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Editors' Notes

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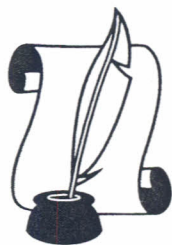


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Editors' Notes

D'Esta Love, Stuart Love

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children . . . Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6-7).

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16).

The above quotations emphasize the importance of children in Israel's worship, prayer, and ritual and the significant place they held as models of discipleship in the ministry of Jesus. The Bible affirms that children are a gift from God: instruments of his activity, a symbolic guarantee of the covenant between God and his people, and a model for Christian believers to emulate. These biblical affirmations were established in a social world in which children were powerless—the bottom rung of the family ladder; in a culture in which tradition and custom allotted the most important place to older people; and in a social context that emphasized the absolute authority of parents over their children, often involving the use of severe physical punishment.

Yet it is a young Joseph who rules the land of Egypt, a young Solomon who asks God for wisdom, a young David—a "little one" out in the fields doing the work of children—who will be the new king to replace Saul. It is a child of David's lineage that will be the hope of God's people. It is a young virgin, Mary, who is the mother of our Lord. It is a young man who flees naked in the face of the crowd with swords and clubs in Mark's gospel, but it is a young man as well who sits in the empty tomb and makes the last utterance of the gospel to the women: " 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you' " (16:6-7).

Our children are still important in the sight of God and the kingdom. But they are at risk in our time as much as ever in the history of human experience. Accordingly, we believe this issue of *Leaven* is timely, and we are grateful for Tommy King with Lynn Mitchell, who have served as guest editors. Tommy King preaches for the Glenwood Church of Christ in Tyler, Texas. His interest in children grows out of a life commitment and his training at Abilene Christian University in the Doctor of Ministry program. Lynn Mitchell, a member of our editorial board, Resident Scholar in Religion at

the University of Houston, and a member of the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, has longed for the realization of this issue. Lynn and his wife, Carolyn, are the friends of children.

As we consider this topic, we are called to think afresh concerning children and the church. Our prayer is that in some small way, as Jesus blessed the children, this issue of *Leaven* will bless all who read it.

D'ESTA AND STUART LOVE

This issue of *Leaven*, devoted to matters involving the children of the church, is indicative of a renewed interest in children's ministries within Churches of Christ. Since the early days of this century, when most Churches of Christ established their Sunday schools, our tradition has aggressively pursued educational programs for our children. In many congregations, the Sunday school became the primary evangelistic and church growth method. When churches began adding ministry staffs, often the first position created was the "Educational Director." Vacation Bible School, bus programs, attendance drives, teacher workshops—all marked the heyday of the Sunday school. However, during the past two decades, the educational program of the church has become an area of concern and questioning. This is reflected in the declining attendance figures, the disappearance of educational staff positions in many churches, and a general feeling that the Sunday school is "not what it once was."

As is often the case, dissatisfaction with the current system marks the need for a paradigm shift. This is what is occurring within children's ministries. The term "Children's Ministries," now emerging as the terminology of choice, is descriptive of the new paradigm. Children's Ministries are now less dependent on the educational model and on the objectives and methods of

the Religious Education Movement of years past. Those who are exploring Children's Ministries are asking more questions about the nature of the community of God's people as described in the biblical text and as demonstrated during the hundreds of years of church history. The quest is not for new educational techniques, but for a return to nurture and formation. Children's Ministries seek not only to minister to children, but to make room for the children to minister to others within the context of the church. These are exciting times for the faith community.

The diversity of the articles found in this issue reflects the embryonic stage of this new era in Children's Ministries. The articles address a wide variety of questions that many are asking about the role of children and the responsibilities of the community to its children. RON HIGHFIELD and JAMES THOMPSON discuss the Christian struggle with public education in late twentieth century America. KENNETH DANLEY and JOHN WESTERHOFF (in his interview with PAUL WATSON) provide discussion of the role children play in our churches. LYNN and CAROLYN MITCHELL encourage church leaders to consider how they communicate with children and what place they give children in the community. HOLLY ALLEN provides a model for how the cell church nurtures the faith of children. My article calls us back to a forgotten model of catechism that still has an appropriate place in the lives of young disciples.

Our desire is that these articles not only serve as resources for new ideas, but that they also stir our communities to look at our children with fresh eyes and loving hearts. When we commit ourselves to the faith of our children, we are investing in our future as well as allowing our children to contribute to the richness of the community's faith. Enjoy.

Tommy King