

Baptism to Confirmation in the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia:
Strategies for Faith Formation in Children (Ages 7-12)
By

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Dedication

In loving memory of my parents, Joseph Vahton Gaye Jr and Sarah Sady Horace, whose life and sacrifice planted the seed of courage, commitment, and formation into my faith.

Introduction

The Episcopal Church of Liberia was established in 1836 by the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Episcopal church of the United States of America. The church started as a missionary Diocese in Cape Palmas, now Maryland County, Liberia, and was headed by Bishop John S. Payne as its first missionary bishop.¹ The pattern of mission planting and discipleship emphasized enculturation in western Christianity, at the expense of the indigenous culture. “The Reverend Dr. Thomas Savage, the first missionary Priest, assumed the responsibility of coordinating the church's work in Cape Palmas.”² A process of enculturation followed, which injured the cultural norms of the indigenous thereby disparaging their beliefs and imposing a colonial style and worship. The missionaries' overall goal was to Christianize the native Africans and spread the Gospel throughout the continent.³ In doing so, most of the early missionaries perished due to tropical diseases along Liberia's coastal belt.

Located in West Africa, Liberia is bounded on the West by Sierra Leone, the North by Guinea, the East by The Ivory Coast, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean. The overall landmass is 43,000 square miles with a coastal line of 350 miles.⁴ Although Bishop Payne and other missionaries encountered an indigenous community that was polytheistic along the coastal belt of Cape Palmas, they were able to engage and establish a presence through the educational and health sectors by catering to the specific needs of the Liberians.

¹ James T. Yarsiah, *Early Missionary Work of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Liberia and Their Differential Effects, 1821-1871* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 25.

² Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 25

³ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 25.

⁴ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 16.

Over the period the missionaries adopted the children of the indigenous inhabitants and educated them formally through reading and writing. These skills acquired transformed local economies and livelihoods, including the treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Formation starts in the home and nourishes the church. Christ's exemplary invitation to children is the beginning of their formation through reading and practices that address their faith journey. By providing opportunities for children and youth to serve in the church, missionaries raised adults who were nurtured in the faith. In an atmosphere of trust, children took the initiative to grow in faith and gained confidence in their service and their role and place in God's mission.

Despite the limitations of this foreign model of mission, Christianity grew in Liberia, in large part due to the hard work of trained Episcopal Christian education specialists. Unfortunately, since the inception of the civil war in 1989, many trained Episcopal Christian education specialists have fled the country, causing a decline in doctrinal teachings in the churches and schools. This void has affected the fabric of formation across the Diocese. Many who currently teach faith formation in Episcopal Sunday schools have little or no experience in the Anglican faith. Teachers who are now members of the Episcopal Church received their doctrinal foundations from other denominations whose theological understandings are not always congruent with Anglican theology.

There is inadequate consistency of quality or purpose in what is being taught. Too often, each Sunday class stands alone, unrelated to the week before or the experiences of those gathered. There is no "scope and sequence" or articulated curriculum guiding the instruction.⁵ As a result,

⁵ Laura M. Justice and Amy E. Sofka, *Engaging Children with Print: Building Early Literacy Skills through Quality Read-Aloud* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 21.

many children are being taught about Christianity without understanding or connecting with the fundamentals of Episcopal doctrine. Therefore, their understandings do not reflect the maturing faith and doctrine as expressed in the baptismal covenant. There is no primary distinction to recognize or identify that these young people are Christian disciples formed in the Anglican tradition.

Children are an integral part of Jesus's ministry. Jesus sees them as heirs of the Kingdom of God, and supports their spiritual and physical needs. Many Biblical accounts refer to the importance of children and how their actions are lauded as examples of leadership. Children must not only be loved, but they also need to be taught that they are God's elect, with gifts for the church today and tomorrow. The Bible traces accounts where Jesus takes children into His arms and praises them before the multitudes. On one occasion, Jesus describes the kingdom of God as belonging to people who are like children (Matthew 19:13-14).⁶ These accounts of Jesus' reaction to children provide glimpses of the importance of children's faith formation.

One of the most significant incidents about children in the Bible occurs when the disciples attempt to push away the children. Instead, Jesus stops the disciples and welcomes the children with open arms. Another incident is when Jesus uses the metaphor of children to describe heaven (Luke 18:16). Jesus also involved children in some of His healing miracles, such as when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:21-24) and healed the son of a royal official (John 4:46-51). He consistently demonstrated the inherent value of children, building on their honored place among his forbearers, the Israelites: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate" (Psalms 127:4-5).

⁶ All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

From these instances, the Bible shows children are valued before God through His son. Children are essential to the church, and as baptized members of the Body of Christ, they are full members of that Body and bring gifts for its flourishing. Notably, in the Liberian church and elsewhere, they are also the future generation of the church and should be encouraged to participate in the church's ministry because they have gifts to bring about the kingdom of God.⁷ Unfortunately, too often, children are relegated to the margins of an adult-centered church. Instead of recognizing their wholeness, created in God's image and likeness, church leaders may regard children as immature because they are young. The role of children should not be defined by their age, sex, or gender. Instead, they need to receive appropriate training, recognition, and guidance. These can be achieved by adequately training the adults who minister to the children. Children need to have a strong foundation of their faith to be disciples and to keep the church more vital for future generations.⁸

Liberian society generally ranks children in a lower status than they do adults. In many instances, children are ignored, and their concerns and participation may be downplayed. Such patterns and behavior are the results of unexamined beliefs about children. Most adults underestimate the gifts of children, believing that children are not yet fully matured because being fully matured is equated with mature adulthood. Often, children are not given a chance to participate in decision-making even when a decision directly affects them (for example, curriculum planning, career development, and year-end camp/retreat). Sadly, for the church community,

⁷ Helena Stockinger, "Developing Spirituality: An Equal Right of Every Child?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 3 (2019): 307–19, accessed February 28, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/internationaljournalofchildren'sspirituality/vol-24-2019/developing-spirituality-an-equal-right-of-every-child/307/>

⁸ Ronni Lamont, *Understanding Children, Understanding God* (London: SPCK, 2007), 84.

holistic mental and spiritual well-being is often not as crucial as other church projects, such as infrastructure.⁹

Jesus shows a different perspective in His regard for children and their impact on the church and the world. In one instance in Matthew's Gospel, parents struggle to get their children through to Jesus to bless them, and His disciples stop the parents. Jesus is angered by their actions and rebukes them, saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:14). Jesus demonstrates His love by saying that whoever does not receive God's kingdom like a child shall not enter it. Jesus embraces them in His arms and blesses them (Mark 10:13-16). These are examples in the Bible where Jesus is recorded as getting indignant because of the disciples' attitude. His reaction shows how much children mean to Him and His father's kingdom. When Jesus says, His kingdom belongs to those who are like children, He means that the characteristics children possess are pure, God-given, and, tragically, hard to find in adults.¹⁰ Naturally, many human beings are competitive and want to be ranked highly in society. The disciples of Jesus were no different. Such an attitude reflected how the community was, with everyone, including religious leaders seeking to get better treatment than others. But amid the disciples' misinterpretation of Jesus' actions, Jesus still used the model of the little child to show the greatness of His Father's kingdom.¹¹

⁹ Neale Molloy, "The Field of Child Care: The Role of the Church," *St Mark's Review* 84 (1975): 20–23, accessed March 13, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/stmark'sreview/vol-84-1975/the-field-of-care-the-role-of-the-church/23/>

¹⁰ Stockinger, *Developing Spirituality*, 312.

¹¹ Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 13.

This capstone focuses on the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia. The faith formation of children has not been a priority in many churches within the diocese for over 30 years. Inadequate attention has been paid to the resources used or the modes of training teachers. Too many children and youth gravitate to other denominations because they do not experience meaningful and relevant teachings to their faith development in the Episcopal Church. Without updated strategies for renewed ministry to children, their faith foundation will be diminished, and the church's growth will continue to be hampered. The growing needs for adequate children's faith formation is crucial for the growth of the church. Identifying specific programs that cater to children's learning and development goals in the church requires planning, training, and implementation. This project seeks to further discuss the historical context of the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the author will explore the biblical and theological foundation for faith formation, followed by proposing a contextually appropriate curriculum for children in the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia in Chapter Three.

Chapter 1

The Historical Context of the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

The American church’s establishment of the Episcopal mission in Liberia is the result of its missionary expansion program seeking to Christianize what was perceived as the dark continent of Africa that was considered polytheistic. Establishment of the ACS preceded the Berlin Conference of 1884 that divided the African continent among European countries, namely Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. The ACS (American Colonization Society for the Free People of Color) was established to rid the United States of free black people who then numbered more than 200,000. The presence of the free black people was seen as a threat to the institution of slavery. Especially after Haiti had revolted against the French and declared independence in 1804, and the rebellions against slavery in the USA by abolitionist. It was only later that some enslaved people were set free on condition they would leave the United States. Prominent stakeholders met in Washington DC through the instrumentality of Reverend Robert Finley for the sole purpose of facilitating the return of free blacks to the continent of Africa.¹² An interest in and the need for overseas missions had been sparked. Therefore, missionaries from the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States traveled by sea to the continent of Africa. This long and risky voyage was undertaken by men and women who felt the need for formation and evangelization in the Episcopal tradition in Cape Palmas, West Africa in the early 1800s. As the Reverend Dr. James Yarsiah affirms, “The ACS collaborated with Churches and foreign missions to implement the

¹² Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 4.

concept of colonization of free blacks.”¹³ Such a movement became the driving force for foreign missionaries that landed on the shores of Cape Palmas.

The Indigenous Culture before the Missionaries

Indigenous polytheistic beliefs and cultural practices were the way of life for native Liberians throughout the 1800s before the missionaries' arrival. Most of these practices such as the worship of the deity, ancestral commemoration, and healing of the land were symbolic and represented various seasons and festivals. Just as the Episcopal tradition is ordered around a liturgical year that marks seasons with rituals and colors, the indigenous Grebo practices in Liberia celebrate multiple seasons such as the festival of harvest, the visitation of ancestors' spirit, adoration of the shrine, and circumcision into tribal orders. The commemoration of these festivals was associated with the war dance (Tradition Grebo dance), with the use of cutlasses, spears, palm branches, and blowing of animal horns. The town crier (local announcer) announces these festivals, and all other activities came to a standstill.

There are over sixteen indigenous tribes in Liberia with varying elements of these cultural practices . Some standard practices are the naming and dedication of children, offering libation to 'the gods', traditional dances at funerals, sacrifices for the new moon, cultivation of the soil for planting, traditional bush school, and engaging deceased ancestors in the spirit world. Indigenous ritual centers on the village shrine. The shrine is the center of worship and animal sacrifices where it is believed that the 'gods' listen and cleanse evil spells and punishment from the land. A traditional priest performs these rituals, serving as the oracle between the community and the spirit

¹³ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 8.

world. Traditional practices such as dowry payment for marriages amongst various clans at early ages for girls are encouraged to maintain the identity and cultural heritage.

In most indigenous communities today, it is customary for families to meet to discuss marriages for their children. The dowry payment is the legal standard for traditional marriage. Compensation for a bride price is approximately forty-five Liberian dollars or \$0.50 US, kola nuts, cane juice (locally made alcohol), calabash, cotton cloth, and other traditional artifacts. Polygamous practices are still widely practiced today amongst most tribes. A man's worth is valued by the sum of the number of wives, children, farmland, and livestock. The town chiefs and traditional rulers are the custodians of the rituals and legal practices, which is the standard way of life and binding on every household. Traditional practices are the way of life and are common in most formal settings. They are considered an established norm for many Africans along the coast and interior. Most families will perform a traditional marriage before coming to the church thereafter for a Christian marriage.

Sociologist and African theologian Jean-Marc Ela affirms, "In various African societies sacrifices are offered to the ancestors. Such sacrifice regularly involves a blood offering, with various prayers and invocations."¹⁴ These rituals rally the community into a service where the oracle pleads with the gods for his intervention with the spirit world for blessings, healing, harvest, and unity. These practices are core values of African heritage and culturally important to the continent. Renowned African theologian John Mbiti acknowledges this belief by affirming: "Africans are notoriously religious; each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices."¹⁵ Each community is unique with a sense of identity, dress code, and practices that

¹⁴ Jean- Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Eugene: Wifp & Stock, 1988), 21.

¹⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1.

set them apart, such as names, scar (marks on the back/shoulders), and greetings (handshake), but they share a commitment to spiritual ritual practice.

Subsistence agriculture is the way of life for many indigenous Liberians, which their ancestors learned and passed down from one generation to another. This practice continues in the lives of people in the vicinity of Epiphany Episcopal Church, the oldest Episcopal Church in Liberia and located in Cavalla, Maryland County. Many of the villagers have family plots on which they farm and support their families through the barter system (exchange of produce). The town's geographical location between the Atlantic Ocean and the Cavalla river makes it possible to trade agricultural produce with other communities further inland. Importantly, the abundance of water and trading along the coast was an attractive feature that caused the missionaries' to settle and evangelize in this area.

Indigenous tribes along the coast were involved in the slave trade in the 1700s. Liberia's Kwai ethnic group, which lives along the seacoast, is the largest in Liberia. The Grebo, Kru, Krahn, and Bassa are various ethnic groups with shared cultural practices and beliefs. These customs extend along the coast with neighboring countries such as The Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, where these tribes have cross-border ties and tribal connections. The proximity of the Atlantic Ocean and Cavalla river was crucial for trade and cultural exchanges which still have a profound impact on Liberia's indigenous communities today. It was to this context that the black settlers and the missionaries of the Episcopal church arrived in 1836, bringing a new identity and the religion of Christianity.¹⁶

¹⁶ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 23.

The Impact of the Missionaries' Work

The abolition of slavery in 1807 and slave trading in 1834 was the catalyst for overseas Christian missions in Liberia.¹⁷ The plight of slaves led to efforts in mobilizing support to establish missions in Africa. The Protestants spread the Christian gospel through the slaves liberated from slave ships along the West Coast after 1834. The success of Christian missionary programs can be linked to the Western formal education they offered. Many people in Africa desired such an education. The missionaries provided teaching skills that gave many indigenous people the ability to read in order to understand the word of God. As Ela confirms, “Evangelizing people shaped by a certain culture must go hand in hand with their struggle for development in all aspects of their lives.”¹⁸ Teaching the gospel of Christ to a continent perceived as the “dark continent” represented a turning point for westerners who considered their worship and faith superior to traditional African practices. The missionaries’ primary focus was to Christianize Africa and instill monotheistic worship and belief system based on western cultural values. Renowned educator and historian of the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia Dr. D. Elwood Dunn, cited the first female President of The University of Liberia, Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown:

The early pattern for western education in modern Liberia was set by the American Colonization Society. Its striking features included emphasis in instruction in Christianity. The sub-ordination of technical skills needed for adjustment to the physical environment, and the isolation of tribal children from their environment for purposes of instruction. Christian missions reinforced this pattern, since public education followed the mission schools and those of American benevolent societies, it too strengthened the pattern.¹⁹

¹⁷ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 7.

¹⁸ Ela, *My Faith*, 91.

¹⁹ Elwood Dunn D, “The Episcopal Church in Liberia under Experimental Liberian Leadership: 1884-1916.” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 58 (1989): 3-36, accessed April 19, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost-com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/login.aspx?>

The structural changes for mission, education, and health were patterned by the missionaries' because they constructed most of these institutions in Liberia and developed the curriculum. Through education, evangelism, and agriculture the missionaries' exercised Western enculturation in Liberia and laid a foundation upon which the country's declaration of independence was signed in 1847. The faithful gathered for worship at St. James, Cape Palmas, and requested financial and pastoral assistance to cultivate the land. They felt the urgency of spreading the Gospel wherever they went in winning souls and reinforcing the Great Commission to a society considered traditionalist.

Among the early missionaries to Liberia in 1833 were James and Elizabeth Thompson, who had emigrated to the United States from the West Indies and finally settled in Liberia. They are credited as the torchbearers for the official planting of the first Episcopal mission in Liberia. They modeled an evangelism system amongst the natives focused on building schools, health centers, and mission stations. Although historians of the Church often ignore their work in Liberia and the church, the Thompsons started the first Sunday school program. James Thompson's work in Liberia prompted the Missionary Society in the United States to encourage him to pursue ordained ministry, which he refused.

In June 1835, the General Convention appointed the Thompsons as teachers and catechists to run the affairs of Liberia's mission.²⁰ As their work expanded in Liberia, the Missionary Society secured funding to construct buildings to enhance their ministry. James Thompson further initiated construction efforts for the establishment of boarding schools and formulated the educational

²⁰ George D. Browne, "History of the Protestant Episcopal Mission in Liberia up to 1838." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 39, no. 1 (1970): 17-27. accessed March 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/historicalmagazineoftheprotestantepiscopalchurch/vol-39-1970/history-of-the-protestant-episcopal-mission-in-liberia/27/>

policy of the church in Liberia. He believed education was crucial in distancing children from their traditional cultural practices to instill new (Christian) discipline and skills. Christian education fostered literacy within the societal context in sub-Saharan Africa.²¹

Bishop Samuel David Ferguson's Episcopacy in 1885 initiated an era of accelerated learning in higher education. With a donation of five thousand U.S. dollars by R. Fulton Cutting, Cuttington College and Divinity school were established. The College opened in 1889 as a center for vocational and technical education in Cape Palmas. Due to the financial cost of the operation, the College closed in 1929 and reopened in 1949, at a more central location in Suakoko, Bong County. The College, now renamed Cuttington University, is the oldest private university in sub-Saharan Africa. The university has expanded to other parts of the country. The reach includes a community college in Margibi county and a graduate campus in Monrovia. Other institutions include Julia Chester Emery all-girls' school in Clay Ashland, St. John's House of Bethany in Robertsport, and Bishop Ferguson High School in Cape Palmas. As renowned African theologian Esther Mombo echoed, "Salvation and liberation meant accepting and accommodating the teaching of the Gospel as presented by the missionaries in his or her cultural terms."²² Such medium for formation and evangelization through education and health transformed rural communities that relied on traditional norms to a faith that focuses on Christian values.

²¹ Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Todd M. Johnson. *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 376.

²² Ross, Asamoah-Gyadu, and Johnson, *Christianity*, 378.

The Challenges of Faith Formation in Liberia

Enculturation in a predominantly polytheistic setting was a daunting task for the missionaries throughout Africa. Referred to as the "dark continent" with the remnants of slavery, intra-tribal conflict, and tropical diseases, Liberia's ethnic makeup and tribal polarization between the coastline and the interior were cultural dilemmas the missionaries encountered. Implementing the General Convention's overseas mission in Cape Palmas was difficult considering the language barrier and traditional cultural differences. Nonetheless, the missionaries ignored African culture and insisted on imposing North American cultural, religious, educational, and political systems.²³ Despite adequate funding from the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, enculturation became a problem because the missionaries were unwelcomed and rejected in many interior parts of the country.

Failure to respect cultural dignity undermined the mission efforts and overall framework for formation and evangelization. The Good News of Jesus Christ was experienced as oppressive and threatening. Over the period, the missionaries tried to adapt. They learned many forms of the indigenous cultures and traditions, particularly by learning to speak the Grebo vernacular. In return, they persisted in teaching indigenous communities how to read and write English. Working with the indigenous people was Bishop Payne's priority. Bishop John S. Payne (VTS, Class 1836), who was the first missionary bishop of Liberia, also learned the Grebo language to communicate with his community. His emphasis seems to have been on recruiting candidates for the ordained ministry.

²³ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 31.

Before his consecration as Bishop of Liberia, Rev. Payne recruited individuals from the following indigenous tribes: Ku Sia, Bidi Wah, and Musu. He sent these men for theological training at Virginia Theological Seminary in the United States.²⁴ His vision was to train the indigenous and have them partake in the Great Commission of Christ amongst their people. Getting theological training, understanding the cultural context, and speaking the vernacular of the interior was crucial in establishing the Episcopal presence throughout the Southeast of Liberia. This was challenging. As Kathryn Tanner claims, “No matter how extraordinary the individual, he or she is shaped decisively by the particular culture in which he or she has been educated to humanity.”²⁵ Payne spoke the Grebo dialect fluently and lived with the indigenous community in the Cavalla region. He was the only missionary that was trusted by the natives and served as a liaison between the indigenous and the missionaries. He worked extensively in the region and learned the Grebo culture, strengthening the trust with the natives.²⁶

Despite Payne’s cultural understanding and community engagement, he was temperamental and uniliteral in his approach to the natives. Yarsiah confirms;

He did not ask for things from the natives; instead, he demanded them. For example, in 1841, Payne reported a quarrel with the natives concerning the observance of the sabbath. He insisted the people comply with his orders, and, when they refused, Payne became very angry. He described a prayer meeting that occurred in 1840 during which absolute western standards of posture, silence and prayer style were strictly enforced.²⁷

Such a posture increased the level of suspicion amongst the indigenous population, who feared that the missionaries had an agenda to exploit and take control of their land and expunge their cultural practices. The established colonies had the Americo Liberians (descendant of the free

²⁴ “Liberian at VTS” *Virginia Theological Seminary Magazine*, (Fall 2020), 15-16.

²⁵ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, Guides to Theological Inquiry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 11.

²⁶ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 41.

²⁷ Yarsiah, *Early Missionary*, 58.

people of color) who were more powerful and influential because they were resourced, educated, and Christianized. The missionaries knew that confidence-building measures were the ultimate aim in strengthening relationships amidst the suspicion. To the extent through which the missionaries were successful, they demonstrated respect and dignity for indigenous practices. This helped to address the peoples' doubts and encouraged them to live in peace.

The centrality of the Gospel through Christ is for liberation that cannot be void of the community participation.²⁸ Christianity's growth in Liberia was the result of the conscious effort of formation and evangelization by missionaries at the peril of their lives but also at the expense of indigenous cultures. Formation is important, but sadly the way the first Liberian Christians were formed was colonial. They failed to realize that God already existed, and they were bringing an invitation to conversation that would allow people to recognize God.

The missionaries ignored the religious culture of the indigenous and imposed a system that they considered monotheistic and superior. They undertook a risky and uncertain voyage, but, with faith in God, established missions that educated and reformed communities in embracing the Christian faith. This history of the Church's establishment in Liberia is crucial in understanding the Biblical and theological foundation of children in the next chapter.

²⁸ Ross, Asamoah-Gyadu, and Johnson, *Christianity*, 378.

Chapter 2

The Biblical and Theological Foundation for Faith Formation with Children

The Christianization of Liberia was the aim of the missionaries but their disdain for tribal norms and enforcement of western culture hindered evangelization. The context of formation is important within ways that are not harmful but engaging and honoring. Long before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land, the concern about children being spiritually nourished is documented. (Deut 6:1-7). When God was preparing Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God gave Moses instructions to teach God's commandments to families in such a way that they would pass the teaching down to succeeding generations. The spiritual formation of children is critical for the continuation of religious tradition and, by inference, the Christian Gospel, spiritual guidance, and the achievement of a stable society.²⁹ Moses reminded the people that they had made a covenant with God. Their part of the covenant agreement was to ensure that they lived by the commandments, and God vowed to keep all the promises made to them through their ancestors. In Deuteronomy 5, God challenges the Israelites to learn the Commandments. Then in Deuteronomy 6 God gives the people statutes and ordinances to observe in preparation for crossing into the Promised Land, they were to learn these and subsequently teach them to their children by example. Children do not only learn from being taught, but they learn more from observing those around them.³⁰

Moses had foreseen this, and during one of his sermons, he confidently tells the people that “when your children ask in time to come...” he does not use “if” but “when” because he knew children would ask at some point. He instructed the descendants to use a story to explain the greatness of

²⁹ Ronni Lamont, *Understanding Children, Understanding God* (London: Ashford Color Press, 2007), 20.

³⁰ Lamont, *Understanding Children*, 56.

God to them. Children understand more when things are presented to them using accounts. Parents were to narrate to their children the wonderful story of how God had guided and led them out of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land.³¹ Such story brings out the greatness of God and His powerful and caring nature. It gives the Israelites a reason to believe in Him and identify as God's people. Besides, they understand their covenant with God requires them to live a life separate from non-believers. The responsibility of nurturing children in the ways of God is not only delegated to parents but to the entire community. Parents are more successful if they get support from the extended community. A community living a righteous life sets a good example for its children to emulate.

³¹ Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 3.

The Biblical Mandate for Faith Formation

As part of the covenant between God and the Israelites, parents in particular, were instructed to teach their children the faith. The ancient Hebrew household was an educational institution in which parents gave practical and religious instruction to children. Ideally, as equals before God, deeply devoted and in love with each other, husband and wife shared one voice in their children's training. In turn, children were required to honor their parents as God's earthly representatives. To respect parents involved showing affection and caring for them, highly prizing them (Prov. 4:1–10), and learning the law of God from them. Moses taught Israelite parents, “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut. 6:6–7, 9.). This meant that the word of God was not limited to temples or in specific settings. Instead, formation is a continuous process that must be conducted anywhere, especially homes, family settings, and generally, at any time. Such a holistic and ecological orientation to passing on faith ensured that God became an integral part of their children’s lives.³²

Another effective means the Israelites used to teach children was through symbols. Every time Jewish fathers went to pray, they strapped critical verses retrieved from the laws to their left hand and forehead. Additionally, Hebrew families also developed the culture of having their chosen verses in small boxes, mezuzahs, by the entrance to their houses. Every member of the house would then touch the mezuzah each time they entered, which served as a reminder of God’s laws. Using symbols to educate and recite the commandments to the children served as an

³² Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1999), 19.

introduction to God.³³ Children also needed to see what they were taught being lived by those who taught them, and parents were also commanded to adhere to Moses' teachings to make it easier for the children to emulate.

In addition to symbols, the Israelites also used rituals to teach faith to children. When God called the Israelites to be a covenant people, God's purpose for these rituals was not to establish religious routines. Instead, God wanted the observances to establish a rhythm that would become a part of their lives. These rituals were to teach households to have and show love for one another and God.³⁴ The Israelites celebrated three major feasts yearly: Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Weeks.

It is clear from our Biblical ancestors that formation starts in the home and can only be achieved if the entire family, including children, undertake the rituals. By so doing, children learn how to conduct various ceremonies and understand the significance of these practices for their faith. Parker J. Palmer affirms this model of faith transmission within a contemporary context when he writes, "Teaching and learning are critical to our individual and collective survival and to the quality of our lives."³⁵ The Israelites were conscious of their religious upbringing and responsibilities and, therefore, ensured the teachings of others who came after them.³⁶ There is a crucial connection between the Old Testament's view on children's formation and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. Biblical scholar J.A. Grassi goes further, insisting that "In the New

³³ Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 74.

³⁴ Craig Dykstra, *Growing*, 38.

³⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (Montgomery: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 3.

³⁶ Thomas, Douglas, and Temilola Alanamu, eds. *African Religions: Beliefs and Practices through History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 25.

Testament, children are principally a model or image for the believer to emulate."³⁷ Such is the stance similar to the Synoptics, as Jesus is depicted by holding up children and embracing their early formation as role models. The birth of Christ marked the beginning of this new covenant. The good news was announced by an angel, who approached the shepherds (Luke 2:11-12). Who could have thought the redemption of the world would be placed in the hands of a baby, the lowest and unexpected ranked person in society? Such was meant to be a lesson for believers to understand that God uses the humblest beings to create a significant impact. The world's Savior was not only a baby, but also one born in a poor home.³⁸ Because of the incarnation, humanity would get closer again to its creator. Likewise, Paul's letters describe children not only as flesh and blood individuals, but also in metaphorical terms. These letters affirm different words to define offspring, including "infants" (Gal 4:1; 1 Cor 3:1-3) and "children" (1 Cor 4:14-21; 1 Thess 2:11; Phlm 10) and also make mention to "adoption as a son" (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). Furthermore, Paul's letters use paternal (1 Thess 2:12; Rom 8:15) and maternal (1 Thess 2:7a; Gal 4:19) metaphors to describe Paul's and God's relations to converts. The role of the home in the formation of children cannot be over emphasized. The parents of Jesus did not leave him behind whenever they went to the temple. They also ensured the child went through every ritual as required by the Jewish law.

³⁷. Punt Jeremy, "Not Child's Play: Paul and Children." *Neotestamentica* 51, no. 2 (2017): 235-60, accessed March 13, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/Neotestamentica/vol-51-2017/not-child's-play-paul-and-children/235/>

³⁸ Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, *Incorporating Children in Worship: Mark of the Kingdom*. (Eugene: CASCADE Books, 2014), 1.

The Episcopal Foundation of Faith Formation

Despite our inherited biblical tradition to form the faith of children and our Episcopal baptismal theology, most current models for faith formation and evangelization in Liberia are not congruent with Episcopal traditions. Healthy formation and evangelization establish a systematic pattern that engages the spiritual and physical needs of children much like the catechumenate in the early church. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann defines evangelism, “as an activity of transformed consciousness that results in an altered perception of world, neighbor, and self, and an authorization to live differently in that world.”³⁹

Perry WH Shaw and Corneliu Constantineanu further concurs:

Christ’s action of placing a child in the center of a theological conversation provides a striking message then and now: in the measure of the Kingdom children are of intrinsic importance and consequently need to be heard with all seriousness. The logic of the Kingdom of God is radically different from the logic of our dominant culture, and we are called to reassess and restructure the way we understand and relate to our children and youth. An important starting point is to re-educate the people of God in their understanding of children through a patient but emphatic presentation of Jesus’ life model and Kingdom instruction with respect to children and youth. But while verbal instruction is valuable, even more powerful learning will come through experience: when we provide the space for children and youth to share This content downloaded from their own life experience of God’s grace the church can discover the rich gifts they bear, and the important place and role that children and youth have in God’s missional purposes.⁴⁰

Children are essential in every community called by God, and they are a symbol of faithful witness once they are nurtured and welcomed as members of the church's body through baptism. Full incorporation of children by using their skills, talents, and recognizing their value to the church

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann. *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storeyed Universe*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 129.

⁴⁰ Perry WH Shaw and Corneliu Constantineanu, “Special Issue: Children-at-Risk,” *Transformation* 85 (2016): 208-217, accessed March 13, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/specialissuechildrenat-risk/vol-33-2016/transformation/208/>

and community rightly reflects the church's baptismal theology. The Episcopal Diocese of Liberia has the opportunity to see children as an inherent part of the church's broader mission.

Providing intentional space and rich learning environments for children enhances their participation and awareness of becoming a part of God's stewardship with their gifts and skills. Baptism is an essential rite in the Church, through which Christians die to themselves, receive forgiveness, and become fully initiated into new life in the Body of Christ. During the baptismal liturgy, the assembly takes vows. The gathered community is tasked with taking care of children who are not biologically theirs.⁴¹ "Will you be responsible for seeing that this child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?" Such promises might sound like an easy task, but they are not. Rowan Williams implores, "Children are not brought up, are not educated, or inducted into a human society, just by one or two people. The entire social complex of which they are part makes them the person they are."⁴² Such is the family system approach that the church of Liberia should practice to meet children's needs. Our Anglican faith calls for collective action in mission. Therefore, a holistic family and congregational approach must be the foundation of the Diocese's formation efforts.

The Episcopal Church's welcome signs, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You," have been the invitation for formation and evangelization over the years. The Church welcomes anyone who seeks a home of fellowship and needs God's forgiveness and care. Children occupy a central

⁴¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, 302.

⁴² Rowan Williams, Abo of Canterbury. "Formation: Who's Bringing up Our Children?" *Sewanee Theological Review* 48 (2005): 379-86, accessed February 26, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/sewaneethrologicalreview/vol-48-2005/formation-who's-bringing-up-our-children/379/>

place under God's blessings and inclusion. Therefore, the Church symbolizes love, encouragement, and inclusive teaching when children are fully incorporated. Over the years, the focus on children's formation and incorporation has been hindered by multifaceted problems that have eroded vital ministries. The lack of centralized, institutional support for children's ministry has left a vacuum leaving local congregations to decide their path. Inadequate learning materials, a shortage of trained Christian education specialists, and local content curriculum are pressing impediments.

African theologian Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator stresses; the manner in which the Church ought to regard and treat children rests on the foundation of a moral duty incumbent on the Church and mandated by Christ.⁴³ All God's people, in one way or another, are called to care and nurture children because they are gifts from God, and they belong to God. For example, Hannah lived for a long time without a child, but she did not hesitate to give her son Samuel over for the temple's work and formation process. "For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore, I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." (1 Sam 1:27-28). The Pharaohs' daughter also showed that the community has the responsibility of taking care of children and ensuring there is care for them. Such happens when she takes the baby Moses from the river into the royal palace as her very son.⁴⁴

The responsibility of those teaching and caring for children is enormous because it sets the pace for their future development. They need psychosocial support at every level to understand the layers of the Church. The Diocese sees the ministry of children as a vital investment from an

⁴³ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. "Between Ecclesiology and Ethics: Promoting a Culture of Protection and Care in Church and Society," *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 897–915, accessed February 27, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts/theologicalstudies/vol-80-2019/between-ecclesiology-andethics-promoting-a-culture-of-protection-and-care-in-church-and-society/897/>

⁴⁴ Clifton-Soderstrom and Bjorlin. *Incorporating Children*, 12.

early age, which requires a systematic engagement in having them incorporated into the children's programs that attract and suit their calling. Children's involvement in the church calls for specific stories and symbols that help keep their daily commitment.⁴⁵ Historically, the Diocese of Liberia has relied on materials from the American Episcopal Church to enhance its liturgical understanding of worship and faith formation.

Such a culture of reliance on American resources has impeded the church's growth over the years. The Church has relied on Sunday school and confirmation classes to nurture the next generation. Such a pattern over the years has shifted from an organized learning forum to a more programmatic event that is rush through. Who are those teaching our children, and how are they impacting the faith? These are questions the church needs to consider because children's faith developmental needs are essential to a thriving Church. With a rapid decline in membership, few trained Christian educators, and the absence of dedicated space and time, children are not being formed as full members of the Body of Christ. There is a critical need to change the process and substance of children's formation in the Liberian context.⁴⁶ The approach to teaching and formation should be engaging and practical through a series of programs. Renowned African theologian Lamin Sanneh stresses,

Christianity is not a garment made to specifications of a by gone golden age, nor is it an add-on whimsical patch work rigged up without regard to the overall design. Rather, Christianity is a multicolored fabric where each new thread, chosen and refined at the designer's hand, adds luster and strength to the whole.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Emily Slichter Given, *Building Faith Brick by Brick II: An Imaginative Way to Explore the Parables with God's People*. 2nd ed. (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2019), 25.

⁴⁶ Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 8.

⁴⁷ Lamin O Sanneh. *Whose Religion Is Christianity: The Gospel beyond the West*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 56.

Healthy Christian formation is a blend of effort that ensures each stage is carefully nurtured for the and glory of God's kingdom. Christian Learning is an intentional, life-long process that involves the deepening of faith and understanding in every stage of life. Faith formation in the Diocese of Liberia should require a blend of culturally engaging Liberian ideas that focus on practical stories and theories. Such a process should incorporate teaching aids, movies, symbols, and performance art. As Episcopalians, we excel at highlighting the sacraments, but we sometimes neglect the context of a relationship. We relied for decades on a thriving Episcopal culture that is western in orientation for formation.

The Responsibility of the Church Today

Children are rarely, if ever, involved in decision-making processes that involve the Church, even those that affect them directly. The culture of the Diocese of Liberia is built so that children are meant to observe the adults as role models and never vice versa. However, God thinks differently about children. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The Book of Common Prayer affirms this belief when, at baptism, we promise to uphold and respect every person's dignity.⁴⁸ In reality, incorporating children into the life of the Church has been a daunting task because they are often left on the margins of the Church as spectators. The Church is called to be inclusive by building an environment that caters to children's physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. As the future of the Church, they can only take ownership through educational and social programs that are supported at every stage of their formation. This crisis is not unique to Liberia. In 1976, renowned theologian and educator, John H. Westerhoff III, implored the American church, "no longer can we assume that the educational understandings that have formed us, or the theological foundations that have undergirded our efforts, are adequate for the future."⁴⁹

The Diocese has a responsibility to prepare trained and qualified teachers. Notably, the environment for learning, such as the classroom, community youth center, theater, and Sunday school, needs to be effectively managed and accessed during education. Establishing an authentic relationship with children calls for an environment where they can trust, play, identify, and relate their concerns to trustworthy adults. Children need to be further incorporated into the worship life of the Church by finding the space to identify their roles and calling. Such practical involvement

⁴⁸ *Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, 305.

⁴⁹ Westerhoff, *Our Children*, 2.

shall encourage them to learn by doing. Hence, Christian formation's objective at an early age ensures that children are nurtured in the Christian way and faith. Accordingly, if the Church does not teach and work to retain its identity, the formation of children will be hampered. There should be a functional balance between attention to questions of identity and concepts of faith formation. Striking this balance ensures that the community still grows and accomplishes much.

From an early age, the objective of Christian formation must be to ensure children are nurtured in the Christian way and faith every day. The transmission of Christianity to children will fail if the Church does not teach and model its identity at church and at home. Lifelong learning is a process that takes time, resources, and an intentional approach to achieve its ultimate goals. Incorporating children into faith requires the Church to prioritize the development of a culture of ongoing formation for all ages. Such a shared responsibility with parents will underscore the fulfillment of their prime responsibility for their children's upbringing and Christian education. Even in antiquity, there were Hellenistic institutes of higher learning, such as the Stoic philosophy schools. Once students were done with school, they moved around different places, teaching, and giving instructions in their communities on ethical principles.⁵⁰ Such was the same method Jesus used to teach. Jesus underscored the need for mission by reaching out and teaching using parables. Such teaching was characterized by repentance, fellowship, discipleship, and caring for those in need.⁵¹ Also, when He departed, He gave His disciples an instruction to go forth and continue teaching. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

⁵⁰ Michael W Merriman, *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumenate* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp, 1990), 25.

⁵¹ Christopher M. Hays, "Provision for the Poor and the Mission of the Church: Ancient Appeals and Contemporary Viability." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 1-7, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://www-proquest-com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/scholarly-journals/provision-poor-mission-church-ancient-appeals/docview/12832>

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19). No wonder early followers of Jesus became itinerant teachers.

Jesus' disciples were the first people to visit communities, teaching them about the Son of God and new faith in Christ. With time, people in these communities became interested in teaching others about the newly acquired faith's practical living. This is when a process of preparation for adult baptism took shape, the process we now recognize as the catechumenate – a journey from seeker to full initiation and Christian vocation – in the life of worshipping faith communities. Over time, the lack of an authentic articulated theological anthropology has hindered evangelization and often inhibited Christian formation. Westerhoff echoes this process, “Christian faith and education are inevitable companions. Whenever living faith exists, there is a community endeavoring to know, understand, live, and witness to that faith.”⁵² Christ's mandate for formation is entrusted to all baptized members of the Church. All Christians are obliged to participate in the evangelizing and formational mission of the Church for productive and sustained ministry.

If the Diocese of Liberia believes in passing on faith to children, a holistic form of children's formation that honors our biblical mandate, tradition, and cultural context must be a priority. The historic catechumenate is the building block to form congregations that nurture lifelong disciples and pass faith on from one generation to another. The next chapter will propose a basic curriculum structure for children in the Diocese of Liberia.

⁵² Westerhoff, *Our Children*, 1.

Chapter 3

Curriculum for Children in the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia

Teaching faith formation or Sunday school is a complex task that teachers face as they select and structure the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of children.⁵³ The Diocese of Liberia inherited a pattern of catechesis, or Christian education, from American missionaries. The curriculum of the Church has always been modeled on the following priorities: introduce Christianity to children and all the new members of the community; ensure the Episcopal traditions were maintained and interpreted; and nurture individuals to have a distinct religious identity that is not overshadowed by the dominant culture.⁵⁴ This process of enculturation to Christianity has strengths and weaknesses.

Over the years, the children's ministry of the Episcopal Church of Liberia has faced challenges that have made it hard for formation to be effective. Such challenges are:

Burnout: Most of the leaders in the children's ministry are volunteers who have been in these positions for years. Volunteers begin to experience burnout because they are overburdened and there are not many resources to train and orientate them to news skills. In most cases, the need to fill these positions overshadows prequalifications such as desire, spiritual gifts, and experience. There are not enough qualified and called teachers/catechists to cover the entire diocese. Often, one catechist is forced to handle more than three parishes. Such responsibility can be draining

⁵³ Gregory B. Long, "Revelation, Then Response: Sola Scriptura and Children's Sunday School Curriculum." *Christian Education Journal* 15 (2018): 43–61, accessed February 26, 2021, <http://www.escohost.com.librarycatalog/christianeducationjournal/vol-15-2018/revelation-then-response-sola-scriptura-and-children's-sunday-school-curriculum/43/>

⁵⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 40.

especially over a protracted period, and especially when the volunteers do not have the natural gifts or training for the role.

Budget: Children's ministry is often neglected in terms of budget allocation. The materials needed to carry on teaching and formation are excluded. The church is a community where children come to learn and explore. Other projects such as buildings are given more priority and more funds compared to formation ministries. In addition, children are involved in sports, excursions, camps, and retreats with other faith groups to facilitate their growth. This can place financial expectations on parents for their children's Christian formation, which is often a burden or barrier for them, and can result in children not having an equal opportunity to learn and participate.

Curriculum: The Diocese does not have a standard curriculum that addresses the particular needs of children. Most of the lessons or materials are culled from The Book of Common Prayer and other Christian teaching journals. It is difficult for the catechists to get age-appropriate information for various ministry contexts.

The curriculum for children is particularly outdated, and the need for new approaches cannot be over-emphasized. With the increased number of children attending churches due to the All-Girls Summer Camp, Girls Friendly Society, worship dance, and evangelism on wheels -across the diocese, there is much urgency to reimagine children's catechesis. On many Sundays, the number of children in attendance at church outnumbers the adults at worship. Therefore, their formation must be more fully integrated into the life of each congregation. Congregations must take seriously the role of parents and households in forming the faith of children. A more conscious outline of faith, God's salvation plan, and the Church's responsibility as a community to prepare individuals for baptism and Christian living is needed. Such a holistic approach to catechesis more

fully resembles the catechumenate than the schooling-based model of Christian education introduced by the missionaries.⁵⁵

It is mandatory in our context that any individual being prepared to follow Jesus as a Christian disciple, much like the catechumens of the early church, understand and live according to the Christian faith in a dominant culture that is challenged by the infiltration and growth of other faith. At the heart of our identity as Episcopal Christians in Liberia are the creeds, the Baptismal Covenant, Confirmation rite, the outline of faith, the Church's mission, seasons and colors of the liturgical year, and the Bible as the Word of God. These are the instruments that have guided the formation of converts over the years and must continue to guide our catechesis. It is not what we believe that must change, it is how we teach children what we believe that needs to be reimagined. For example, the Creeds, Collects, and Lord's Prayer are recited at devotion and Friday's assembly at the Bravid Washington Harris Episcopal High School in Monrovia. This daily practice has positively influenced many Muslim children that attend the school to embrace the Christian faith.

⁵⁵ Susan Marie Smith. *Christian Ritualizing and the Baptismal Process: Liturgical Explorations Toward a Realized Baptismal Ecclesiology*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 174. (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 61.

The Catechumenate Process for Children

The catechumenate refers to an intentional period of Christian formation and education in which individuals (catechumens) undergo intentional preparation for baptism. During this time traditionally adults are immersed in the life of the church: in worship, Bible reflection, and service to the poor. They are accompanied by other Christians who serve as faith mentors and later as sponsors for their baptism. In the process of the catechumenate, catechumens are taught about the sacraments and other traditions essential for the growth of their faith, such as understanding who God is and what God desires, human relations, and what life means.⁵⁶

The process of the catechumenate, its rhythms and purpose, can be adjusted for the formation of children. The Episcopal Church in Liberia, with its commitment to gathered worship, extended families, and desire to form the faith of children, is well suited to adapting the catechumenate for use with younger generations. In this formation curriculum, children between the ages of 7 and 12 will be presented to the teachers by individuals, in this case, their parents or guardians, who can vouch for them to begin study in preparation for baptism. The child, once enrolled, will engage in age-appropriate experiences that include Bible stories/readings, prayers, and instruction from the trainers.⁵⁷ This course, built on Christian doctrines and morals, will end once the catechumens show their readiness for baptism through a better understanding of their faith and the Christian life. In the Diocese of Liberia, candidates will be enrolled at the beginning of Lent, to honor the customary tradition of baptism on Holy Saturday.

⁵⁶ Episcopal Church Center. Office of Evangelism Ministries. *The Catechumenal Process: Adult Initiation & Formation for Christian Life and Ministry; A Resource for Dioceses and Congregations*. (New York: Church Hymnal Corp, 1990), 20.

⁵⁷ Ian S. Markham and C. K. Robertson. *Episcopal Questions, Episcopal Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 65.

The Diocese intends to divide the catechumenate into two stages: 1. A pre-catechumenate period where the candidates test their desire for baptism and how ready they are. The individual at this point, especially parents and children, will be encouraged to have a more intentional conversation about their wish to become Christian. 2. At the second stage, children (7-12) who are deemed ready by the Catechist or Sunday school teacher to begin their formation journey towards baptism shall be initiated into the class. They will then begin with a public liturgical act that is done during the principal Sunday liturgy. Each of the candidates must be brought forth by a sponsor. The sponsor is usually chosen by the parents/guardians of the child. Parents are encouraged to choose sponsors from their family or close friendship circle. Once enrolled, the children are expected to be regularly involved in worship and other services and be willing to follow the Sunday school teacher or catechists' Christian faith and doctrine. The instructional sessions, like Sunday School currently, will usually be held weekly on Saturdays, from 9 AM to Noon.

Until now, most congregations in the Diocese have ignored the catechumenate process due to inadequate training preparation and limited access to quality resources. Baptism and Confirmation have become regular events with less emphasis on the preparation. As a result, they are not recognized for their importance in children's spiritual growth. As a priest in the Diocese, I acknowledge having rushed children to the font without adequately preparing them or their parents for the significance of the promises they were making. Often times a baptism has been held on the same day as the baptismal request was made. Clergy have the canonical responsibility to examine and engage the converts to ascertain their readiness or concerns. Baptism is not a membership scheme which sadly is often the case in our context, but rather it is initiation into the Body of Christ and the beginning of a lifelong discipleship process. Parents bringing their children for the

sacrament of baptism (or Confirmation) should be nurtured in an intentional approach to the vows and commitments made. Often, children come for baptism without godparents or guardians. When that happens, there is usually an urgent request within the congregation to solicit a willing sponsor or guardian to support the child/children. Such practice dilutes the sacrament's essence and makes me wonder about our intentions around the sacredness or commitment as a witnessing community. The Book of Common Prayer outlines that parents and godparents are to be instructed in the meaning and essence of baptism, in their duties to help new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and their responsibilities as members of the Church.⁵⁸ This curriculum takes that rubric seriously.

Children need the opportunity to explore what the sacraments are and the extent of their commitment. How can they commit themselves to what they do not know nor understand? Formation of children as the future leaders of the church must lay a foundation for their lifelong journey with Christ, the church's mission, God's salvation plan for them, and their gifts and ministry. As a church dwelling on the traditions and apostolic teachings of the church fathers, we are called to uphold and teach such virtues to the next generation. Through these teachings and this discipline, children can be integrated into the intergenerational community of the Episcopal church. A well-structured catechumenate children will be drawn into a deep, inherited narrative of salvation and God's plan for their lives and their ministries.

⁵⁸ *Book of Common Prayer*, 298.

Curriculum for Children's Ministry

Catechesis is meant to be about the people and not the program with each bringing unique gifts. The emphasis should not always be about the people's differences in their ages, but interest in learning. Such teaching involves the life and teachings of Christ explored in the context of real lives today.⁵⁹ The church recognizes that it is crucial to maintain unity in faith among all its members. However, the church appreciates the fact that there should be diversity, equality, and assurance of respect among all of them. For this to happen, the Diocese should provide culturally sensitive educational materials to members of its community. Intergenerational programs need to be promoted in the church where people of all ages can interact freely as members of Christ, each bringing unique gifts. Good teachers recognize that children's understanding and other intellectual abilities are not the same as those of adults. Teachers should therefore, develop and promote programs that allows children to participate and practice what they are being taught in courses that are appropriate to their ages. Younger children learn more through observing and imitating, through play and wondering. Interaction helps both age groups reflect upon their developing comprehension of how God is calling them to act on the issues affecting them. Keeping children isolated from older members of the congregation can slow their growth and maturation. At the same time, separating age groups mean that adults miss out on the opportunity of learning how to be like children, as Jesus commanded. Children enjoy organized activities such as music, scouting, arts, and other creative events. By 7 or 8 years of age, their cognition has changed from the more

⁵⁹ Gerhard Bode, "Knowing How to Live and Die: Luther and the Teaching of the Christian Faith." *Concordia Journal* 44 (2018): 15–33, accessed February 28, 2021. <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/concordiajournal/vol-44-2018/knowning-how-to-live-and-die-luther-and-the-teaching-of-the-christian-faith/15/>

self-centered and imaginary characteristics of preschool-aged children as they begin to appreciate and apply principles of cause and effect. With the children between the ages of 7 and 12 beginning to acquire new cognitive abilities and responsiveness to groups, their thinking and language skills make it possible for them to understand symbols, sacraments, and the Bible as a narrative of the history of salvation.

As children approach adolescence, they are usually ready to receive instruction in a more systematic manner, including exploration of the Bible, worship elements including vestments, the creeds, seasons of the liturgical year, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Hymnal. Formation experiences that the catechists plan should encourage children to attend worship regularly rather than occasionally. Moral catechesis should also incorporate positive children's literature and biblical or current stories of people who have modeled qualities and practices of mature Christian faith. Through age-appropriate catechesis, children can develop a personal, prayerful relationship with God.⁶⁰

For a catechumenal approach to children's formation in the Diocese of Liberia to be effective, the current catechetical structures and content must change. This will require a new approach to planning for catechesis with children.

1. Faithful planning for the catechesis needs to be person-centered instead of program-centered. When all plans are being made, the determinant should be the children. This means it is the program that needs to be adjusted to fit the people who will be involved in

⁶⁰ David Ng, "What Children Bring to Worship." *Austin Seminary Bulletin (Faculty Ed.)* 94, no. 3 (1978): 5–30, accessed February 28, 2021. <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/austinseminarybulletin/vol-94-1978/what-children-bring-to-worship/5/>

a course, rather than building plans around specific programs and having the people fit into the program.

2. Faithful planning requires that the church endeavor to seek support for the formation of children and not allow financial limitations to compromise the quality of teachings of the church or access to them.
3. The primary goal of authentic planning is to ensure the personal growth of individual children in the ways of Christ, and equipping them to serve and accomplish the church's mission.
4. For faithful planning to be successful, there has to be ecclesiastical approval and support. Local efforts need to collaborate with the Christian education and theological education departments of the diocese.
5. Faithful planning is a continuous process that needs to be regularly reviewed and evaluated by the Christian education department in conjunction with the catechist or the Sunday School teacher. ⁶¹

⁶¹ Bushkofsky, Dennis, Suzanne Burke and, Richard W Rouse, *Go Make Disciples: An Invitation to Baptismal Living: A Handbook to the Catechumenate*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012), 23.

The Role of Family in Faith Formation

Family involvement in faith formation is crucial in children's spiritual growth because children learn from what they see in the homes and community. As the first line of transformative engagement, what they teach and pass on is crucial for the children's holistic wellbeing. From the biblical settings, the Hebrew society emphasized the teaching and nurturing of children, as recorded in Deuteronomy through the Shema, the main theological belief of Judaism.⁶² While spiritual leaders guided the more prominent family traditions and rituals, elders assumed responsibility for the moral formation. Culturally, the most aged grandparent was to narrate the stories of God's redemptive acts in rescuing Israel and establishing a covenant. These stories reminded children of God's presence and activity in Israel. Traditionally, every Jewish household worshipped and celebrated the Hebrew festivals in keeping with the Shema given them by their ancestors. Jesus further demonstrated the Passover meal's celebration amongst His disciples as the eucharist and taught them to celebrate in memory of Him. The early Christian communities continued to celebrate the Lord's supper in their homes, from one generation to another. Family households remained the primary settings in which the oral tradition, psalms, and profession of Jesus as the Messiah were spoken, sung, and shared. Such a formation process was family-driven and intentional and involved children, servants, and guests.⁶³ The foundations of such a family-centered, faith-forming culture exist in Liberia and can be strengthened.

⁶² Roland D. Martinson, "The Role of Family in the Faith and Value Formation of Children." *Word & World* 17 (1997): 396–404, accessed February 26, 2021, <http://www.ebscohost.com.librarycatalog.vts.edu/word&world/vol-17-1997/the-role-of-family-in-the-faith-and-value-formation-of-children/396/>

⁶³ Edward Hays, *Prayers for the Domestic Church: A Handbook for Worship in the Home* (Easton KS: Forest of Peace Books, 1979), 17.

The Diocese of Liberia acknowledges the family's important role in passing the faith to children. Many congregational ministries focus on covenant family fellowship in communities to engage families and strengthen children's formation. The Episcopal Church Women of Liberia and the Mothers' Union have worked diligently to increase family religious practices through excursions, workshops, symposia, and Lenten series. They see such engagement as the nexus through which the Episcopal identity is transmitted to children.

Enculturation in faith is encouraged through family devotion, Bible study, gracing of the meal, and biblical recitation. Yet, commitment and promises made at baptism and confirmation by sponsors and godparents call for an even more intentional process guiding children in nurturing the faith. Family caregiving and supervision are crucial steps in ensuring children are secure and free to express their faith and inquire about things that matter to them. What the children read, watch, and listen to has a profound impact on their faith journey. Caregivers need to be proactive in providing an environment where there is awareness of children's activities as they explore their faith journey's richness. This curriculum will include intentional faith practices in homes as reliable and effective means of faith formation.

Curriculum

The following curriculum's target group is children between the ages of 7 and 12, which means it is easier to determine what the children are taught in a particular stage. The format allows the catechists to develop learning outcomes appropriate for a specific theme.

Proposed Faith Formation Curriculum Resources and Learning Outcomes

Topics/Series	Ages: 7-9	Resources	Learning outcomes
Who is God?		Building Faith Brick by Brick II An Imaginative way to Explore the Parables with God's People Emily Slichter Given The Deuterocanonical Bible with Apocrypha The Book of Common Prayer	Will be able to name God as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. Will be able to spell and write the name of God. Will be able to recite God as the provider, defender, and healer.
Who is Jesus?		Teaching Godly Play How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children. Jerome W. Berryman	Will be able to name Jesus as the Saviour. The Son of God, Children's friend And the light of the world
Prayer and Family		The Book of Common Prayer	Will be able to recite the Lord's prayer at devotion, grace the meal, and recite a Bible verse. Will be able to pray with the family and identify the immediate family (Father, Mother, Brother, and sister)
The Home of Faith		Living Home with Faith Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth Elizabeth F. Caldwell	Will learn to be truthful. Will show love and respect to parents, siblings, and those in the community. Will be able to draw and color Bible actors
Bible Alphabet		Building Faith Brick by Brick II An Imaginative way to Explore the Parables with God's People Emily Slichter Given	Will be able to spell the name of Jesus using bricks, poster sheets, and index cards. Will be able to spell the Bible, faith, church, and creeds.

		The Deuterocanonical Bible with Apocrypha The Book of Common Prayer	Will be able to name the first four books of the New Testament. (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)
The Colors of the Church Year		The Book of Occasional Services and the Book of Common Prayer	Will be able to draw the colors of the church in their books. Will be able to recite and list the colors of the church (Red, Blue, Green, White, Purple) Will help decorate the family table each liturgical season
The Church Year		The Book of Common Prayer	Will be able to name the seasons of the church year They shall know there is a 3-year cycle of Bible readings, the Sunday Lectionary (A, B, C)
Baptism		The BCP and Go Make Disciples. An Invitation to Baptismal Living	They shall be able to name the places baptism takes place: baptismal Font rivers lagoons waterfall creeks They shall identify and name the elements of baptism (water, candle, oil and salt)
Topics/Series	Ages: 10-12	Resources	Learning outcomes
The Mission of the church		Kevin E. Lawson Scottie May Children's Spirituality The Book of Common Prayer The Good News Bible with the books of the Apocrypha	They will be able to spell church Name three functions of the church Recite the mission of the church

The Role of Parents in the Church		<p>Leaving Home with Faith Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth Elizabeth F. Caldwell</p> <p>Faith formation with a new generation With Lisa Brown, Tenya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates</p> <p>The Pastoral Care of Children Daniel H. Grosseohme</p>	<p>They will be able to see and identify parents:</p> <p>Mentor Care provider Teacher Counselor</p> <p>They will be able to talk about faith with their parents.</p>
The Holy Bible		<p>The BCP The Good News Bible</p>	<p>They will be able to list the sections of the Bible</p> <p>The major and minor Prophets</p> <p>List the two parts of the Bible They will know how the Bible came to being</p>
The God Head		<p>https://plainbibleteaching.com</p>	<p>They will understand the Godhead as the Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)</p>
The Creeds		<p>The Book of Common Prayer</p>	<p>They will recite the Apostles' & Nicene Creeds and understand the difference between them</p>

<p>The Importance of the Sacraments</p>		<p>Go Make Disciples An Invitation to Baptismal Living A Handbook to the Catechumenate Dennis Bushkofsky, Richard W. Rouse, and Suzanne Burke & The Book of Common Prayer</p>	<p>They will understand the sacraments:</p> <p>Sacraments instituted by Christ Strengthen our relationship with God Are the identity of the church They shall list the inward and outward visible and invisible signs of baptism They shall be able to write the seven sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Matrimony, Uuction, Reconciliation, Ordination, Confirmation</p>
<p>The Role of Sponsors in Baptism</p>		<p>Faith formation with a new generation With Lisa Brown, Tenya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates</p>	<p>They will see sponsors as role models, spiritual directors, conversation partners</p>
<p>Children's Participation in Worship</p>		<p>Faith formation with a new generation With Lisa Brown, Tenya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates</p>	<p>Participants shall be able to practice their faith through Singing in children choir Acolyte guild Girls' friendly society Children's drama club</p>
<p>Family Day & Cultural Service</p>		<p>Faith formation with a new generation With Lisa Brown, Tenya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates</p>	<p>They will be able to dramatize, recite, and display:</p> <p>The creeds the collect of purity different traditional cultures in worship (prayer and songs)</p>

The Parts of the Church		The Book of Occasional services	<p>Children shall be able to name and identify the following:</p> <p>sanctuary, narthex, nave, aisle, rails, sacristy, chancel,</p> <p>They shall explain who sits in the various parts of the church and why</p>
Intergenerational Faith Experience		<p>Faith formation with a new generation With Lisa Brown, Tenya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates</p> <p>Christian Practices Life of the Faith</p> <p>Craig Dykstra</p>	<p>The children will experience and witness authentic faith by:</p> <p>Praying & worshiping together with adults Attending camps & excursions Bible studies Lenten series</p>

Next Steps

A proposal for training and recruitment of catechists for children's formation will be made in collaboration with the Christian Education Department of the Diocese. The Diocese of Liberia is divided into Archdeaconries, namely, the Western, Southeastern, Bassa, and LoBoNi. A decentralized approach for recruitment will be the first step, and after that, a week of training and logistical empowerment of teaching materials will follow. The Department of Christian Education shall conduct nationwide training across the diocese. Support is crucial in this endeavor, and, with the bishop's consent and approval, the diocese will sponsor the initiative. Moreover, a proposal seeking partnership within the Anglican communion for Christian formation shall be encouraged. Importantly, sponsors and godparents shall be required to attend two workshops before the start of the formation program. It is vital to involve them in understanding their role and commitment in nurturing those entrusted to their care. It will be important to develop a family support network in collaboration with the church to optimize the learning and formation journey of children.

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