

Every Pastor in the CRC Should Hear This

by Karen DeBoer from Network (network.crcna.org, May 10, 2017)

Research on young adults and their absence from formal faith communities has been a popular topic of conversation for the past decade. It's leading our churches to change course in the ways we've been discipling youth and enfolding young adults. As a parent of kids who fall into both of those categories, I'm grateful. But as someone who has been engaged in ministry with children for over 30 years, I'm concerned that we're skipping over a generation.

This comment I received from a church leader says it best: "Focusing all of our attention on youth and the problem of young adults leaving the church is like responding to boiling water without realizing how gradually the water came to be boiling."

The faith of our littlest ones is as worthy of our attention now as it will be when they're teens and young adults.

A few months ago, Faith Formation Ministries spoke with a small group of CRC pastors about how our choice of children's ministry curriculum impacts the way we're forming faith in kids. The next day, after describing for the CRC's Board of Trustees the content of that presentation, one of those pastors said, "I wish every CRC pastor could have heard this." We agree, so we're sharing it with you now.

As members of the CRC we read Scripture through Reformed theological lenses. That interpretation of Scripture informs the sermons prepared by pastors. It's the reason we have a CRC seminary. Reformed theology is reflected in everything a CRC congregation does, from the way worship services are planned to the way we engage with neighbors. If we want to grow in our children the same deep and wide faith we want to grow in our youth and adults, our Reformed theology should inform the way we tell kids God's story.

A Comparison

To illustrate the difference between a non-Reformed and a Reformed theological approach to teaching kids, let's take a look at the way two different curricula that are being used by CRC churches interpret Genesis 3 for children.

252 Basics is a curriculum from Orange that's gained in popularity in recent years. It links each Bible story to a virtue such as Individuality, Kindness, Endurance and in the example below, Contentment.

Using this virtues based curriculum, the story of The Fall is a story of Contentment (described in the session as "choosing to be happy with what you've got") and kids at all levels from kindergarten through grade 3 are taught Genesis 3 using these focus statements:

Bottom Line: When you want what you shouldn't have, it can lead to trouble.

Basic Truth: I need to make the wise choice.

Memory Verse: "I have learned to be content no matter what happens to me. I know what it's like not to have what I need. I also know what it's like to have more than I need. I have learned the secret of being content no matter what happens. (Phil. 4:11b-12a, NIV)
(252 Basics, August 2012, Week 1)

Now let's look at how the same story is taught from a Reformed perspective, beginning already with children aged 2 and by adding layers of depth right up to grade 8.

Age 2-3 (God Loves Me, book #5)

Focus: God still loved Adam and Eve.

Age 4 (Dwell Curriculum)

Focus: Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

Faith Nurture Goal (one of several): Thank God for loving us even though we sometimes disobey.

K-Grade 1 (Dwell Curriculum)

Focus: God forgives us when we are sorry for disobeying.

Faith Nurture Goal (two of several): Imagine how God feels when we disobey / Know that God loved and forgave Adam and Eve.

Memory Challenge: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [...] God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:1, 31a, NIV)

Grades 2-3 (Dwell)

Focus: God’s perfect creation was spoiled when Adam and Eve disobeyed.

Faith Nurture Goals: Give examples of how sin spoiled creation / Tell what God promised Adam and Eve / Celebrate our forgiveness in Christ.

Memory Challenge: “And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” (Genesis 9: 12-13, NIV)

Grades 6-8 (Dwell Curriculum)

Focus: No part of my life is free from sin.

Faith Nurture Goals (one of several): Acknowledge who we are: Sinners who disobey God but who are loved by God, made in God’s image, and forgiven by God.

Memory Challenge: “If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Romans 14:8, NIV)

One story, two interpretations.

Which interpretation would we expect to hear in a worship service at a CRC church?

Which interpretation should we expect to hear with children during their children’s ministry program?

Every church context is different and a variety of factors go into determining what and how you choose to nurture the faith of children at your church and how you plan to partner with families at home. But the way you tell God’s story matters, and it deserves your thoughtful attention.

Faith Formation Ministries is planning to launch a Children's Ministry Toolkit this fall as one way to support leaders as they sift through the more than 50 curriculum options that are available to them. The kit will also contain resources to help leaders who write their own curriculum, and it will include materials for encouraging and equipping families, provide training for leaders, and more.

One resource that's already available as a free download is the 10 Question Tool for Choosing a Children's Ministry Curriculum. (See how Faith Alive has used it [here](#).) We invite you to print and distribute as many copies of 10 Question Tool as you'd like, and to use it to open a conversation about the curriculum you use.

Because theology matters, whether you are 2 or 102.