

Religion

Children can discover their own God

Twelfth Sunday
in Ordinary Time
Mark 4:35-41
June 23, 1991

"God is with me when I round second base."

So said one child to David Heller during the research for his book, *The Children's God*.

This statement is the evidence, according to Heller, of a child who has begun to move from a parental and socialized conception of God, to a more self-initiated, creative and original representation of a personal God.

For this child, God plays ball, gets sweaty and probably slides into home plate.

For this child, God knows the same exhilaration that he or she feels when they round second, gauging whether they can make third, or even go all the way.

For this child, God shares their growing sense of self-discovery, self-mastery and self-awareness.

The point all the way through

Heller's book is to encourage what psychologists call individuation. Heller writes, "Separating from the parents of childhood and becoming a person in one's own right is a fundamental task for the child-turned-adult." Separation includes detachment from the "expectations, patterns and internalized images of parents." This can be especially difficult for those who experienced "stagnating early family and socialization influences."

Heller also writes about religious individuation. By this he means the separation from parental religion and the discovery and creation of personal religion.

Can parents help in this process?

Heller says yes.

Tolerance, optimism, limit-setting and a zest for originality and novelty, are all parenting characteristics that allow a child



Religion
and
Reality
by
Jim Ryan

to explore the mysteries of the universe.

But most important is trust.

Trust which starts in the mother-child relationship, and then develops as parents nurture a child over time, will make it possible for faith to emerge in the child. Heller writes, "Trust is not necessarily the first cause of that faith, owing to the possibility that

faith may be caused by the actual existence of a deity" ...; but it lays the groundwork for faith.

If parents can help in the development of faith; they can also hinder it. Heller thinks that overbearing family problems and lack of trust can make it too difficult for children to confront the question of God's existence.

But parents can only facilitate the process at best. Religious individuation is never guaranteed and never easy.

Heller thinks that the child who has a tolerance for being alone may have an advantage. "Time along seems to allow a child to develop his or her own beliefs outside of a parental shadow, however benign that parental oversight might be."

It is during this time alone that a child may have a breakthrough, a moment of a "newborn God." These moments carry with them a special quality. The child will speak with a special authority.

Intestingly enough, the discovery of the child's own God is accompanied by the discovery of the child's own ability to affect the world.

Heller concludes, "No longer are the children perceiving themselves as pleasant puppets of the adult world. They seem to believe that they can have great impact on the world. Certainly, they continue on with many questions about their God. They take with them, however, a natural appetite for meaning and great taste for the freedom to explore."

We're back to our friend rounding second base with God.

This is not so different from today's Gospel reading. In Mark, Jesus stands up in a boat and tells the wind and the waves to shut up and calm down. And they do. The disciples wonder, "Who is this guy?" They think, "He seems like God. Is he God?"

Endnote: David Heller, *The Children's God*, (Chicago: 1986).

Lutheran Church convention attended by local delegates

By REV. FRITZ SCHMITT
Rev. Fritz Schmitt and Ted Von Zuben attended the Second regular Convention of the East District of Lutheran Church - Canada, which took place on June 6-9, as delegates of Immanuel

(Georgetown) Lutheran Church. The East District includes congregations in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. The Convention took place at the campus of Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. The theme of

the Convention was Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28, "Come Unto Me." The convention was opened with a service of praise to God led by Dr. Edwin Lehman, President of Lutheran Church - Canada.

An historic part of this convention was the election of Dr. Roger Winger, of Kitchener, Ontario, as the new District President. He succeeds Dr. Albin Stanfel who has held this position for the past 21 years. Dr. Albin Stanfel, the current president and a longtime friend of Dr. Winger, congratulated him on his election.

with the assembly the tremendous work being undertaken by Canadian Lutheran World Relief around the world in such areas as Bangladesh and among the Kurds on the Turkey-Iraq border. The department also focused need for refugee resettlement and sponsorship in its report. A motion was adopted to request the study of the Ontario Provincial Government's Ministry of Community and Social Services Advisory Committee on Children Services Report, "Children First." While noting that the study document has been prepared to strengthen the state of the family in a healthier society and that the Government has prepared the study document, in part, to solicit response from all responsible segments of the Province the motion further stated that the Ontario District of the LC-C is also concerned about strengthening the state of the family and parental authority in our society.

President-elect Dr. Roger Winger addressed the assembly. He said he considered it a great privilege to carry out the responsibility entrusted to him by the congregations of the District and that he felt deeply humbled. He said that while he remembered the words of Isaiah, who said, "Here I am Lord! Send me," Rev. Winger said he felt more like reluctant Moses. Nevertheless he said he took strength from the words of St. Paul who said, "I can do all things through God who strengthens me."

The Department of Social Ministry of the District shared

Church groups unite in friendship

By JANET DUVAL
Herald Special

The members of St. John's United Church are getting special help from their friends at Knox Presbyterian this summer.

For years, the two churches have worshipped together during July and August, switching sanctuaries and preachers halfway through the summer.

This year, major renovations and an addition at St. John's will make use of the building impossible, so the Session at Knox has offered to hold all services there.

In July, the Rev. Peter Barrow of Knox will be preaching at the 11 a.m. service, with St. John's Music Director Haydn Evans at the organ.

In August, St. John's minister Nancy Knox will lead services at Knox, with resident organist Rennie van Dyke leading the joint choir from the two churches.

Both congregations enjoy the chance to follow the slightly different styles of worship each

summer, to sing from each others' hymnbooks, and to renew acquaintances on the steps outside after the service.

The two churches work together throughout the year on projects which involve other denominations as well, including the Georgetown Refugee Committee, and Ten Days for World Development.

"There's no question that we would be willing to share our building with the United Church," says Knox's Clerk of Session Hank van Goch. "We are happy they can renovate and expand."

Currently, part of the downstairs at St. John's has been gutted, and almost all the furniture and fixtures have been moved into storage. A new addition is rising on foundations poured at the back of the building. An elevator and new kitchen are being installed, and a wider door will be built into the sanctuary from the elevator lobby, to give full accessibility for

wheelchairs.

When construction is complete in the fall, the main entry to the building will be from the back parking lot, leading into new ground floor offices.

"It's wonderful generosity on the part of Knox to let us use their building all summer," says Rev. Nancy Knox. "Already, they've offered us the use of their hall for a reception following a funeral."

This sharing is a continuing witness to the community churches working together," she said.

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