

Passing on the Faith

Deuteronomy 4:9

Introduction

In 2013, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, told a conference at Shropshire, England that the Church of England was “one generation away from extinction.” In 2017, it was reported that infant baptisms in the LCMS were down 70% from the 1950s, and adult converts were down 47%. Spirituality, a belief in something beyond the physical world, is at an all-time high, while church membership is on the decline. Some good news: In 2019, our average weekend attendance was 40. The year of COVID, it fell to 35. And so far, this year, the weekend average is 53. Recently, the Lord has blessed us with children and teens. Now, before we start feeling too good, let’s take a closer look at Lord Carey’s statement: “The Church of England is one generation away from extinction.”

The Next Generation

Lord Carey was saying that if something wasn’t done, in twenty years the Church of England would be dead. But there is another meaning to being *one generation away from extinction* (Read **2 Timothy 2:1—2**). Timothy was to take what he learned from Paul (one generation) and teach it to faithful men (the next generation), who would teach others (another generation). What happens if one generation is not taught the faith?

What Do We Teach?

But just what do we teach? I suppose the simplest answer would be, “The Bible.” That’s a tall order and rather impractical. So, if we’re teaching the faith, the best thing to do would be to follow the example of the ancient church. For the ancient church, their catechism had three main parts: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Based on that, Luther gave us a **Catechism** with six main parts, adding in teachings about Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar. These six things encapsulate the Christian faith and make it easy to teach and easy to swallow.

The Facts of the Faith

In short, what we teach is the **Triune God**, who as **Creator**, gave us His Law, so we know how to live. Because we have fallen into sin and cannot keep the Law, He is our **Redeemer**, who became one of us to die in our place, purchasing our forgiveness with His body and blood on the cross. He is also our **Sanctifier**, through the washing by

the water with the Word and will keep us by His Supper through the Holy Spirit until the last day, when He comes to take us home.

How Do We Teach?

Learning the **Catechism** isn't just memorizing the Commandments, Creed, Prayer, the Baptismal formula, and the Words of Institution. It's about understanding them and learning what they mean. The **Small Catechism** asks and answers that question. Luther says that we should continue to read and study the **Catechism** every day throughout our lives.

Where Do We Teach?

One of my chief jobs as pastor is to oversee the Christian education of the church. To that end, I teach the faith in sermons, lead Bible studies, teach Confirmation classes, lead Adult Education classes, and oversee Sunday School. So, a lot of Christian Education takes place in the church. But that's not the only place it happens (Read **Deuteronomy 6:6—9**).

Who Teaches?

The Lord is talking here to parents, especially fathers. That's their responsibility as head of the household. Luther says: *Therefore, it is the duty of every father of a family to question and examine his children and servants at least once a week and see what they know or are learning from the catechism* (**Large Catechism**, Short Preface, 4). To assist you, I have included as an insert a list of resources and where to access them.

It Takes a Village

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. While the parents are the primary educators of the children, the church, the family of God is a vital support system. We are here to hold parents up in prayer, to lend a hand whenever needed, and to be available with any expertise we might possess to assist them. The goal is passing the faith on to the next generation so they can pass it on. Then, the faith will live on, and the Family of God will continue to grow through His Spirit until the day our Lord returns.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
