

Column

At Christmas a few years ago I received a book featuring pictures of church signs with messages. Needless to say, these messages were all over the board. Some were funny; others trite; still others thought provoking. In the last category falls one which I have seen myself: “Every home a school.”

With another school year beginning and many boys and girls now or soon to be behind classroom desks, this message screamed to be pulled out of my ‘memory file’.

Those four words are true, for good or ill. Either children are being taught at home to be diligent, honest, clean, inquisitive, helpful, or the corresponding negative habits and mindsets.

Most teaching that goes on in the home – especially the bad sort – is not deliberate or intended. It happens by default and is largely picked up by example. For example, if a child sees adults never cracking a book, never showing any curiosity as to why things are as they are, never engaging in meaningful discussion, then it is likely that this child will slide into the same pattern as he or she moves toward adulthood.

The same downward pull, no doubt, would be felt if a child grows up in a household where beds are left unmade, dishes are left in the sink unwashed for days at time, processed foods containing ingredients that no ordinary person has heard of let alone can pronounce are eaten regularly, people are quarrelsome and abusive . . . well the child growing up in such a home will likely take what he sees and reproduce it in his own when he becomes an adult.

Of course, there are exceptions. A teacher, a neighbour, another child’s parent, a minister may be the catalyst for turning that child’s life around and putting him on quite a different road.

Hoot Skelton, a member of St. Luke’s Blue Ridge, tells of a conversation he had with a prominent educator and avid world traveller who had grown up next door. When the young educator came back home, Mr. Skelton asked him:

“You grew up in a family of rather modest means. No other member of your family had any aspirations to go to college or see the world. Why were you different?”

The young educator looked at him and said: “Why, it was you who made the difference. When I was a boy, you passed along all those National

Geographic magazines. They opened my eyes to a world outside our own little community and made me not only want to see that world but to open it up to others.”

It can happen; nevertheless, the home remains tremendously important. It is a school. Conscious effort, therefore, needs to be given to ensure that it is a school of GOOD learning.

Good learning would certainly include good art, good literature, good habits relating to work and health, but it would also include the things of God.

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up,” the ancient Hebrews were so instructed in Deuteronomy 6:7.

These words still hold. Indeed, what is being enjoined is needed more than ever in today’s culture. After all, so many voices – many of them not good – are out there vying for the attention of the young.

As a friend of mine in south Florida once said about his own children, “We were determined to claim them for Christ before they were claimed by MTV.” That surely should be the goal of every Christian father and mother. The home must be an extension of the church. The same message of truth, honour and beauty must sound forth from both.

But, where do you begin? The catechisms (instruction in the form of questions and answers) of former times were very basic in their approach. They began with the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed. Right behaviour, right worship and right belief -- all three -- were part of the curriculum. There is good reason for such an approach to be rediscovered.

What lessons are being taught in your home? What might be done to make it a better school?

ALMIGHTY God, our Heavenly Father, who hast committed to thy Holy Church the care and nurture of thy children; Enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn; that, rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal (Anglican) Church, Blue Ridge.