

Elders and Christian Education

Calvin and Prayer  
Session Starter #18

What's on Your Mind?—Infant baptism without the parents?

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## Elders and Christian Education

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In our Canadian Presbyterian tradition, the Book of Forms is very clear.

The session is responsible for providing for the programme of Christian education for persons of all ages in order that they may be confronted by the Gospel, may grow in faith, participate in the life of the Christian community, and be active witnesses to Christ in the world. The session is responsible for the administration, oversight, support and evaluation of the total Christian education programme of the congregation within the confessed doctrine of the Church as set forth in the preamble to the ordination questions. (Book of Forms, 112, 112.1)

It is important for sessions to take this seriously, since many sessions leave Christian education decisions to Sunday school teachers. Paying attention to Christian education communicates to everyone that the church cares deeply about what is being taught in your congregation.

Here is a checklist for elders in your congregation to assist in this aspect of your congregation's ministry. (If some don't apply to you, just ignore them.)

If some of the boxes cannot be checked, but you think that some ideas need to be implemented, have some conversation about how to move toward this goal.

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| 1. We provide educational opportunities for all ages.   |  |
| 2. The children, youth and adults in our congregation use educational material that has been approved by our denomination. (See <i>Curriculum Chart 2009–2010</i> .)  |  |
| 3. We provide an adequate budget for the support of Christian education programs, and this budget is reviewed yearly.   |  |
| 4. The offerings that children and youth bring to Sunday school and youth programs are used for mission and outreach, not to purchase their educational material.   |  |
| 5. As a session, we assume responsibility for the recruitment and appointment of teachers.  |  |
| 6. We use the <i>Leading with Care</i> risk assessment tool to determine the risk levels of various ministries. (See <i>Leading with Care</i> , p. 21.)   |  |
| 7. We ensure that all teachers/leaders comply with safety requirements, including police records checks, as described in <i>Leading with Care: A policy for ensuring a climate of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults in The Presbyterian Church in Canada</i> . |  |

# Elders and Christian Education (continued)

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| 8. At the beginning of the program year, we have a commissioning litany for teachers and leaders during worship.   |  |
| 9. We work hard to provide family educational opportunities. We see what our congregation does as a supplement to the Christian nurture provided by parents.   |  |
| 10. We provide training opportunities for all our teachers and leaders. <sup>1</sup>   |  |
| 11. Our educational programs are holistic. We provide opportunities to grow in knowledge (understand the faith) as well as opportunities to serve (live the faith). Our goal is to have a living faith that seeks understanding. |  |
| 12. At least once a year we honour our teachers and educational leaders.   |  |
| 13. As elders, we make an effort to get to know the children by name and encourage them ourselves.   |  |
| 14. We do an annual review and evaluation of our educational programs.   |  |

## Some things to discuss as elders

- Read this quote from *The Active Life* by Parker Palmer.  
I feel sorry for teachers who are required to spell out precise “learning objectives” long before a class begins so that they can measure their own “effectiveness.” I feel sorry for their students, too. Education dominated by preconceived images of what must be learned can hardly be educational. Authentic teaching and learning requires a live encounter with the unexpected. An element of suspense and surprise, an evocation of that which we did not know until it happened. If these elements are not present, we may be training or indoctrinating students, but we are not educating them. In any arena of action – rearing children, counseling people, repairing machines, writing books – right action depends on yielding our images of particular outcomes to the organic realities of ourselves, the other, and the adventure of action itself.

What advantages do churches have in regard to teaching?

What is the difference between training or indoctrinating and educating?

- Tell others about a positive learning experience you have had in the church - as a child, youth or adult.
- For years there was a large banner hanging in the central hall at the PCC national office. It read, “The Presbyterian Church in Canada: a thinking church with a tender heart.” If you were to create an educational motto for your congregation, what would it be?
- Have some fun making a top-ten list! As a session, list the ten most important things that people learn at church. Post this list where others can enjoy it.

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<sup>1</sup> The Presbyterian Church in Canada offers two excellent training programs: TLC (Teacher/Leader Courses) - minimal cost - and *Opening Doors to Discipleship*, a free online program. The denominational login number to register for *Opening Doors to Discipleship* (Teaching Skills, Bible Background or Reformed/Presbyterian Faith) is 42596.

# Calvin and Prayer

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Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

### Prayer—Attributed to John Calvin:

Grant, Almighty God, that since thou continue daily to restore us to thyself, both by scourges and by thy word, though we cease not to go astray after sinful desires, O grant, that by the direction of thy Spirit, we may at length so return to thee, that we may never afterwards fall away, but be preserved in pure and true obedience, and thus constantly continue in the pure worship of thy majesty and in true obedience, that after this life past, we may at last reach that blessed rest, which is reserved for us in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Introduction

An elder must be a professing member of the congregation and must be “an example to the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

*Book of Forms*, 106.1

### Scripture

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Luke 11:1-4

### A Brief Commentary

The disciples, noting the deep devotion of Jesus and John the Baptist to prayer, wanted to learn how to commune with God in the same way. Jesus responded by providing a model of praise, confession and intercession that would be repeated across the ages and around the world.

### Reflection

Prayer has always been an essential part of the life and practice of the followers of Jesus. As elders within a congregation, it is essential to be women and men of prayer, not only for our own spiritual benefit but also to provide a healthy example to the rest of the congregation.

Since 2009 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, we continue to reflect on Calvin’s writings, published in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, an introduction to the Protestant faith, first published in 1536. Here is a little of what Calvin wrote about prayer in Chapter XX, 3.

Calvin raises an interesting question about prayer that many continue to ponder today; namely, if God already knows our difficulties and our needs, is it not “...superfluous to solicit him by our prayers, as if he were winking, or even sleeping, until aroused by the sound of our voice?” Calvin responds by pointing out that prayer is not so much for God’s sake as it is for ours. He lists three benefits of prayer.

1. That our heart may always be inflamed with a serious and ardent desire of seeking, loving and serving him, while we accustom ourselves to have recourse to him as a sacred anchor in every necessity;
2. That no desires, no longing whatever, of which we are ashamed to make him the witness, may enter our minds, while we learn to place all our wishes in his sight, and thus pour out our heart before him;
3. That we may be prepared to receive all his benefits with true gratitude and thanksgiving, while our prayers remind us that they proceed from his hand.

### Discussion

1. Write Calvin’s reasons for prayer in your own words. Talk about them. Do you agree with Calvin?
2. How can elders be “an example to the believers” in terms of prayer?

# What's On Your Mind?

## Is it permissible for someone other than a child's parents, such as a grandparent, to present that child for baptism?

The sacrament of baptism is a truly magnificent celebration of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

When an infant is baptised, most often it is the mother, father or both parents who present the child to receive this sign and seal of our union with Christ and his church. Occasionally there are circumstances in which it is not possible, or not appropriate, for the parents to be the ones who carry the child to the font. Thus the question, "Is it permissible for anyone else to accept this responsibility?"

*Book of Forms*, section 110.4, states, in part:

[Baptism] is to be administered to unbaptized candidates in conjunction with their profession of faith and admission as professing members, and to infants when **at least one parent** is a professing member of the Christian church, baptized, and is fulfilling the covenant engagement of baptism.

At first glance, it appears at least one parent must be involved in the baptism of a child. However, if you look up this section in the *Book of Forms* you will see it draws attention to General Assembly decisions that allow others to assume the role of parent in this situation. For example, in 1993, the General Assembly approved this statement:

"...the administration of infant baptism is not necessarily restricted to circumstances in which there are natural parents competent to provide Christian nurture for their children. Infants who are subject to the Christian discipline of believing persons other than their natural parents may properly be baptized, provided that such believing persons are already fulfilling the function of parents in the Christian nurture of the infants."

(Acts and Proceedings 1993, p. 232)

In other words, as long as the session, who is responsible for the provision of the sacrament of baptism, is satisfied the person presenting the child is Christian and in a position to fulfill the baptismal vows by helping nurture the child in the faith, that person may be permitted to carry the little one forward for baptism and on to the child's first steps of the faith journey.

Blessings,  
Don Muir  
Associate Secretary  
General Assembly Office

## What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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