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David Sedlacek

Andrews University, sedlacek@andrews.edu

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Adventist Christian Education Begins at Home

Christ must be the center of Christian education.
It must begin and end with Christ.



▲ David Sedlacek

Ideally Christ is first taught in the home by Christian parents, but research shows that many parents abdicate this responsibility to the church and to the school because they do not have a vibrant, living relationship with Jesus themselves (Barna, 2003). Perhaps a necessary focus of Christian education is filling this void in the lives of our adult parents. They cannot give what they don't have.

What do we mean by Christ-focused education? Children learn by what their parents, teachers, Sabbath School teachers, siblings, friends and other influential persons in their lives teach. Some of this education is formal, that is, teaching about Jesus throughout Bible history from Genesis to Revelation. This is content-based education designed to anchor and ground the mind of the child in the facts of Jesus being foretold in the book of Genesis — the covenant that God established with His people through Abraham; the response of His people to that covenant over time; the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and the revelation of Jesus and His second coming.

Just as important, if not more so, is Christ-centered education that is modeled and experienced. Children experience Jesus through the love of their parents, teachers and other loved ones. When parents demonstrate love through selfless sacrifice for their children and express that love in words and hugs, their children experience Jesus through them. When parents affirm their children as the Father did with Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22), are actively involved in their lives, protect them, forgive them, discipline them and guide them in loving ways, they model Jesus and help their children experience Jesus through them.

The secure attachment that both formal teaching and experiential modeling of the love of Jesus brings to their children gives them a solid sense of both who they are and Whose they are. The brain becomes wired to both give and receive agape self-sacrificing love. This type of Christian education will prepare our children to be used by God as emissaries to spread the love of God to those they encounter in these last days.

Layered on top of this love foundation are specific biblical understandings that have been captured in the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These fundamental beliefs must be taught (and modeled) by parents, Adventist educators, pastors and Sabbath school teachers in a way that teaches grace, redemption and trust. As students grow from infancy, through childhood and adolescence and into young adulthood, the methods of instruction must vary to suit their stage of development. In particular, adolescents and young adults must be given the freedom to think for themselves and ask difficult questions. Wise Adventist educators will support the growth that these questions imply and be willing to engage in a personal, biblical dialogue and resist dogmatic, pat answers that will push these students farther away from the church. We must trust that the Jesus we have taught them to love will keep and guide them on their Christ-centered journey. ■

Barna, G. (2003). Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

David Sedlacek is professor of Family Ministry and Discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.