

Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell. *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*. Eerdmans, 2005.

*Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* is a comprehensive sourcebook for people who care about children's ministry. The authors, women who have been immersed in Christian education most of their lives, offer theory and theology, stories and examples from the Canadian and US Protestant context, and biblical and historical foundations to help readers grasp the broad view of children's ministry.

The book is divided into foundations, context and content, and methodology. A primary foundation is our view of children, which affects all we do in ministry with them. If we view them as empty vessels, we try to "fill" them with information. If we view them as pilgrims, we will want to walk with them as guides and companions. The metaphors we live by shape the ministry model we choose and determine what matters most in terms of content, relationships, learning activities, and involvement in the congregation. The authors describe ministry models in North American churches that represent the various views.

Part 1 explores ministry with children through biblical, theological, developmental, and historical lenses. Even though people may use the same theological language, they interpret it differently; assumptions are made based on their theological tradition, whether sacramental, covenantal, or conversional (55). With the growth of independent churches, the authors refer to an unnamed "unclear" tradition that appears in nondenominational congregations as a reaction to tradition and liturgy (65).

Part 2 examines the present contexts in which faith is formed in children; the authors name the congregation and the home as the two most important arenas for faith nurture. This does not minimize the congregation's role but encourages adults to pay attention to the children in their midst in all aspects of church life. Children can worship and participate in the life of the congregation, and can build relationships with caring adults who model a vibrant lived faith. And adults can experience grace as they witness an uncomplicated faith. The congregation gifts the children when it pays

attention to the spiritual nurture of the parents and gives them the skills to speak and live out their faith every day. A carefully planned core curriculum for all ages will benefit the whole congregation in its spiritual formation. The congregation that “practices what it preaches” teaches children about the church’s values and beliefs.

Part 3 addresses practical suggestions that build on the principles outlined earlier. It does not give step-by-step instructions but offers models for ministry that can help a congregation think beyond “the way we always do it.” The writers share personal experiences and offer a wealth of suggestions that will enhance any congregation’s ministry with its children.

I highly recommend this book for leaders in our denomination. It can serve as a textbook for faith formation courses at the college and seminary level. For pastors and leaders in children’s and youth ministry, it can reshape the way ministry happens with specific age groups and, indeed, the whole congregation. However, the writers make some assumptions that do not represent the typical Mennonite experience. Take church size, for example. Our denomination has many small to medium-sized congregations that do not have multiple pastoral staff, but the model for effective children’s ministry presented here is that of a paid children’s minister who works closely with a team of volunteers. The responsibilities outlined may overwhelm a volunteer with good intentions but little time to give to children’s ministry. I wonder, too, how many congregations have gifted and creative Christian educators who are motivated to do all that is needed to envision and shape a dynamic children’s ministry.

Nevertheless, the authors have provided an excellent, comprehensive resource. I urge anyone who believes that children matter to use this book as a tool for discernment on how to provide effective ministry with the children.

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