

## The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey Frantz

*Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, **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 18:13-14)

**Will our children have faith?** Although there are few references in the Bible to children and even fewer references to the challenge of parenting, still, we tend to assume in the Church that the Christian education of our children is a high priority for parents and families.

Jesus' reference to the spirit of children in this passage from Matthew's gospel is a reminder of the unique gifts of children; but it is a *wake up* note as well of the enormous responsibility we have—as parents and as church leaders—in raising our children up in the Christian faith.

However, for this to happen, our children have to be exposed to our faith traditions. They have to learn their religious story—the stories of Jesus, the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, the story of the church; the stories out of which the values and meanings of Christian faith emerge and give shape to our ultimate commitments.

An important question for countless young families, both now and in the near future, is *Will our children have faith?* For *the kingdom of heaven* to belong to our little ones, we have to teach them our story. They can't learn it sleeping in on Sunday mornings, playing video games non-stop, and going to Disney World every weekend.

**Family decisions for a workable balance.** No doubt one of the major challenges for young families today is finding a workable balance for their family life. With regard to church, for example, families can make a reasoned decision about how many Sundays a month they want to attend church. While every week might be unrealistic, one Sunday a month would be too infrequent.

For our children to have faith, they have to have enough exposure to church to develop an active memory of church/ religious life. As parents and church leaders, we want them to have meaningful memories of Advent as it leads in to Christmas Eve. We want them to have a vibrant memory of holy week—at the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, before the cross on Good Friday, and of course in the *good news* celebrations of Easter.

For our children to have faith, they need to be participants in hands-on Christian outreach functions, sponsored by the church. They need to see first hand what it means to *feed the hungry* and *lift up the lowly*.

**A sense of God's infinite love.** They need to have some interaction with other children like themselves whose lives are marked by some element of daily struggle and deprivation. They need to learn to share their abundance and to have compassion for the countless millions around the earth less fortunate than themselves.

For our children to have faith, we need to teach them, first hand, what it means to be a part of the *body of Christ* that is the Church.

Furthermore, to have faith as a child and as an evolving young person is to have a sense of God's infinite love. It is to have an active sense of God's abiding presence. It is to know that, no matter what, we are never alone.

It is to grow up knowing that you are a part of something larger than yourself. It is to have the knowledge (part of the memory) that—always—the church is there for you ... that your life matters, both to God and to your wider church family. It is to have a sense that you belong, that you're a child of God—infinately loved and valued.