

Christian Education in the Congregation

A CE Article

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Helping people mature in the Christian faith. That is why we give time and energy to the ministry of Christian education. We want all of the participants in our congregation to be able to follow Jesus by living out their love of God and their neighbors. That's our hope and dream. And every congregation probably has the same or at least a similar dream. However, congregations are different. And that means that different congregations may need to do different things to achieve the same dream.

How can we be sure that our congregation is doing the things it needs to be doing to make the dream a reality? How can we make sure that when we are thinking about doing new things that we are making a good choice for our congregation? How can we make the best use of our resources? One way is for the leadership of a congregation to ask these foundational questions:

- What is Christian education?
- What is the purpose of our educational ministry?
- What is the context of our teaching and learning?
- What is the content that we need to know?
- Who are the participants in our educational ministry?
- What process do we use to help people mature in the faith?

Those questions don't ever seem to change much. You can find them in one form or another in many basic Christian education planning resources.

The questions don't change, but some of the answers often do. So, every congregation needs to revisit them from time to time. Let's look at how a few of the answers might change and how those answers might impact a congregation's educational ministries.

For example, the **CONTEXT** of the congregation may have changed. A congregation that for generations was in the middle of a very stable farming community may now be in the middle of new houses and shopping centers that seem to be springing up overnight. Or maybe a congregation that was once part of a suburban area filled with young families is now part of a neighborhood filled with retirees. A change in context may mean that some of the ways a congregation has helped people mature in the faith in the past may not be the best way to do so now.

The changing **CONTEXT** may mean that the **PARTICIPANTS** in a congregation's educational ministry may be changing. Perhaps those new suburbs are filled with adults and children who have very little experience in church. Those suburbs may be filled with people

who are intensely focused on their education. The children may be very busy and have little unstructured time. The older neighborhood may be filled with people trying to figure out what they are going to do with their lives now that they are retired. Some of those people may be dealing with the death of loved ones or the decline of their own health. If the actual or potential participants in our educational ministries are changing, we may need to offer some new opportunities for them to mature in their faith.

The nature of the PARTICIPANTS in those changing CONTEXTS may have an impact on the CONTENT of our educational ministries. Those young parents who did not grown up in church may need to learn the basic stories of the Bible at the same time their children are learning those stories. Those retirees may need to learn how to continue to mature in the faith even as their world seems to be falling apart around them.

Paying close attention to the foundational questions and generating honest answers will not be any kind of magic potion for a congregation's educational ministries. But doing so may keep it headed in a direction that is helping people to mature in the Christian faith.