same Spirit by which we cry, "Abba," "Daddy," will instruct and call to mind the teachings of Jesus.

We learn the Way from the master teacher, Jesus; we imitate and do; we teach by involvement and participation with our students as we experience together the Way of Jesus.

"Authentic Teaching"

The faith we give to others
is in our stance
more than in our speaking
And he who listens
hears a hollow sound
when vacuums of non-action
indicate that we do not believe
but rather speak the speech
tripplingly on the tongue
a polished piece of prose,
without the life
the Spirit puts in words
to give more life

The faith we share
melts into another
when he feels
our kind emotions
and our concern-
"when he sees that we believe Beatitudes-
that call for total living

The faith that is their life comes only through our life lived in willing witness to the words we say about the Word.

No man can meet our Christ until he finds in us the Christ who came 'that they may have life, life in great abundance.'

We Christian teachers need to know that our living is our teaching at its best and that for this authentic job no phony need apply.4

"Yes, the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send famine upon the land; not a famine of bread, or thirst for water, but for hearing the Word of the Lord." (Amos 9:11)

In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the Scriptures. Perhaps the changes of Vatican II, the Prayer Book revisions in the Anglican and Lutheran Churches and the Charismatic Movement have all played an important part in this hunger and thirst for the Word of God. In quenching this thirst we must find the balance between a fundamentalist approach which takes literally all Scripture and denies the existence of contradictions and inconsistencies within the Word and an historical approach which searches out the historical and cultural conditions which influenced the thoughts and concerns of the biblical authors. Vatican II has said that those who interpret the Scriptures "...must look for that meaning which the sacred writer, in a determined situation and given the circumstances of his time and culture, intended to express, through the medium of a contemporary literary form."5
What we must keep in mind in reading and using the Scriptures in religious education is that the Bible is an evolving understanding of the Hebrew people and their God, an understanding which changed as their relationship with him deepened over generations, and as they came to understand their experiences as a revelation of a caring, loving God. Because as Christians, we have our roots in the history of the Hebrew people, we must understand this deepening understanding and relationship as the story of our people, people in covenant with God as we are today. When we understand the story as our story we can begin to understand Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am," or, "I am the God of what is happening," "I am what is happening to you," "I am your story."6

In the light of Scripture we can begin to see the presence of God in our own daily experience; we can say to our students, "This is a story of the way our people understood God working in their lives." When "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," (John 1:1) we discovered that our God is known personally through Jesus, and that when we respond to Jesus we respond to God. The covenant has become personal reality in Jesus Christ and through him, in us. How exciting the Scriptures are as they reveal this to us, as they teach and admonish, as we respond in faith and share the story with others along the Way! As religious educators we must see the Scriptures as the living Word, speaking in our struggles to faith and love, as "effective and sharper than any two-edged sword." (Hebrews 4:12) We, too, must hunger for the Word of God as revealed in Jesus and the Scriptures.

4. Breaking of the Bread

"When he had seated himself with them to eat he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him." (Luke 24:30-31)
Within the five sentences of Acts 2:42-47 reference to breaking bread and sharing meals in common occurs three times, indicating the importance the early Christians placed on (a) following Jesus' command, "Do this as a remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19), and (b) the particular intimacy of table fellowship in sharing a common meal.

When we break bread in remembrance of Jesus we remember with the faithful our whole history of salvation. In the Eucharist we remember not only the events of the history of our people, we also experience the event of Jesus as he takes bread now, and he takes wine now as he acts in our lives this moment, for what is intended in "Do this in remembrance of me." is more than a remembrance. Jesus is saying, "Do this when you want me with you, when you want to recall me to your midst." The living presence of Christ is feeding us at the table.

When the disciples shared their evening meals with Jesus they became conscious of their communion with Jesus and with each other. They experienced a depth of friendship and intimacy we all search for in our lives. The common meal wherever, whatever it was, celebrated their community; they had experienced community between God and man. Jesus identified himself with bread and wine, common objects in our common lives, so that the communion of God and man could continue. Even though he would no longer be visible among his people, whenever they came together for the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup, he would be with them.

The common meal and the breaking of bread continues in the experience of those who desire Jesus to be in their midst today, in the central act of our worship, the Eucharistic Liturgy. He is with us when the words of consecration are spoken in the vast cathedral spaces, in the closeness of
small home communions with intimate fellowship, and he is also in our midst as we share a common meal with family and friends, for normally we share our meals with those whom we trust and care for.

It is important that we share a common meal, whether at the community's central celebration of Eucharist or a simple offering of food and drink when the community is gathered, because it is a sign and symbol of our friendship and union with each other and with God.

I submit this four-point model of religious education for serious consideration. There are an infinite number of religious education curricula available today. With care, planning and conviction any curriculum could be adapted to this model. I see each aspect of the model as essential to the building up and nurture of the faith community. It is easily adapted to every age and ability level. I have witnessed and experienced the building of Christian community from pre-schoolers in a thrice-weekly program, through all age levels to adults in a week-long Christian camp experience. Through this model the early Christians were equipped to minister to each other, to mature and build one another up in the faith, and to go out into the world and preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is our call also. "Let us go forth, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit." Alleluia!
FOOTNOTES

Chapter V


2Loc. cit.


CHAPTER VI

ADAPTING THE MODEL TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

"The child grew in age and strength, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40)

In order to determine the starting point and inner readiness of the learners, religious educators must have some knowledge of the stages of development on the road to physical, psychological, intellectual, social and spiritual maturity. With that knowledge we can adapt the religious education curriculum to the four elements in the scriptural model or devise our own curriculum.

From the moment a human being enters the world until he leaves it, learning takes place. It is a birth to death process for each individual. Every moment a person is living he is constantly making discoveries about himself and the world in which he lives. An infant soon learns that he can make things happen. A cry will bring a quick reaction from mother; arm and leg movement will set a mobile over his crib into motion. The same is true for an older child, an adolescent or an adult. Each person, regardless of his level of development and maturity, is always discovering that he can make things happen by the way he acts on his environment. As the person develops he learns that not only can he make things happen, but that he must make things happen in order to maintain and enhance his environment. He must recognize his potential and fulfill his primary needs for survival, security, love, self-esteem and self-actualization, and is constantly searching for ways to meet his needs.
and develop his potential.¹

Mortimer Adler says, "The human mind naturally tends to learn, to acquire knowledge, just as the earth naturally tends to support vegetation."² Man, in his search for meaning, also wants to know "why." A child goes through a questioning period like, "Why does it rain?" "Why do the leaves fall from some trees and not from others?" As a result of wanting to know why things happen he makes discoveries about the reason behind things, and finds meaning. The "making things happen," the discovering "why things happen" and man's search for meaning lead us to knowledge of how learning takes place.

In his search for meaning and competence, man is in a continuous process of (1) perceiving relationships between himself and his environment, (2) conceptualizing these relationships, (3) interacting and trying out his concepts and (4) making judgments and evaluating the results of his knowledge and interaction. This begins a new cycle of perceiving, conceptualizing, interacting and evaluating.³

Jean Piaget's principles of cognitive development indicate that there are two inherent tendencies in man - organization and adaptation. He says that man is an organizing creature and that he is adaptive in his behavior, that is, he accommodates and assimilates. Accommodation is the changing of a person's behavior or concepts to a new situation. Assimilation is the taking in of the environment as it fits in with our concepts, interaction and behavior. For example, a child learns through imitation, usually modelling his behavior after that of his parents. Some of his imitative behavior may be approved and rewarded (assimilation - that is, his own style of behavior and his environment are compatible). On the other hand, some of his imitative behavior is not ac-
ceptable, even though he is still imitating his parents. The child must then adapt and change his behavior to gain parental approval (accommodation). In this, the child is constantly perceiving relationships, conceptualizing ways of successfully dealing with his environment, trying them out, and evaluating his learning and behavior. He is constantly discovering that there are various answers to questions, various solutions to problems and various means to an end. He must try out these various solutions to see which ones fit his need and achieve his goal. In imitative behavior, for example, a series of trials and errors will help him determine which imitative behavior will work for him, which behavior is acceptable and which is not. (A child playing with matches after watching adults smoke, light fires, etc., soon learns that that is not acceptable behavior.)

This need to observe, conceptualize and try out should be enough to indicate to educators that learning is more than a process of telling and retelling. "We learn best those things that are part of our present experience, those things with relevance." John Dewey indicates that we move from an immediate experience to a larger understanding, that learning originates in a life situation, not in a book. The life situation and experience may lead to further study and discovery of new information and knowledge, but basically begins with life experiences. Learning is not just a matter of the intellect, but requires the active involvement of the selfhood and personality of the participants if it is to be successful. Learning is a process of gradually coming into a larger and larger expression of mental awareness with the intention of learning and understanding more about the world in which we live.

Piaget, prominent Swiss philosopher and educator, emphasizes the child's active and constructive involvement in learning. He feels that knowledge is not something that
is simply transmitted from one person to another verbally or otherwise; it has to be constructed and reconstructed by the individual learner. It has to be appropriated by the learner. He says that learning, or the development of intelligence, is a continuous process of assimilation of the external facts of experience and integrating them into an individual's mental (or cognitive) structure.  

The Cognitive Development Stages of Piaget:

1. Sensori-motor (birth - 2 years) - learning through senses and activity.

2. Pre-operational (2-7 years) - A stage of intuitive thought. Language begins to develop, the environment begins to take on its own existence apart from the self. Through speech and language the child begins to master some symbols and to mentally manipulate them. Children in this stage are weak in expressing a sequence of events, explaining cause and effect relationships, understanding other speakers accurately and in understanding and remembering rules.

3. Concrete operational (7-11) - The child makes judgments based on reason and perception, can reverse things with concrete objects (3 plus 2 equals 5; 5 equals 2 plus 3), but cannot yet generalize beyond his actual experience. While beginning to mentally think through problems, he continues to think in terms of concrete (actual) objects, not abstractions.

4. Formal operational (11 and up) - The child can deal with abstractions, becomes more interested in possibilities than realities, can imagine alternatives and
various solutions to problems and develop hypotheses. "Operations" are actions which are carried out through mental processing and are necessary in the development of rational thought.  

Piaget feels that every child moves through these cognitive stages in sequence, not necessarily at the same rate, but that these stages are fixed and innate for all children in all cultures, the variables being physical maturity, experience with physical objects, social interaction and equilibration, or a stable idea of our world and our part in it. Each stage results from the preceding one, integrating it with the present level, and preparing for the subsequent one. Piaget says that if you allow a child to experience, generalize and verbalize, he will learn.  

Cognitive growth and learning are summed up by Piaget in these key ideas:

1. Children are not miniature adults. They have their own world view and ways of determining reality.

2. Children's mental development follows a sequence of definite stages. The sequence remains constant, although the entrance and exit ages may vary.

3. A child may function in one stage for some matters, in another stage for processing different matters.

4. Mental growth and development is influenced by four interrelated factors:
   a. maturation - physical development, particularly the central nervous system
   b. experience - manipulating, handling and thinking about concrete objects
c. social interaction between adults and the child's peers.

d. equilibration - maturation, experience and social interaction are organized into a balanced system through mental processes.

5. Children's mental development places limitations on what they can learn and the conditions under which they learn.

6. Genuine learning which is long-term and stable rather than superficial indicates that:

a. Knowledge must be discovered and constructed through learner's activities.

b. Children learn best by handling concrete objects and participating through the five senses.

c. Thought grows from actions, and not from words alone.

d. Children are constantly active as they find out about themselves, others and their world.¹¹

This is relevant to religious education if we are to minister to others in a teaching capacity and find the starting point for experiencing and learning within the faith community.

The Characteristics of Development¹²

Preschool - Grade Twelve
With Approximate Corresponding Ages

1. The Preschool Years - Three - Five Years

Physical: Increasing ability in gross and fine motor
control and coordination. Limit only those activities necessary for maintaining safety.

**Emotional:** An atmosphere of love and security is essential. The child is developing a sense of autonomy and self-esteem. Positive reinforcement is necessary from parents and significant adults as both self-esteem and self-control develop. The child is acquiring a sense of direction and purpose in activities.

**Social:** A capacity to trust in himself, parents and others is developing as his needs are met in tangible ways.

**Cognitive:** He attempts to organize and make sense of his environment. Adults can help him see his world as stimulating and challenging rather than threatening. Exploration, reasonable freedom and the need to question, "what, where, why and how," leads to the rapid development of language skills.

**Moral:** Autonomy and self-control are important and can be developed by giving clear guidelines. Within the guidelines the child must be allowed freedom to make some choices. He is operating in a punishment-obedience orientation. Respect for a moral order is not apparent, but, rather, avoidance of punishment and deference to power.

This is a time when false notions of God become implanted if we are not wary. It is not the time to perpetuate the false notion of God which indicates that problems, sickness or death are punishment from God. This is the time to express the unconditional love of God. In children's terms, "God loves you when you're good. God loves you when you're bad. God loves you all the time." God doesn't love because we are worthy of the "reward" of his love.
He loves because it is his nature to love unconditionally.

Faith: The child needs nurturing by people of faith in a secure and loving environment. Develop attitudes of curiosity, wonder and appreciation of the natural world as created by God, and themselves as a unique and special part of that creation. Develop the beginnings of knowledge of God as Father/Mother: nurturing, caring, loving and relating through their experience of family, friends, neighborhood and faith community.

Methodology:

1. Share and delight in new experiences with the child.

2. Provide a variety of stimulating concrete experiences using as much sensory material as possible.

3. Provide opportunity for play and movement within the limits of safety.

4. Meet his physical and emotional needs promptly without feeding his ego needs for self-gratification.

5. Encourage independence, choice, and creative thought and action.

6. Use melody, rhythm and gesture for total involvement.

7. Learn by doing, showing, experiencing and repetition.

2. Grade One - Six Years

Physical and Emotional: The child loses his rounded baby appearance. He is active, imaginative and emotionally
responsive. He loves to create, explore and dramatize stories and situations. Frustration in lack of gross or fine motor skill or social interaction skill may lead to emotional outbursts and extremes of behavior. His imagination and responsive emotions may lead to unwarranted fears requiring reassurance and guidance from adults.

**Social:** Relationships with others often depend upon the ability to meet the child's needs. He is egocentric, expecting and receiving much from others. He finds it difficult to place himself in another's situation and needs adults to listen and praise his efforts and accomplishments. Self-esteem is important as he acquires a sense of mastery and competence.

**Cognitive:** He needs to be actively involved with concrete objects in sensory experiences. Language increases at a rapid rate.

**Moral:** Rules become absolute with no relative circumstances changing the consequences. For example, a child who accidentally drops a tray of five glasses merits greater punishment than a child who breaks his mother's vase deliberately. Intention has no bearing in the case.

Motivation to follow rules satisfies a desire to win approval for behavior considered "good" by adults and he avoids behavior which brings disapproval. When love of parents and significant adults is apparent the motivation to do the right thing is increased. When parental or adult love is non-existent the child has no motivation to incorporate any right behavior.

**Faith:** Openness and wonder to the world around him provide an opportunity to develop a "sense of the sacred"
and the presence of God as revealed in creation. A sense of the fatherhood/motherhood of God is fostered by experiences of love with his parents who are faithful providers of love and care, fulfilling his needs. Through close and loving relationships with parents and other adults he begins growth into an other-centeredness rather than a self-centeredness.

**Methodology:** At this level of emotional need, reaching the child through the affective areas of art, music, drama and movement are appropriate. He thrives on methods which leave him free to be creative and imaginative at a feeling level. Worship, if it is expressed in language and experience at the child's level, is an important element in religious education. Spontaneous prayer and praise are to be nurtured since they flow from basic needs, feelings and experiences.

3. **Grade Two - Seven Years**

**Emotional:** A continuation of previous emotional response, although the child is exerting more self-control. His response is totally positive or totally negative in general. His most basic need at this age is a sense of belonging. This is particularly pertinent to religious education in providing an accepting community in which to grow and believe. The child is sensitive to what his peers, parents and teachers say and do, not what they think. He is sensitive to being treated unfairly.

**Social:** Other adults become important as the child becomes less dependent upon his parents for love and approval. These significant others are important as they provide the support and model of relationships in the world outside the family. He does not relate consistently with his peers.
Cognitive: He is not able to reason without concrete images and experiences. Within his limited reasoning abilities, his perception is dominated by his own point of view. True dialogue or discussion is not possible because he is incapable of taking on the viewpoint of others, or of making comparisons.

Moral: Anxiety develops in a child who is not given structural guidelines from adults in his life. The anxiety may result in abnormal superstitious behaviors at this age.

Faith: Rudimentary contemplation is nurtured by his continued sense of wonder. He is beginning to be able to reflect apart from his own needs. The basis of faith is built in relationships of trust and security with parents and other adults.

Methodology: First-hand experiences and life themes can be explored in the context of Christian belief such as: wind, water, bread, seed.

Emphasis may be placed on receiving: God gives gifts to us, especially the gift of Jesus. Gospel stories of Jesus as friend, brother, helper and healer develop an affective awareness of his presence, particularly as the stories are related to the children's lives today with concrete objects and images.

4. Grade Three - Eight Years

Emotional: The child seeks new experiences as his curiosity and new outwardness lead to knowledge and discovery. His mood and style are active and expansive as he exhibits more self-confidence, self-curiosity and awareness.

Social: The child is developing more intimate friend-
ships based on personality traits, but continues to fear "being left out," or not belonging. He begins judging him-
self as well as others and is becoming conscious of social
status. He has complex and ambivalent feelings about his
parents as he moves from total dependence on this source
of stability. Parental guidance and support remains essen-
tial.

Cognitive: The third-grader is increasingly able to
place himself in another's situation as he judges and ap-
praises the "why" of events. He is able to engage in dia-
logue with others rather than using monologue. He is gen-
erally friendly and cooperative and enjoys being personally
involved in a learning situation. He likes to take things
home to parents for their response as he begins to evaluate
his abilities.

Moral: The peer groups and the individual child will
begin to set up rules and regulations as they internalize
those which were previously imposed externally by adults.

Faith: Support and reinforcement from adults will
provide the faith and trust which can be further nurtured
in the Christian community. The unconditional love in the
example of the community will firm the foundation of faith
in a God of love as the child continues developing his sense
of selfhood.

Methodology: The child may enjoy participation in
creative dramatics, role play, and the development of or-
iginal and meaningful liturgies "in his own words." Because
of his increased intellectual capacity and ability to dia-
logue with others he is able to engage in group activities
and projects which demand cooperation among peers. I believe
that competition is counter-productive to building up the
body of Christ and recognizing the gifts of each child. Rather, activities which are non-threatening and non-competitive may serve to improve the self-image of each child as he stands before others and before God.

5. Grade Four - Nine Years

Physical and Emotional: Physical growth is slow and emotional life is more stable. The child is more inner-directed, more calm, steadfast and responsible. He is able to better resist external pressures of control. He has more self-confidence and deals more maturely in relationships with others.

Social: Friendships with peers made the previous year are continued and strengthened, although they are strictly between those of the same sex. Tendencies to judge are tempered with a new objectivity and discernment. Intentions begin to have more weight than damage by actions. It is more easily accepted that parents and adults err and are not perfect. As self-confidence increases, so does the capacity for self-motivation, self-reliance and acceptance of personal responsibility. Acceptance by a group is necessary, and within its context the child is dependable and loyal.

Cognitive: Materials and information attract a nine-year old. He is interested in the "real world" and likes to explore his environment. The skills and information he learns in a classroom he is able to transfer to new situations and environments, although he still operates very much on a concrete level. He is action-oriented and can work individually or in a concerted group effort. He is developing an increased ability to think and reason for himself.

Moral: He has an increased awareness of right and
wrong as well as a new objectivity in making judgments based on intention rather than damage or results. A growth of conscience and desire for moral order is evident as he struggles with rudimentary ideas of justice, a sense of fairness and heightened sensitivity toward others. He is able to share himself as well as material objects and needs to opportunity to do so.

Faith: A sense of fairness and sensitivity provides the foundation for experiencing acceptance, forgiveness and love in the context of the Christian community. This is the time to present the standards of the world in contrast to the standards of the Christian community when there are examples of conflict between the two. Communal reconciliation, celebrations relating to their immediate actions, needs and fears with unconditional love and acceptance by the community will be meaningful.

Methodology: A time for sharing, discussing and experiencing the results of personal choice in life situations and as they relate to the Gospel of Jesus. Problem solving situations, simulation games and memory games are effective teaching methods in relation to the scriptures. This is the prime time to emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation themes.

6. Grade Five - Ten Years

Physical-Emotional: The first signs of puberty emerge in girls. There is a high point of balance and adaptation to the world that may not be equaled again before another decade. The ten-year old is generally at peace with himself and his world.

Social: Continued friendships with peers of the same sex. Girls may have petty "fallings out" with friends and
there is a continual switching around of smaller cliques within larger groups. A ten-year old is generally self-accepting, acknowledges his own skills and talents, and appreciates the same in others. He has a broader outlook and is able to discuss, with some flexibility, social issues of man in relationship to his environment, the larger world, and to others.

**Cognitive**: Curiosity, thirst for knowledge, classification of information and developing powers of reason characterize this age. He has a great number of concepts and is beginning to rely less on actual experience.

**Moral**: He is making more decisions of personal choice. "Keeping the rules" and a great respect for law and moral order predominate. He continues to mature in his ability to perceive intentions in deciding whether an action is good or bad. He may tend toward legalism or the law of the group in its negative aspects.

**Faith**: As sensitivity to others develops, it is to be nurtured by expressing that concern in tangible ways whenever possible. Discussing actions in the life of Jesus through the scriptures helps to affirm the need to be sensitive and to reach out and touch others' lives.

**Methodology**: Confront the tendency toward legalism with the concept of a plan of order for God's people so that his purpose may be fulfilled in each person. The spirit of the law is based on love. A child at ten may be able to discern whether his own actions are based on love as he confronts the issues relevant to his life. He can experience creativity and self-expression through dramatization, film making, tape recordings, art and music, writing journals, poems, prayers, hymns and celebrations. All of these exper-
iences may be reflected upon as they relate to the scriptures, especially the stories of Jesus. Active involvement in physical, cognitive and affective participation is vital.

7. Grade Six - Eleven Years

Physical and Emotional: The child is conscious and curious about sexual development and functions. As there is rarely growth without conflict, this new phase of physical, intellectual and emotional growth is fraught with renewed conflicts. Emotional outbursts of rage, moodiness and quarreling may become common. A new search for self-identification begins with the process of maturation and the result often seems to be "everything I do is wrong" or "you are always picking on me."

Social: Increased dependence on peers and independence from parental influence is typical. Parental authority is challenged, but a firm, loving hand must continue to guide and set boundaries.

Cognitive: He is beginning to move into Piaget's Formal Operations Stage. He becomes interested in possibilities, in rational thinking and in abstract ideas. While able to make rational choices, his emotional instability at this point may hinder his response.

Moral: The building of a Christian value system is aided by analyzing his own decisions and motives. Adults must allow him freedom to make wrong decisions while reinforcing and praising right decisions.

Faith: The model of Jesus, the prophets and people of faith and courage in our day provide the appropriate models for this age when the child is searching for the image of what he wants to be. He will recognize qualities present and lacking in himself. He is influenced by those he
admires and patterns himself after their modeling. This is a notable factor for those in parenting, teaching and counseling roles.

**Methodology:** Dynamic personal witness and sharing of the relevance of faith and the reality of spiritual experience is important at this stage, as the eleven-year old tends to be critical in analyzing facts and events as they are presented.

8. **The Junior High Years - Twelve - Fourteen Years**

**Physical and Emotional:** In this age of puberty, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth continues. Boys are entering a period of physical growth and change; girls are usually two years ahead of boys in maturity. The peer group provides the social setting for the activity of the individual. They become preoccupied with self-concern, self-conscious in terms of appearance and how they are viewed by others. In their egocentrism they assume others are constantly watching and perform for this "imaginary audience." Boys are conscious of their physique, but may be awkward and lacking in coordination. While they act with bravado, they are often insecure about themselves and shy with girls. Girls are more secure in their self-image because of early maturation.

During the adolescent years young persons become acutely aware that they are no longer children and attempt to adjust themselves to an adult self-concept. This is a crucial time for credible adult models who are not authoritarian, but live out their faith and values.

**Social:** Peer groups are influential and personal relationships become more intimate and refined. When relation-
ships fail the adolescent may perceive it as a reflection of failure in himself, becoming wary of establishing new, intimate relationships. Adolescents often reflect the attitude that their own experiences are unique with such statements as "You don't know how it feels." Feelings of uniqueness have their negative aspects in adolescents who believe they will never get pregnant, get hooked on drugs and other variations on the theme.

Cognitive: Propositional logic allows the adolescent to consider many variables simultaneously, a process more complex than he has been able to handle in previous stages. The world of ideas, theories and possibilities opens upon a broad horizon. He is able to see things not only as they are but how they might be. This may lead to conflict and rebellion as the adolescent attempts to find a balance point in the tension between the reality and the vision.

Moral: Adolescence is a time when much of an individual's moral development occurs. They become aware of the conflict in belief and behavior, becoming particularly critical of inconsistency in moral conduct and faith within the adult Christian community. While critical of adults, they are not able to see the inconsistency of their own behavior. Conflict of conscience reveals the development of moral reasoning, responsibility and decision making.

Faith: A period of testing and rejecting religious values and teaching which had been accepted on the authority of adults emerges. This comes from a need for independence from adult authority more than a rejection of God or faith. This is a time when the basic foundation of the unconditional love of God and the care and support of others proves its value. The child moves from life experiences to basic prin-
ciples and back to concrete experience. Depth of understanding is developing through these processes.

As religious educators share their belief and experience of personal relationship with Jesus, the adolescent may be enabled to make a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord in a meaningful way.

Methodology: The "Good News" is revealed in the everyday experience of all God's people. The questions of faith and existence must be answered with insights which give meaning to the very real events of adolescent life. Dialogue with students is necessary because they are in a stage of rejecting authoritarian figures and statements. From an adult's faith vision and faith sharing the adolescent may be able to translate words into action independently. He needs space in which to listen, reflect, dialogue, act, experience and decide.

In his need to define his self-concept as a young adult and answer "Who am I?" questions, he is able to appreciate a sense of history. If the faith community has not already instilled a sense of personal history in the faith story of Old and New Testament peoples, this is the time to begin.

Religious educators must deal honestly and fairly with adolescents. Establish just rules and insist that they abide by them. Praise accomplishments which reflect the values of the community. Do not overreact to misbehavior, humiliate individuals for their actions, or make judgmental statements. Listen with your heart; listen and speak wisely.

9. The Senior High Years - Fifteen - Eighteen

Physical and Emotional: Boys at this level progress
from the preliminary stages of maturity to the physically mature adult, no longer undergoing glandular and hormonal development. By twelfth grade they have achieved a peak period of energy and coordination. Girls during this period are physically advanced and have already established a self-image.

As sophomores they may become negative, questioning all that had value as a child. Boredom and indifference to persons and things may foster undesirable experiments with alcohol, drugs and vandalism. This phase usually passes quickly. With increasing age the question of primary importance becomes one of personal concern with the future and the best use of abilities and talents.

Social: Interpersonal relationships become more altruistic and less manipulative in the sense of "What can he do for me?" Relationships which may last through adulthood may begin here. There is the same pressure to conform to peer groups because of a more secure self-concept. By the senior year most young people are capable and desirous of making major decisions about their future, their lifestyle and their independent status. This may be frustrating for those whose decisions for the future may require several more years of schooling, perhaps prolonging a period of dependence and postponing maturation and responsibility within adult society. Those who progress from high school directly into our competitive and often unstable society will need support from a faith community as they struggle with the conflicts of being Christian in today's society. Christianity is not a spectator sport. It demands people of faith and action who base their values and their lives on the Gospel of Jesus.

Cognitive: Questions ranging over the full range of abstract thinking are pursued, philosophical questions about
the meaning and value of life. They have gained much exper-
iential knowledge, facts and theoretical information and
have responded intellectually and affectively to the flow
of information.

Moral: Personal responsibility should be explored
and discussed. Personal response and decisions must be
their own with responsibility accepted for the consequences.
The questions of value and moral responsibility discussed,
questioned and challenged in this stage may take years to
work out in the lives of individuals. Educators and other
significant adults must express their Christian convictions
and beliefs in a non-threatening, non-authoritarian way.
They must allow comparisons with the values and lifestyles
that society professes.

Faith and Methodology: If we have consistently pre-

sent ed the notion of life as a gift of God; if we have ex-

pressed the revelation of God in the events of our lives
and not perpetuated any magical notions of God; if we have
presented a God relating and involved in the lives of his
people; and if we have presented faith as a way of life and
love as modeled by Jesus, then we have laid a firm founda-
tion. Continue to share faith experiences; deal with clar-
ification of values in the light of the Gospel. Our young
adult will not have to cast off a childhood image of God
that does not suffice in a secular world.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter VI


4 Ibid., pp. 5-6.


6 Ibid., p. 173.

7 Ibid., p. 371.


9 Ibid., p. 3.


CHAPTER VII

THE CALL TO COMMUNITY AND THE MENTALLY RETARDED

"Refuse no one the good on which he has a claim when it is in your power to do it for him. Say not to your neighbor, 'Go and come again, tomorrow I will give,' when you can give at once." (Proverbs 3:27)

With the recent emphasis on the civil rights of the mentally retarded and the move toward "normalization" and deinstitutionalizing the retarded by placement in group homes within communities, a mandate to the Christian Church is established to provide for their spiritual needs as we provide for the spiritual needs of every other individual.

In an effort to fulfill Christ's mandate to "make disciples of all" by witnessing to and sharing the word of God, it must be part of the Church's teaching ministry to provide Special Religious Education so that the basic right and need of the mentally retarded to enjoy a life of faith, according to their own abilities, is realized.

The main objective of a Special Religious Education program is to provide an opportunity for the mentally retarded to grow spiritually, emotionally and socially, within the limits of an individual's abilities. If we consider "religion" to be a series of abstract concepts to be mastered, then the retarded are not educable because of their limitations of conceptual thought. However, if God, the Church, Jesus, the Holy Spirit can be known "intuitively," then the
retarded are educable.\textsuperscript{1} If the retarded can learn through symbol, gesture and concrete experience then the retarded are also religiously educable. We use those same methods with primary children when we \textit{play} (gesture) in the sunlight, light a candle in a dark room (concrete experience) and relate that to Jesus as the light of the world (symbol). This same method can be used in every area of religious education with the mentally retarded, and in these ways provide:

1. an awareness of himself as a person
2. an awareness of other people and God's creation around him.
3. a deeper interiorization of the message by participating in worship and activities of the community
4. an awareness of his responsibility to be of service to others

Obviously, we can not just teach facts about God; we must nurture the faith experience in the daily life of each individual. We must, as Christians, fill their basic needs to belong, to be loved and accepted, to be helped, and to reach out of themselves to others.

We do not grow in isolation. No one believes alone. To believe is to be with others. The handicapped person can believe when he is welcomed into a believing community. The handicapped person can grow in faith when he belongs to a community of faith. The Christian Church, those of us who are the community of faith, must extend that community to include all who are made and loved by God. All have been created in his image and likeness; we only need eyes to see.

The right of the handicapped to receive Special Religious Education adapted to their special needs challenges the ingenuity and the love of the Christian community.
Defining Mental Retardation

The American Association of Mental Retardation states the most widely accepted definition to date:

"Mental retardation refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period." 2

In this statement three criteria must be met before classifying a person as mentally retarded:

1. Significant subaverage intellectual functioning means that the score on a standard intelligence test must be at least two standard deviations (s.d. = 15) below the norm (100) for his age group.

2. Deficits in adaptive behavior means that adjustment to the natural and social environment is impaired. This may be in relation to sensory motor skills, communication skills, academic and reasoning skills or social skills.

3. Manifest during the developmental period between birth and eighteen years; however, those who attain adulthood through normal development and then suffer brain damage or senility are not considered retarded. 3

Mental retardation is to be considered as a condition in which a person's rate of development is below that of a normal person of the same chronological age. This is revealed not only on the level of intellectual development, but often in delayed development of fine and gross motor skills and social inadequacy. He may be unable to communicate and relate to others effectively or conform to acceptable standards of behavior, often exhibiting emotional and behavioral problems.

According to the 1970 census, approximately three
percent of the American population is mentally retarded, that is, five million persons. The majority of the mentally retarded population (86.7%) is classified as mildly retarded, ten percent is classified as moderately retarded, and three percent classified as severely retarded.4

The levels of retardation for educational purposes are:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Educational Designation</th>
<th>I.Q.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Educable (EMR)</td>
<td>50 - 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Trainable (TMR)</td>
<td>25 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe (Profound)</td>
<td>Custodial (CMR)</td>
<td>below 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Severely Retarded

Poor motor development with a minimal capacity for training in self-help skills determines placement in custodial institutions where total supervision and nursing care is provided. Communication skills are minimal, although some speech and communication through sign language and gestures may be developed. Some training in self-help and self-care may be accomplished through systematic procedures. These persons' needs are usually met by the Church through chaplaincy programs, citizens advocacy programs and members of the faith community who become involved in caring relationships on a one-to-one basis.

The Moderately Retarded

This group is often referred to as "trainable." They are able to communicate verbally or through signing, have fair motor coordination and can develop basic self-help skills through training. Some can achieve an academic level of second grade, with basic reading, writing and math skills.
Most at least learn to read signs and labels for self-protection. They often exhibit poor social behavior such as clinging and grasping at others and need training in appropriate social and conversational skills. Many are employed in sheltered workshops and attain a certain degree of "normalization" into the community through economic usefulness and placement in a group home environment.

Many Down's Syndrome and brain-injured persons make up this group.

For teaching within the faith community this group will need a special class since their limited abilities preclude their full integration into the larger body. However, it is necessary that the normal faith community accept and understand them as persons with the same basic needs that all people have. They need to be included in the action of the faith community as it worships and fellowships together.

The Mildly Retarded

A mildly retarded person is often not diagnosed as such until a teacher recommends additional testing when the child shows significant academic deficiencies below age and grade level.6 There is usually minimal sensori-motor retardation and the child appears to develop physically within the normal range.

Environmental and cultural deprivation accounts for many labeled mildly retarded. It is important that the label of retardation never be based on intelligence testing alone, but that the other criteria are observed as well.

This group is referred to as the "educable" retarded. They range in possible achievement at sixteen to eighteen
years in the second to sixth grade level. Most learn to read and are able to achieve social and vocational skills necessary to minimum self-support and independence in society. They may need guidance in stressful social or economic situations. Many live semi-independently; others marry, often living in low-income areas and producing children who are also environmentally, culturally or intellectually deprived.\textsuperscript{7}

Within the Christian community we are striving for the mentally retarded to feel loved and accepted by God, to be loved and accepted by the faith community as they experience that they are also gifted by God and can offer themselves in service to God and others. The mildly retarded may experience this best when integrated into the context of the normal faith community and its structure. When this proves inadequate for reasons of lower functioning or behavioral problems a special class is desirable.

**Characteristics of the Mentally Retarded**

While it is unfair to categorize the retarded into one homogeneous group denying their individual differences any more than we could place the "normal" population into one group, it is helpful to make some general statements regarding characteristics and learning. The characteristics are listed in order, following the sequence of the previous chapter.

**Physical and Emotional:** Development of coordination in gross and fine motor skills may be slower than in their normal peers depending upon the level of retardation and physiological factors. Epilepsy and cerebral palsey may be associated with retardation.

The results of being labeled retarded, social rejec-
tion, educational failure and poorly-developed coping and defense mechanisms may lead to emotional instability in the retarded. They often function from an external locus of control, allowing others to determine their response as they imitate the model of others. Stereotypic behaviors such as sucking, arm flapping, aimless movement, finger twisting, chewing on fingers or string and other oral stimulation may further add to rejection and social isolation. Hyperactivity and behavior disturbances are more prevalent among the retarded.8

The following are a number of personality characteristics more often found among the retarded than in the general population:

1. Expectations of failure plague the retarded. This expectancy causes them to be failure avoidant rather than strive for success. They rely on others rather than risk making their own decisions.
2. They often develop a feeling of helplessness, believing that they are not in charge of their own destiny.
3. They adopt unusual strategies to remain in contact with others for as long as possible.
4. They may have defective ego functioning and lack insight into their own personalities and motives. They are more likely to use defense mechanisms, such as denial or repression, that to attempt to change themselves.
5. They may go to great lengths to demonstrate their "normality" to themselves and others.9

Social: Family stress and tensions related to the acceptance and presence of a retarded child in the family may result in emotional disorders. Families may need attention, counseling and supportive ministry in dealing with their feelings. In the Church it may be the parents of a retarded child
who awaken the conscious response of the faith community when the needs of their child are not being met.

Social isolation and an unstimulating and unproductive environment may lead to feelings of worthlessness, frustration and insecurity which emerge in two types of behavior in a situation requiring social interaction. The first is a behavior of withdrawal or retreat from the world, and introspection. The second is a search for love which may manifest itself in sticky, clinging behavior toward anyone who gives attention, or aggressive "attention at any price" behavior.10

Cognitive: The progression through four developmental stages, as researched by Piaget, is relevant to the learning abilities of the mentally retarded. Piaget indicates that all children progress through the stages as follows (MA = mental age):

1. MA = 0 - two years - the sensori-motor stage: perceptual organization; the infant deals with his environment through simple sensory response.
2. MA = two - seven years - pre-operational stage: the use of objects as symbols, then words and numbers. Reason is based on intuition or hunches.
3. MA = seven - eleven - concrete operational stage: the child begins to order and classify according to his concrete experience.
4. MA = eleven onward - operational stage: the child has developed the ability to deal with abstract, hypothetical thought.

The trainable (TMR) child's rate of learning is one-third to one-half of normal with most TMRs' mental age never rising above seven years. The educable (EMR) child's rate of learning is one-half to three-quarters of normal with most
never rising above a mental age of fourteen years. Research has indicated that the retarded do not attain the stage of formal thought. Most EMRs do not reach the age of concrete operations until mid-adolescence.11

The following may help to clarify the learning characteristics of the mentally retarded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.Q.</th>
<th>Rate of Learning</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Developmental Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(TMR) 25-50</td>
<td>1/3-1/2 of normal</td>
<td>CA = 6 years, MA = 2-3 years</td>
<td>pre-operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CA = 12 years, MA = 4-6 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(EMR) 50-75</td>
<td>1/2-3/4 of normal</td>
<td>CA = 12 years, MA = 6-9 years</td>
<td>concrete operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CA = 16 years, MA = 8-12 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific Learning Characteristics and Implications for Teaching

1. Short attention span
   a. Get eye contact.
   b. Call them by name.
   c. Use color; underlining.
   d. Involve their senses and whole body through participation and movement.
   e. Reinforce attentive behavior and appropriate action with praise.

2. Short-term memory is poor
   a. Teach for overlearning with repetition of similar activities and verbalizations.
   b. Repeat and review over several sessions.

3. Learn best by doing
   a. Teach through concrete experience using the senses.
b. Use a variety of visual aids.
c. Organize content into units or categories for best carryover.

4. Learn by paired association
   a. Associate concrete objects with a word; pair dates and events, names and places.
   b. Associate pictures and words.
   c. Point out cause and effect relationships.
   d. Point out similarities.

5. Lack of motivation
   a. Experience should be relevant to the individual.
   b. Experience many new things together in small groups.
   c. Encourage independent, creative thinking and answers.
   d. Allow choice and decision making through offering a variety of activities.
   e. Establish a familiar routine or schedule which allows a degree of comfort and security.

Moral: As with a normal child in the first stage of moral development, the mentally retarded operate generally within a punishment-obedience orientation. What is good or bad is determined by the consequences rather than the intention. They tend to feel most secure when operating within a set of fixed rules as established unquestionably by some authoritarian figure.12

   It is possible to enable them to see that what is good is what satisfies their needs and the needs of others, particularly in the Christian community where God is known as one who desires the best for us and loves us all the time.

   The retarded are often fiercely loyal, faithful in their affection and intuitively sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. They may show a delicate sense of morality and amazing depth of insight with regard to a sense of the
sacred, of mystery and symbol. Their generosity of spirit enables a real gift in serving God and others.\textsuperscript{13}

**Faith**: Whan an infant is baptized into the Christian faith he is supported by the faith of parents and sponsors. He becomes a member of the body of Christ through the grace of God and the faith and action of the Christian community. In much the same way, the mentally retarded are supported by the faith of the community as it enables them to grow in faith to the limit of their abilities.

Some basic objectives in the faith experience of the mentally retarded should be:

1. Through our example of love they will experience the love of God and be given the opportunity to love in return.

2. To provide a faith community which welcomes, accepts and respects them as they are.

3. To bring forth faith from others as they perceive the hidden value in the life of the retarded.

4. To enable the mentally retarded to see themselves as created in the image of God, as persons of value and worth.

5. To nurture a sense of God's presence in all things, persons and events.

6. To call forth their cooperation in recognizing their own gifts for the service of others.

7. To provide an experience of family through the faith community and participation in a special class, particularly for those who have been institutionalized for long periods and are now in group homes.
8. Through the experience in community and development of a "family spirit" to call forth an understanding of the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God as creative, caring, nurturing and unconditionally loving.

9. To come to know Jesus through Gospel stories which relate to their experiences of loving, sharing, healing and breaking bread together.

10. To discover a unity of faith and life and to prepare them for greater participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

Methodology: The mentally retarded must be actively involved if they are to learn. They may sit willingly, even passively, but they are probably not learning. Utilize as many senses as possible in each learning experience. Verbalize with those who are verbal, use gestures, signs and movement with those who are non-verbal. They must be actively involved if there is to be any relevance and transfer to long-term memory. Repetition of the same or similar experiences plus frequent review is necessary.

A variety of methods which bring forth participation and self-expression may help to interiorize the meaning of the lesson. However, methods must never become an end in themselves so that purpose and meaning are lost. Simplicity is the key for understanding.

Among the techniques most appropriate are:

1. Verbal Means: The spoken word is the most used and often abused. With the retarded use words sparingly, considering the extent of their vocabulary as well as the choice of words and tone of voice.

Verbal expression can be used in story telling, drama,
puppetry, dialogue, discussion and readings. Stories and scripture should be relevant to their experience. Imagination and visualization enlivens stories and scripture. Dialogue and interaction within the reading holds interest and encourages involvement and self-expression. Through dramatization of scriptural stories and characters they can gain a sense of their roots and heritage in the family of God.

2. Graphics: The value of a word is often best expressed in writing. Even the illiterate delight in seeing their written name and will often ask people to "write it down." Painting, drawing, banners and posters are graphic expressions. A favorite book or Bible may be carried faithfully about, not because they can necessarily read, but because the written word is perceived as having value. There is wisdom in the words of the Lord through the Prophet Isaiah, "Upon the palms of my hands I have written your name." (Isaiah 49:16)

3. Pictorial Means: The retarded are often visual learners. Pictures, photographs, flannel board figures, slides and filmstrips are all appropriate, but even more so are those creations of their own design and choosing. Colored paper, paints, markers and crayons allow freedom of expression. It is being discovered that many retarded persons are artistically gifted. Religious feeling and experience are often most successful when expressed in art forms. The finished product need not be a great art work to have significance for its creator.

4. Modeling: Three-dimensional art forms in clay or wire sculpture and freeform wood, cardboard or metal designs invite personal involvement and self-expression.

5. Gestures: Movement tells a great deal about how we feel
about ourselves, others and God. We reveal our open and closed attitudes, often unconsciously, through body language and gesture. Love and friendship, experiences in daily life, prayerful attitudes and liturgical action are all expressed in gesture. The mentally retarded find stability in ritual and a fixed sequence of movement. Liturgy in simple form offers a sense of security as well as a sense of the sacred. The retarded will enjoy processions, lighting candles and other duties as servers or acolytes. They may enjoy the movement of dance, sign language, finger plays or songs with gestures.

6. **Music:** The early Christians spoke often of singing to one another in Psalms, hymns and inspired songs (Colossians 3:16). Music is not only a means of instruction but of edification. It transcends the realm of logic and rationality and enables us to move out of ourselves. Rhythm is visible in the universe and all of nature. It is written in our very beings. Rhythm in sound and movement may help bring calm and order to disorderly feelings and behavior. It may provide the pattern for constructive, purposeful behavior and may develop a sense of body image, of wholeness and unity of muscles working together.

Music is appropriate as a prelude or background to prayer, for listening and visual imagery. It may restore a sense of peace and harmony as well as foster fellowship and mutual enjoyment of a shared activity. It may enable man's spirit to extend beyond himself to God.

7. **Audio-Visual and Multi-Media:** Simplicity is again the key. Too much visual stimulation may be distracting to the real meaning and purpose behind their use. Focus on meaning may be lost in the stimulation of sight and sound. The best example of multi-media expression is the liturgical celebration: light, sound, gesture, simplicity and unity.
In the religious education of the mentally retarded it is important to keep in mind both the mental age and the chronological age of the persons involved. The methods presented may seem appropriate for children and questionable for adults. The retarded adult, regardless of chronological age has probably only attained a mental age of approximately five to twelve, depending upon the level of retardation. The severely retarded will have a mental age less than five years.

The methods of childhood education are appropriate but not necessarily the materials. Curricula which include visuals ought to be screened for pictures which predominantly show children, or seem childish, when used with the retarded adult. His intellectual function and response may be on the level of a child, but his physiological and emotional needs are much like any normal adult. They have the same needs for intimacy, love and security which must be dealt with in learning behavior acceptable in society. This is handled in religious education by modeling and imitation in the ways that Christians are to show love and support of one another. The retarded must see in action the words of Jesus, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) Through our example they will be able to say, "We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us." (I John 4:16)
FOOTNOTES
Chapter VII


4Ibid., p. 72.


7Ibid., pp. 162-187.

8Ibid., pp. 276-280.

9Ibid., pp. 280-281.


14 Ibid., pp. 127-136.


16 Ibid., p. 73.
CHAPTER VIII

ADAPTING THE MODEL TO A SPECIAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM: AN OUTLINE

This curriculum outline is intended for use with moderately to mildly retarded adults. Adapt the activities to the level of each individual group. The curriculum is non-denominational in scope, allowing for additional instruction in doctrinal matters at another time. The intention of this curriculum is to build a foundation of experience in a faith community, to discover themselves as created and loved by a God who has created all things good, and to know the presence of God in Jesus as Friend and Savior.

I feel it is essential that religious educators desire to enthusiastically share the presence of God in the world and in their own lives. We are passing on more than facts and information; we are sharing Living Water, the Light of the World, the Word of our God which stands forever! We are sharing it with a people who may have spent most of their lives in institutions, lived in group homes, or lived sheltered lives in the confines and protection of their families. It is in us that the retarded will discover the God who loves them.

Numerous suggestions are offered as learning experiences. Select those which best suit the needs and abilities of your group. It is recommended that several activities be used from each section. Offer a choice of activities if possible. In addition, select scripture stories and others which are relevant to the lesson from other sources. This
is only intended as a suggested outline. Be creative. Enjoy. Add new activities which reinforce the experience and appreciation of our world, ourselves and each other.

The Gifts of God for the People of God

Unit I Creation: A Gift of God

The basic scripture for this unit in Genesis 1:1-24. This may be presented in simple narrative or using one of the many colorful books available such as the Arch Books series (Concordia Publishing House). We desire to convey a sense of God's presence and love in creating our world, not a fundamentalist approach to a seven-day creation story. Begin each session with a simple phrase, "In the beginning God made ______," and conclude each session with the phrase, "And God said, 'This is very good.'" It is a simple form of ritual which will symbolize stability and add to long-term memory, interiorization and generalization.

A. Light and Darkness: Genesis 1:3 "Let there be light."

1. Teaching and Scripture experience:
   a. A darkened room lit first with a candle, then a flashlight, then electric lights
   b. Discuss feelings in light and darkness. Are they afraid in the dark? Does a light, bright day make you happy?
   c. Create a collage, banner or painting with black and yellow as symbols of dark and light.
   d. Walk through a tunnel or hallway from dark to a light on the other end.
   e. Blindfold one person; let a partner lead him around. Switch blindfolds. Discuss.
   f. Spend time outside at dusk as day turns to night. Discuss how it feels. Activities of night and day

2. Prayer and Praise
   Spontaneous prayer on experience of light or rote prayer, "Thank you, God, for light." Conclusion: God said,
"This is very good."

3. Sharing and Singing
Share feelings about darkness and light. Personal experiences about being in the dark; experiences related to the teaching

Song: "Thank you, Lord" from "Songs for Celebration," page H. 2941
Add verse, "Thank you, Lord, for giving us light."

4. Breaking Bread Together
A dark chocolate cake with yellow frosting and decorated with candles will reinforce the concept of light and dark, or, ice cream with chocolate sauce.

This aspect of the model may seem questionable in a class for the retarded. However, it is an experience of love and community as much as any other aspect. It is valuable in teaching responsibility, service to others, showing consideration for others through sharing and observing appropriate behavior, and in setting a model of prayer and thanksgiving for the gifts of God.

B. Sky and Heavens: Psalm 19:1 - "The heavens declare the glory of God."

1. Teaching and Scripture Experience
   a. A trip to the mountains or hillsides to observe the sky, cloud formations, the distance visible, the activity in the sky (birds, aircraft)
   b. Using paint chip sampler, compare shades of blue. Learn the color, blue.
   c. Make a collage of blues or a collage of sky pictures.
   d. Have a Sunrise or Sunset Celebration to observe the sky; note its color.
   e. Paint a sunrise/sunset mural as a group activity.
   f. Visit an observatory.
   g. Make a kite. Fly a kite.
2. Prayer and Praise
   a. Plan a Sunrise Celebration of worship and include
      the entire faith community
   b. Prayer circle

3. Sharing and Singing
   Reflect and share thoughts or experiences. Song, "Thank you, Lord," or "Sing when the Day is Bright"
   from Sunday School Sing, p. 13.

4. Breaking Bread Together
   "Pudding in a Cloud" made with pudding and whipped topping

C. Earth: Genesis 1:10 - "And God called the dry land earth."

1. Teaching and Scripture Experience
   a. Dig in it, feel it, run it through your fingers,
      note texture, lie in the grass, walk barefoot
      through sand and grass
   b. Discuss caring for the earth; not littering.
   c. Plan an Earth Day Clean-up Party
   d. Observe geographical features
   e. Walk, hike, picnic
   f. Make a sand casting; make rock creatures
   g. Slide presentation with "Grand Canyon Suite"

2. Prayer and Praise
   Plan a Litany summing up the facets of creation in review:
      For light and darkness                    Thank you, Lord
      For day and night                        "
      For sunrise and sunset                  "
      For the sky so blue                     "
      For many colors in the sky               "
      For the earth                           "
      For the feel of earth as we walk and dig and enjoy
      all that you give us                    "

3. Sharing and Singing
   Song: Praise Him, Praise Him,
         Praise Him in the morning
         Praise Him in the noon-time
         Praise Him, Praise Him,
         Praise Him when the sun goes down.
4. **Breaking Bread Together**
No-bake cookies made with Chinese noodles, chocolate and marshmallows

**D. Seas and Lakes:** Psalm 96:11 - "Let the sea and what fills it resound."

1. **Teaching and Scripture Experience**
   a. Travel to a nearby ocean, lake or stream; listen to it lap against the shore; swim, splash it, pour it from containers.
   b. Experience and discuss our need for water to make things grow, to drink, to make us clean.
   c. Plant seeds in containers of earth. Water half and leave the other half unwatered to show how water helps things grow.
   d. Soak beans or alfalfa and let it sprout.
   e. Blow bubbles.
   f. Go for a boat ride; learn to row.
   g. Everyone drink some water; pour water over everyone's hands; pump water from an old pump.
   h. Listen to sounds of water.

2. **Prayer and Praise**
Bring to the table or place upon the altar things that will die without water (plants, fish in a bowl, animal figures, pictures of ourselves). This may be done in procession as "Thank you, Lord, for giving us water" is sung. Read a scripture about water. Share spontaneous or rote prayers. Close with the phrase, "And God said, 'This is very good.'"

3. **Sharing and Singing**
Respond to experiences above by sharing thoughts and feelings; personal experiences with water.

Sing together: (Tune - Ten Little Indians)

1. God our Father gives us water (3 times)
   Water gets us clean.
2. God our Father gives us water (3 times)
   Water keeps us cool.
3. God our Father gives us water (3 times)
   Water helps the plants.
4. God our Father gives us water (3 times)
   Water makes things grow.
4. **Breaking Bread Together**  
   In small group, mix Tang or Koolaid with water and serve.

E. **Plants:** Genesis 1:11 - "Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant."

1. **Teaching and Scripture Experience**
   a. Take a nature walk; observe plants, trees, flowers, seeds, etc.
   b. Plant flower seeds and watch them grow and blossom; discuss what plants need to grow.
   c. Plant a tree outside and care for it.
   d. Travel to a National Forest; experience shade and coolness.
   e. Visit a greenhouse; buy a plant for someone in the hospital and take it to him.
   f. Make a living cross by filling a cruciform shape with plants and flowers.
   g. Plant a community vegetable garden
   h. Prepare a selection of fresh vegetables for the group to eat.
   i. Mow a lawn; rake a yard; note seasonal changes in plants.
   j. Draw or paint a plant life picture; make vegetable prints; make a seed mosaic.

2. **Prayer and Praise**
   Review God's creative action to this point with spontaneous prayer and praise as a Litany of Praise with rote response such as, "Praise you, God," or, "Thank you, Lord." Sing Hymn 296, "For the beauty of the earth."  

3. **Sharing and Singing**
   Personal response to the activities. Song: "He's got the whole world in his hand" (refrain only)

4. **Breaking Bread Together**
   Prepare and serve vegetables; if possible, use those grown by the class.

F. **Sun, Moon and Stars:** Genesis 1:14 - "Let there be lights in the ... sky."
Psalm 148:3 - "Praise him sun and moon; praise him all you shining stars."

1. Teaching and Scripture Experience
   a. Use gummed stars; cut out and glue moon on black paper; use glitter to fill in stenciled sun, moon and stars.
   b. Visit a planetarium or observatory.
   c. Spend an evening outside viewing the moon and stars.
   d. Spend a sunny day outside together in an activity, game or work project; feel the warmth of the sun on the body and on the ground.
   e. Make a banner.
   f. Act out things we do on a warm, sunny day; on cold, starry nights.
   g. Film: Universe (28 minutes) Contemporary Films
       828 Custer St., Evanston, IL 60202 Rental: $8.00.

2. Prayer and Praise
   Recall together that God creates out of love. Recall the phrase, "And God looked at everything he had made and he said, 'This is very good.'"
   Spontaneous response to experience, quiet reflection; some unusual imagery with eyes closed will help recall aspects of creation to this point.

3. Sharing and Singing
   There is some overlapping of the four elements in the scriptural model, which is as it should be.
   Songs: "Thank you, Lord." "Praise Him."

4. Breaking Bread Together
   Sugar cookies in the shapes of sun, moon and stars.

G. Fish and Birds: Psalm 8:9-10 - "The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever swims in the path of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth!"

1. Teaching and Scripture Experience
   a. Bring in a small fishbowl or establish an aquarium in class; study movement, species, etc. Take on responsibility for care of fish.
   b. Visit a fish hatchery; a pet shop.
c. Go fishing; prepare a fish meal; discuss how God provides us with food to eat; bird watch.
d. Make and paint paper mache fish and birds.
e. Make a bird feeding station; discuss
f. Make a sky and sea mural with birds and fish; make and match fish with water, birds with sky.
g. Make a fish mobile.
h. Play, "Go Fish." Cut out paper fish, fasten paper clip to it. Use magnet on end of string on stick.

2. Prayer and Praise & 3. Sharing and Singing
   For dramatization with props or puppets:
Verse: In the beginning God made light, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made the sky, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made the earth, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made the sea, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made plants, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made the sun, moon and stars, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Verse: In the beginning God made the fish and birds, and he said,
Response: This is very good. Thank you, God.
Song: "Thank you, Lord." (This may be extended to include animals and man at a later date.)

4. Breaking Bread Together
   Fish-shaped crackers or fish and bird-shaped sugar cookies.

H. Animals: Genesis 1:24 - "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds."
1. Teaching and Scripture Experience
   a. Use several animal books and stories as resources.
   b. Visit zoo, game preserve, farm, pet store
   c. Make an animal collage or banner
   d. Celebrate pet day; discuss care and responsibility for God's gift of animals.
   e. Celebrate with a Blessing of the Pets liturgy.
   f. Listen to Saint Saens "Carnival of the Animals;" move with the rhythm.
   g. Make animal puppets; animal figures from paper mache.
   h. Play animal guessing games; charades.
   i. Identify animals through their sounds.
   j. Slide presentation of animals with background music.
   k. Film: "Overture" (9 minutes) Contemporary Films, 828 Custer St., Evanston, IL 60202 Rental-$13.50.
   l. Place animal pictures into categories: farm & domestic, wild, creeping.

2. Prayer and Praise
   a. Make animal figures from poster board or paper mache and process with them. Place them around an altar or holy table. Sing "The Animals," #144 in Little Ones Sing. Share spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving for animals or plan an Animal Litany of Praise.
   b. Make an "All Things Bright and Beautiful" banner. Hang it behind an altar or holy table as the refrain to Hymn 311 (All things bright and beautiful) is sung. Verses may be sung as pictures representative of the words in the hymn are placed on the altar or as appropriate slides are shown.
   c. Use Psalm 148 for prayer and worship experience.

3. Sharing and Singing
   "The Butterfly Song" Songs for Celebration H-293 New York: Church Hymnal Corporation

4. Breaking Bread Together
   Animal crackers or cookies
I. Man and Woman: Genesis 1:27 - "God created man in his image... male and female he created them."

1. **Teaching and Scripture Experience**
   a. Review entire creation story from a simple version such as Arch Books (Concordia Publishing House) or Dove Books (MacMillan)
   b. Make body images by tracing around body on newsprint. Color or paint. Cut. Hang around the room.
   c. Movement: Pair up for acting out mirror images.
   d. Make silhouette profiles of each other's heads; add heart and hands to paste all together on construction paper background.
   e. Collect photographs and make a poster or collage with the theme, "God Made Me."
   f. Use a mirror to discover and discuss our likenesses and differences.
   g. Name each person, saying, "God made ________ and said, 'This is very good.'"
   h. Read, "Before You Were Born" by Joan Lowery Nixon Indianapolis: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980.

2. **Prayer and Praise**
   Each person makes a clay model of himself. All place the image on the altar as a sign of thanks to God for who they are. Sing refrain from the "Butterfly Song:"]"Oh you gave me a heart and you gave me a smile, you gave me Jesus and you made me your child, and I just thank you, Father, for making me Me."

3. **Sharing and Singing**
   This is a time to emphasize God's love for each and every person: they are special, unique and loved by God.
   Songs: "Thank you, God" #79, Little Ones Sing
   "God Made Everything" #11, Little Ones Sing
   "God Made Me" #9, Little Ones Sing

4. **Breaking Bread Together**
   Gingerbread People

   The continued curriculum is planned according to the same outline as Unit I but is presented in simpler form.
The units may each cover an extended period, thus this may be presented as a two or three-year program. The skeletal forms of Units II and III follow:

**Unit II  God Made Me and Loves Me**

A. Before I was born he loved me; He wanted me.
B. He made me special and unique; He said, "This is very good."
C. He gave me five senses.
D. He gave me feelings.
E. He gave me gifts and talents; I like to ________.
F. He tells me I'm okay; He loves me as I am.
G. He takes care of me like a Mother and Father.
H. He tells me I am His child and all people are my brothers and sisters: My Family
I. He gave me others to love and others who love me.

**Unit III God Gave Me the Best Gift of All: Jesus**

A. God gave me a special gift: Jesus is born.
B. Jesus grew like me.
C. Jesus loves me as his child - Jesus and the Children
D. Jesus shows me how to love - Good Samaritan, Loaves and Fishes
E. Jesus cares for me - Good Shepherd
F. Jesus loves and forgives - Prodigal Son
G. Jesus teaches me to pray - The Lord's Prayer
H. Jesus touches and heals - Blind Man, Paralytic
I. Jesus goes to Jerusalem
J. Jesus shares a meal with his friends
K. Jesus dies; Jesus is raised from death
L. Jesus lives today
M. Jesus gives me power to live my life better: to love, to be kind, to be happy.

Two resources may serve as additional aids in the development of these units: *The Jesus Story and Gift*, both published by Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, MN 55403.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter VII


7Ibid., p. 11.

8Ibid., p. 9.
A New Beginning

"Put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator. There is no Greek or Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, Christ is everything in all of you.

Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully from your hearts in psalms, hymns and inspired songs.

Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:10-11, 16-17)

Let us begin today to become the people God is fashioning in his own image and likeness as a community of faith, hope and love.
Selected Bibliography


*Religious Education of the Retarded: A Chicago Experiment.* Chicago: SPRED.


