

# Home Schools

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Home schools are not new. The recent growth in home schools and the implications this growth has for our understanding of Christian education and the roles of parents and church in this Christian education, necessitates a careful examination of what Scripture teaches concerning Christian education. The report which follows includes this examination of Scripture. Following this is a discussion of the responsibility of the congregation for Christian education, a brief survey of the writings of Christian educators who spoke to the issue of home education, and an analysis of the legal issues of home education. The report also discusses the capability of parents today to educate their own children and the social/cognitive effects of home schools. The final section summarizes the study with a set of concluding observations.

## Definitions

Home schools are established by parents for a number of reasons and are operated in a variety of ways. Before examining what the Scriptures say about Christian education and the possible effects of home schools on children, their parents, and the Christian congregation, it seems wise first to define and describe home schools. The definitions which follow are not intended to be mutually exclusive. They are given, however, to provide a perspective of home schools.

One type of home school is established by parents who live in areas where distance prevents them from sending their children to a regular school. States, such as Alaska and Montana, with sparsely settled populations have a number of home schools. In these states the parents are generally provided assistance by the state or local school authorities. Parents may also make use of a correspondence course school, such as Calvert School in Baltimore, Maryland, for materials and other services. A situation in the Synod which would be analogous to this would be the case of a foreign missionary who taught his children at home and used one of our Lutheran elementary schools for correspondence courses.

A second type of home school would result when parents wished or found it necessary to keep their child at home because of the child's handicap, illness, or learning disability. A parent also might prefer to keep a child at home who is experiencing a slower than normal development. When the child had overcome the illness, disability, or developmental problem, the parent would enroll the child in school. A parent in the Synod, for example, might decide to keep a Down's syndrome child out of school. The parent would provide the necessary training at home and supplement this instruction with whatever services for the handicapped are locally available.

These two types of home schools need no further comment. They appear to be legitimate and legal responses to unusual circumstances. Our congregations and their Lutheran elementary schools should provide whatever assistance is feasible and needed in these cases.

A third type of home school is established by parents who reject the public school and what is taught in those schools. These parents point to the teaching of humanism, materialism, and evolution as reasons why they do not wish their children to attend these schools. They also cite drug abuse, violence, immorality, declining test scores, inadequate teachers, dehumanizing school bureaucracies, regimentation, and a host of other ills in public education as bases for their decision. These parents are adamantly rejecting public education. An example of this in the Synod would be parents who had no Lutheran elementary school available and established a home school because they felt the public school was a harmful environment for their child.

A fourth type of home school is begun by the "unschoolers." Such a belief about home schools has been described by John Holt. These parents reject the idea of any kind of school, public or nonpublic. They believe all schools stifle the child's spontaneity and curiosity, and kill the child's spirit. For these parents, the home provides a more free, unstructured, and natural environment for learning and nurturing. It is difficult to suggest

an example of this in the Synod because most of the “unschoolers” are not especially interested in religious instruction.

The final kind of home school is the one established by parents who believe that Scripture directs specifically them to educate their children. They look upon their home school as the best way to carry out their God-given responsibilities. They take literally the Scriptural admonitions to parents and they act for conscience reasons. The motivation for these parents may, at times, be mixed. When parents establish a home school, they may imply or state a criticism of the congregation’s agencies of Christian education. This is not necessarily always the case, however. An example of this type of home school would be parents who decide to keep their children at home and teach them there even if the congregation operated a Lutheran elementary school.

At the time of this study, there was no information available on the number and kinds of home schools in the Synod. Information was received on several such schools, through newspaper articles and through private communication. The parents who established these home schools differ markedly in their motives and purpose. Three examples are described below.

In one case a pastor and his wife established a home school for their five children, ages four through ten. The mother, who did attend college but was not trained as a teacher, provides most of the instruction. The father assists with the religion teaching. Their home school has the appearance of a school with desks, standard textbooks, chalkboard, and a regular schedule of classes. Classes are conducted in the morning with study time and non-academic projects in the afternoon. Although the parents stated that they were not rejecting public schools, they did establish their home school because they could find no school which taught in agreement with their religious convictions. They maintain cordial relations with the public school authorities and have complied with the state regulations regarding home schools. They are obviously not rejecting the congregation’s work of Christian education because there is no Lutheran elementary school in the congregation. They receive assistance and advice from an organization which supports home schools and from other parents who have their own home schools. The children are not isolated from friends or community activities and the parents believe they are not being hindered in their social or academic development. The children appear to enjoy being taught at home. The committee believes this example to be similar to the third type of home school defined above. These parents could find no school compatible with their religious beliefs and therefore established a home school for their children.

The second example of a home school was established by parents in a congregation which has a Lutheran elementary school. The families (two, in this case) were active in the congregation but they became concerned about the spirituality of the congregation. Through their own private reading and study they became convinced that the natural and Biblical way of educating children was by the parents. They believe that a home school offers superior advantages, socially, academically, and spiritually. The Scripture, they believe, directs them to be solely responsible for the Christian education of their children. These parents believe that the Lutheran elementary school in the congregation neither adequately provides a Christian education nor meets the needs of gifted children. The withdrawal of their children from the congregation’s school has caused considerable bitterness among the members of the congregation and discouragement among the teachers. One of the mothers has been trained as a teacher; the other has not. Neither the pastor nor the teachers know the details of the education the children are receiving, the materials they are using, or if the parents have complied with any state regulations. The committee believes this type of home school is an example of the fifth kind defined above.

The third example does not seem to fit any classification. In this case, the parents kept one child out of school although other children of the family continued to attend the congregation’s elementary school. The parents did this, not out of any animosity toward the congregation or school, but because the mother wished to spend more time with the child and wanted him to receive more influence from his parents than from his peers. The goals of the home school are similar to the goals of the congregation’s elementary school; the parents sought the cooperation of the school so that the child remains current with his classmates. The calendar of the home school closely follows the calendar of the Lutheran school. Classes are held from nine to twelve in the morning; in the afternoon the boy reads, practices piano, and does his assignments. The mother sees the

interaction and socialization among this child and his younger siblings as a definite advantage of the home school. Although the parents have received some criticism for their action, they do not regret their decision.

### **Education in the Old and New Testaments**

From earliest times formal education in Hebrew society was the responsibility of the father. As the head of the household the father provided his children with knowledge necessary for daily living, the skill required to pursue the occupation of the family, as well as basic social, moral, and religious principles. For the people of God every-day life and religious belief and practice were inseparable, therefore education was primarily religious and ethical. Reading was stressed because it was essential for the study of Scripture.

The mother also took part in this teaching process. King Lemuel's mother obviously proved an able teacher to him. His "sayings" are described as "an oracle his mother taught him" (Proverbs 31:1). Girls' education was wholly in their mothers' hands. They learned the domestic arts, simple moral and ethical instruction, and they learned to read in order to become acquainted with the Law.

Teaching in the home continued to play an important part throughout the Biblical period, but there were other means of education as well. Great festivals provided opportunities to teach religious history to children as well as adults. In connection with the Feast of Unleavened Bread Moses told the Children of Israel, "On that day tell your son, 'I do this (eat unleavened bread) because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8).

There are no direct references in early Old Testament history to schools or professional teachers as a special occupation to provide education to children in general, but various forms of education did take place outside the home. Professional guilds provided instruction and training in the special skills of certain crafts. The profession of scribe was handed down from father to son or from master to pupil in the sense of apprenticeship. Such appears to be the case also in regard to other professions such as temple musicians (1 Chronicles 25:8).

Priests provided instruction in ancient Israel. The child Samuel was given to the priests at Shiloh to be educated and trained as a resident member of the staff. Priests and Levites taught the Law to the people during the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:8) and after the return from captivity (Nehemiah 8:7-9).

Prophets also taught the people. The prophet Elijah provided private daily instruction by word and example to Elisha. It was Samuel who had inaugurated the schools of the prophets (theological seminaries we might say) to train men as teachers of the people. Under the leadership of an elderly prophet promising young men were instructed in the interpretation of the Law, in music, and in poetry. After completing his course of study the prophet entered upon the duties of his office as an instructor of the people.

After the return from Babylonian captivity Ezra established the written Word of Scripture as the basis for schooling in general, and it was his successors who made the synagogue a place of instruction. The young were trained either in the synagogue itself or in an adjoining building. Eventually there arose the position of scribe as teacher in the synagogue.

From a reference in Josephus (Ant. XII.IV 6) it may be inferred that schools had been established in Jerusalem before 220 B.C.

During the period of the Maccabees in 75 B.C. Simon ben Shetah is said to have got a law passed ordaining that the children were required to attend the elementary school. Obviously schools had been in existence for some time; attendance was now made compulsory. History records that a certain Joshua ben Gamala appointed teachers in every province and town a century later.

Attendance at the Old Testament elementary school began at the age of five or six. By that time a boy had learned to repeat from memory Deuteronomy 6:4 (the "Shema"), selected proverbs, and quotations from the Psalms. Now he began to learn to read. His only textbook was the sacred Scriptures. The opening chapters of Leviticus were studied first so that the pupil might become familiar with the laws and ordinances regarding sacrifices, festivals, etc.; then the other books of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures were read and studied. Besides reading, writing, grammar and composition were also taught.

In addition to the elementary school there were eventually secondary schools for boys from the age of ten to fourteen years. One such school was in the Temple complex where the twelve-year-old Jesus was found by his parents.

In large cities there seems to have been also a kind of college for young men from fifteen to twenty years of age. Here, too, religious subjects were taught first, although other courses such as philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, botany, arithmetic, geography, architecture and astronomy were also offered.

The title *rabbi* (my master) appeared at the beginning of the Christian era and designated a person well schooled in Jewish Law and consequently a teacher of the Law (Luke 2:46). Jesus, who was addressed as *rabbi*, taught in the synagogue (Matthew 4:23; 9:35) as did the apostles after him (Acts 14:1; 17:3). According to the method of the *rabbi* Jesus taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. The name ceased to be used but the concept of *rabbi* continued in the early Christian Church.

The word “school” appears only once in the New Testament and refers to a lecture room borrowed by Paul (Acts 19:9). In the early New Testament church there apparently were no Christian schools as we think of them today. But the children were included in the church fellowship, and no doubt received their training there as well as in the home.

### **Scriptural Directives to Parents Regarding the Education of Children**

The following Scripture passages have a bearing on the discussion of home schools. Several of them are quoted by those who believe that Scripture requires all instruction of children to take place in the home. It is therefore interesting and important to examine the context and meaning of each.

*Deuteronomy 4:9* “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

Moses here instructed the people of God who were about to enter the promised land. In their new environment each generation was to observe the same basic principles of the covenant revealed at Mt. Sinai. They would no longer be a united community on the move; they would have permanent individual residences. But only minor adjustments would be necessary to continue to instruct succeeding generations. The point of the passage is that the Hebrews were to teach God’s Word to their children and their children’s children. The way in which it was to be done, whether in the home or in a public setting, is not revealed.

*Deuteronomy 6:6,7* “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

The great *Shema* is found in verse four, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, is one.” Therefore it is clear that the words of chapter six are directed to all Israel—not just to parents. Instruction of children was to be the obligation of all God’s people. But these verses surely indicate that parents had the primary responsibility. As children lived and worked with their parents, the typical way of life in the Old Testament world, instruction in God’s Word was to take place all day long in every situation.

*Deuteronomy 11:19* “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

The point of Moses' words here is that the covenant made at Sinai had binding force for the present generation as well as for their descendants. They were to pass it on from generation to generation. Again the words are directed to all Israel, but we of course conclude that parents had the primary responsibility.

*Proverbs 3:1* "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart."

In Proverbs 1:8 Solomon says, "Listen my son to your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching." The wisdom Solomon wishes to impart to his son encompasses every area of life and is taught by word and example. In like manner Christian parents surely will want to train their children.

*Ephesians 6:4* "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

This verse appears as part of a list of instructions to people in various stations in life—children, masters, servants. The father as head of the household has the obligation to see to the proper training and instruction of his children, although these words are also directed to mothers as is evident by the close connection of this verse with the preceding verse where the fourth commandment is quoted.

The NIV has chosen to translate "exasperate" rather than the more familiar "provoke to anger." This would imply a broader range of actions on the part of parents.

The verse makes evident that the opposite of "exasperate" is "bring up . . . in the training and instruction of the Lord." The Greek word translated as "bring up" has in it the idea of nurturing. As animals nurture their young instinctively, so human beings nurture their children by feeding and clothing them, but as rational creatures they also give them an education, and train them according to certain moral principles.

But the apostle has a special kind of nourishing in mind. It is nourishing first in "the training ...of the Lord." The Greek word translated by the NIV as "training" in classical Greek meant education in the sense of the whole instruction and training of a youth including the training of his body. The New Testament use of this word adds the idea of discipline, that is living according to certain laws, the violation of which brings chastisement, even spankings if necessary.

Parents are to nourish their children also in the "instruction of the Lord." The word "instruction" means training by words of encouragement or reproof. Like parental training (or disciplining), parental instruction is to be in accord with what the Lord has commanded and instituted.

Therefore when parents fail to train and instruct their children as the Lord has commanded, they exasperate them. The Lord has also given his church the work of training children. If parents refuse to permit the church to carry out its responsibilities could they not be said to be exasperating their children by denying them this fellowship opportunity? The Lord has insisted that all teaching be in accord with his Word. If parents teaching their children at home use and fail to correct teaching materials riddled with false doctrine could they not be said to be exasperating their children? Could it not be said too that parents ill-prepared to instruct their children at home might well be guilty of exasperating them? The number of ways by which parents might exasperate their children would seem from this passage to include not only arbitrary, inconsistent, foolish, or cruel treatment, but also failure to train and instruct them in accord with God's Word.

*2 Timothy 3:14,15* "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Timothy received instruction as a child from his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice, but Paul emphasizes that Timothy's faith rested entirely upon the Word and not on his mother and grandmother. Paul is not stressing so much education in the home as education in God's Word.

### **Scriptural Directives to God's People in General Regarding the Education of Children**

*Deuteronomy 31:11-13* “When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people – men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns – so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

These verses are part of instructions of Moses to the priests and elders of Israel. Every seven years, during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Law was to be read before the assembled people. Men, women, and children, together with the strangers living in their towns, were to listen to and follow carefully all the words of God’s Law. “Their children” refers to the children of the aliens or foreigners mentioned in the previous verse. These children too were to be instructed in God’s Law as they appeared in the assembly of God’s people.

*Joshua 8:34,35* “Joshua read all the words of the law – the blessings and the curses – just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.”

After the destruction of Ai by the armies of Israel the people gathered at Mounts Ebal and Gerazim where Joshua read all the words of the Law of Moses to the entire assembly of Israel. Here is an example where children were instructed publicly.

*2 Kings 11:21 and 12:2* “Joash was seven years old when he began to reign . . . Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him.”

Joash received instruction from the priest Jehoiada who served as his private tutor throughout his reign of forty years. It was one-on-one teaching, but it wasn’t done by a parent.

*Psalms 78:2-6* “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from of old – things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”

God builds and preserves his church on earth, but he does it by having each generation teach and train the succeeding one. As we were taught by our forefathers, so we need to teach our children, and when they grow up they are to do the same thing for their children.

*Proverbs 22:6* “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

This verse is a general statement not directed exclusively to parents. Any person truly wise will understand that children need to be trained in the right way. A Christian realizes this is God’s will for children.

*Matthew 28:19,20* “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The Christian education of children is here made a duty of the church. These words were obviously not spoken only to parents, nor to certain individuals only, but to all Christians of all times. “All nations” surely includes children. “Everything I have commanded you” means that the instruction needs to be thorough and complete.

*John 21: 15* “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’”

Jesus mentions the lambs of his flock first. Spiritual feeding and nourishment of children is made the first concern of Jesus’ called shepherds. Shepherds are literally to keep on feeding the lambs, that is regularly providing them with spiritual nourishment and teaching them to observe all Jesus has commanded. It is clear from this passage that not only the parents but also the church has a responsibility to train children in the truths of God’s Word.

*Acts 20:28* “Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”

Paul addressed these words to the elders of the congregation at Ephesus. They were thus charged to teach not only the sheep but also the lambs of Jesus’ flock. So today the called workers in the church are duty bound to teach children. They dare not leave this responsibility to the parents, saying that it is only their responsibility. God has obviously entrusted this great work to the church too.

The passages cited above regarding the responsibility of both parents and the church for the nurture of children clearly show that this is a dual responsibility. Even as in the home where there should be no debate between a father and mother regarding the Christian nurture of children, so also there should be no contention between the family and the church concerning this nurture. The gifts and responsibilities of the home and the church are interrelated. The church and the home working together can best determine their function and emphasis in Christian nurture. The Lord may distribute the gifts that contribute to Christian nurture differently in different times and places. At one time and place He may give parents a rich measure of the gifts that contribute to Christian nurture and the church, in comparison, may be a less effective agency of nurture. Such a situation may exist, for example, in times of persecution when the church is forbidden or oppressed. In such circumstances the home would have the greater responsibility for Christian nurture. In other times and places, the church may be a stronger agency of Christian nurture. Such might have been the case of the “aliens” referred to in Deut. 31:12,13. Neither parents nor congregations will be jealous for what they regard as their own prerogatives. Hannah is an exemplar of this mutual interest and cooperation between home and church. She recognized the need and responsibility of the church in the education of her son, yet she also fulfilled her own responsibility for his care and nurture. Such an example of home and church having as their first concern the welfare of the child should guide the action of families and congregations today.

### **The Christian’s Responsibility to the Government**

*Romans 13:1* “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

Christians in the Roman Empire were living under a government which persecuted them. Nevertheless this government too was God’s institution which was to be obeyed. In every way God’s people were to be careful they did not rebel against the authority God had instituted.

A parent who insists on operating a home school in spite of laws to the contrary is rebelling against the authority established by God. God’s Word does not command home schools. If the government, however, were

to forbid the instruction of children in God's Word generally, that would be a different matter. Then we would need to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Some advocates of home schools contend that parents are the only governing authorities over their children. They reject the government's legitimate and Scriptural authority to rule its citizens and to use education as part of this ruling. Their rejection of public education may, in some cases, extend to a rejection of the government's right to educate. Although parents are included among "the governing authorities," they are not the child's only authorities. Parents and children must recognize the government's proper role and obey that government when it operates in its sphere of responsibility.

### **The Responsibility of the Congregation for Christian Education**

Some persons who establish home schools imply or assert that the congregation is not responsible for the Christian education and nurture of the children in the congregation, whatever congregation agency is used for this education. There are, indeed, no words of Scripture which direct a church to establish a specific agency of Christian education and Scripture admonishes parents to be responsible for the education of their children. Yet Scripture, as the previous section showed, does direct the church to teach. There are good and sufficient reasons why this teaching can be done effectively and well by a congregation.

The Deuteronomy passages examined in the previous section clearly show that God gave to the Children of Israel a collective responsibility to provide Christian training and instruction to everyone—men, women, children, and aliens—in the community. The description of one of these collective worship and teaching activities of the congregation of Israel is described in Joshua 8:34, 35. The Children of Israel, therefore, understood God's command concerning the education of their children to be a command to all, not just to parents. The Psalmist (78:2-6) uses words such as "fathers" and "the next generation" which suggest more than a single father teaching his own son. These words indicate that one collective generation is teaching the next.

The New Testament continues this directive to the church to educate when the risen Savior included a teaching function in His mission command to the church (Matt 18:19-20). To carry out this mission, Christ established the ministry. One of the functions of this ministry is to teach, as Christ directed in His words to Peter (John 21:15). Paul directed Timothy to choose as ministers "reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). Ministers of the church must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). Such a qualification for the ministry would be necessary only if the church had a responsibility to teach.

The Christian sees this command to the church to teach as an opportunity to express his faith and love to his Savior. Thus Lutheran schools and the other educational agencies of a congregation are a wholesome and appropriate means for Christians to exercise this faith in their Savior. The educational agencies are also a means for Christians, including those who do not have children of their own, to show a love for the children of the congregation by providing a Christ-centered education. Finally, these agencies show the congregation's love for the church which is strengthened and furthered when God's Word is taught to future generations. Thus the educational services of a congregation provide a wholesome means whereby all members of the congregation can express their love—to the Savior, to children, and to the church. Certainly not all parents who establish home schools reject the educational agencies of the congregation. There are examples, however, of parents with home schools who have withdrawn their children from the Lutheran elementary school and the Sunday school. Parents, by actions such as these, are preventing the other Christians of the congregation from exercising their blessed privilege of educating a future generation. To restrict the responsibility for Christian education only to families denies others in a congregation this outlet for their love. As well-intentioned as parents may be who wish to educate their children at home, they may, thereby, be preventing others from fulfilling their privilege and opportunity for providing Christian education.

When parents reject the educational opportunities which are provided by the congregation and insist on exclusively providing for their own children's education, they are not only depriving their children of wholesome opportunities for nurture and fellowship. Such parents are also denying and restricting the congregation's proper exercise of an important responsibility it has been given by the Lord.



There are also reasons why a Lutheran elementary school is a particularly effective congregational agency for the Christian education of children.

Lutheran elementary schools have historically been a part of the congregation because, if a school is to survive and prosper, it must have continuing support. Such support is not only financial but includes also a moral support in which many people give of their time, abilities, and their encouragement to the school. Such support is found in the term *paideia*, whereby the entire community (congregation) takes responsibility for guiding and directing the lives of the children of the community. Children also live as part of this community of believers in the school and in their life and learning in the school have beneficial opportunities to practice Christian fellowship. In this exercise of community responsibility, the congregation is also strengthened. The parish school provides a training ground for the future congregation. The children learn of the community of believers which provides them this education and their own future responsibility regarding the generations which will follow them. The Lutheran school, with the blessing of God through His word, thus strengthens the congregation.

Lutherans have been concerned about factionalism which can develop if a school is established apart from a congregation. Factionalism divided the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1,11 ff). Lutherans rightly fear that if individuals within the congregation unilaterally perform the collective work of a congregation, an unhealthy situation could exist. Parents who operate a home school might consider themselves better Christians than the rest of the congregation and unwholesome competition might result. A congregation is a community of believers who are one in their purpose. A community is destroyed when it breaks up into rival parties. Lutherans would not want a debate over the responsibility for Christian education to be the cause for a congregation to destroy itself by factionalism.

### **Christian Educators on Home Education**

Our predecessors in Christian education defined carefully the dual responsibility of parents and congregations for the Christian training of the church's youth. Speaking in 1900, a critical time in the development of our modern Lutheran elementary schools, Prof. John Schaller reminded the Synodical Conference of this joint concern:

. . . the ministry of the Gospel as instituted by Christ carries with it the obligation of looking after the spiritual welfare of children, including their Christian education and training. Parents are under obligation to educate their own children. As soon as a congregation has been established, all children within it are placed under the spiritual care of the pastor; for not only did Christ command Peter to feed the lambs as well as the sheep, John 21, 15,16, but He also commanded His church to teach all those who are baptized to observe all things whatsoever He hath commanded His disciples. (Schaller, J. "The Need of Christian Education By Means of Parochial Schools." Paper presented to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, 1900. P. 5)

Some years later Prof. E.W.A. Koehler developed the point a bit more fully in a lengthy two-part paper in which he explained Christian education in the home, on the one hand, and Christian education in the congregation, on the other.

The question is sometimes asked whether it is really the duty of the church and of each local congregation to provide a Christian education for its children. Is this not exclusively the duty of the parents, to whom God gave these children? There is no doubt that parents are commanded to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In fact, it is their duty in the first place, above all, to do so; they before any one else on earth are responsible to God for the proper training of their children. But while we grant priority of right, duty, and responsibility in this respect to parents, it is nevertheless true that they are not the only ones to whom the

Christian education of children is commanded. Also the church and each local congregation has a duty in this respect.

[In] Ps. 78,5 we read: “God established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should make known to their children.” While the text says that the fathers were to make known the Law and the Testimonies of God to their children, this was by no means a private family affair, something that did not concern anybody else. But this was a command given to the whole congregation of Israel. Everyone in Israel was interested in this, that each father would also do what the Lord required....

That the Christian education of children is a duty of the church is especially clear from the words of our Lord Matt 28, 19,20.... We all admit that these words were spoken not to certain individuals only, but to the entire church, to every local congregation, to which the office of the Word and Sacraments is committed....

Pastors and congregations may not shift this responsibility claiming it is the duty of parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is very true. But it is just as true that the Lord has laid this duty also upon each local congregation and its pastors. (Koehler, E. “Christian Education and Training by the Congregation.” *Proceedings of the Fifty-Ninth Convention of Michigan District, Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States*, 1931. Pp. 35-37)

In this joint relationship children benefit not only from the training offered them by parents and teachers, but also from the interaction and growth in living the life of faith which is to be had from fellowship with other Christians. Prof. Harry Coiner described this benefit in a discussion of the role of the Christian teacher.

The Christian teacher who does not understand that the church is people (and that includes young people) in communion, that the individual Christian child has been placed by God in the context of a sharing community, activated by the Spirit of God, and that the child is to experience, understand, and practice the realities of faith in personal and fellowship relationships, is teaching with an incomplete comprehension of what Christian nurture is. God’s people demonstrate their Christianity in their relationship to, and participation in, the communion of saints. The grace of God, which has placed them within the communion of saints, has also given them the power to have their life and their spiritual growth in relationship to God and one another. They belong to one another because God has claimed them for Himself and given them to one another. The water of Holy Baptism and the blood of Christ have incorporated them with Christ and with one another. (Coiner, H.G. “The Context of Christian Education.” *Lutheran Education*. 95 (1960): 375-376)

The benefit of the fellowship of the saints is realized when the congregation carries out its Scriptural duty and involves itself in the Christian training of all its members, including the children.

The nature of the Apostolic mission is stated in the most comprehensive terms in St. John 20:21: “As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.” The task of carrying on upon the earth the work of Christ Himself was transmitted to His disciples. The ministry of Christ was a teaching and preaching ministry. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). This teaching and preaching ministry was not a separate thing from the mission of the Church. If as St. Paul so constantly teaches, the Church is one body with many members, the acts of the organs of the body are the acts of the body itself.

Apostles and evangelists and pastors and teachers and elders were the organs of the body. St. Paul tells the elders in the church at Ephesus “to feed the church of God.” (Coiner, H.G. “The Scriptural Basis for the Responsibility of the Christian Congregation in Christian Education.” *Lutheran Education*. 89 (1954): 396)

We are also wise to consider the admonition of Luther himself. Although he taught that parents should teach their children in the home, he was concerned that those things taught in the home might not have the depth and breadth which children need if they are to be well prepared to accept their adult roles as Christian citizens. Although we grant that our people are very likely better educated than most parents were in Luther’s day, we still need to consider his warning very carefully before we develop home schools apart from our Lutheran elementary schools.

The training we undertake at home, apart from such schools, is intended to make us wise through our own experience. Before that can be accomplished we will be dead a hundred times over, and will have acted rashly throughout our mortal life, for it takes a long time to acquire personal experience. (Luther, M. “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.” *Luther’s Works*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962. V. 45, 369)

The words of these Christian educators are as appropriate today as when they were first written. We are not the first to ponder the relationship between church and home, between specific responsibilities of parents and general responsibilities of the congregation. No one could accuse Luther or Schaller or Koehler of being against parents or homes, yet these men urged the collective responsibility of the church for Christian nurture. Concerns about home school education ought not therefore be construed as a lack of interest or concern about parental responsibility.

### **Legal Issues in Home Schools**

Governments at various levels also show concern for education. This concern is expressed as a compelling interest in developing an enlightened citizenry. Lutherans have always viewed this concern as legitimate and have acknowledged the state’s right to show its interest through reasonable regulation of all schools, including those of the church. Sometimes, however, this regulation has intruded on the constitutional rights of citizens or has been deemed to be unreasonably restrictive. Thus, discussion of home schools must at some point give attention to the legal issues involved.

One of the foremost evidences in our country of government’s compelling interest in education lies in each state’s compulsory education law. These laws affect both public schools and all alternate forms of schooling or instruction. Significant litigation affecting home schools arises from these laws because they are frequently unclear and seemingly permit varied interpretations. In many instances the true cause of difficulty may be that most of the existing laws were written with only public and more formal kinds of alternate schools in mind. We shall look first at the compulsory attendance laws and then briefly review several of the court decisions relevant to home schools.

The basic regulations in compulsory education laws specify the ages during which children are expected to attend school, the number of days or hours per year school should be in session, and which subjects are to be taught. In addition, the laws normally identify the conditions under which exceptions are granted. What these “alternative statutes” say about attendance at a private school or the receiving of other acceptable forms of instruction are the exceptions most pertinent to home schools.

The table on the following page is an attempt to summarize state laws affecting home schools. This summary is based on a recent extensive study of state statutes by Christopher Micka, Executive Director of the Home School Legal Defense Association. Neither this chart nor any subsequent comments on these legal issues are to be taken as the giving of legal advice. The information is as accurate as our interpretations are correct, and the unclarity and ambiguity of some statutes suggest the risk of acting on the basis of this information without benefit of privately retained counsel. Indeed, in a few minor instances, the data in Klicka’s study are not

in accord with that of another recent equally thorough study by Patricia Lines. Nevertheless, the information is acceptable for the purpose of delineating legal issues in home schooling.

The table shows that alternate forms of schooling, including home schools, in most states are treated much like the public schools with regard to attendance and subjects that must be taught. We note also that the majority of states have alternative statutes which expressly permit home instruction or simply require that children be educated in lieu of school attendance. Specific home school statutes exist in twenty-two states, albeit some of these laws, e.g., those of Missouri and Ohio, are as vague as many compulsory attendance laws. This vagueness often lies in the uncertain interpretation of terms such as “equivalent” or “comparable” instruction and the failure of lawmakers to define “school.” At the time this report was written, at least ten state legislatures were considering home school laws deemed favorable to parents.

The states’ monitoring of home schools through compulsory education laws is effected in a variety of ways. At present, seventeen states require home schools to be approved by the local school district or school board. A few states require that home school teachers have a valid state teaching certificate. Another form of state control, one apparently fostered by a number of home schools, is exercised by requiring children educated at home to write standardized tests to assure that they are progressing.

As previously stated, litigation relevant to home schools has resulted from existing compulsory education laws, which are the primary means of state regulation of all non-public schooling. Home school litigation is of relatively recent origin, but some earlier landmark United States Supreme Court decisions affecting private and parochial schools, precipitated by unreasonable state regulations, serve as important precedents today in home school cases.

Perhaps the most important of these precedents is found in a 1925 decision when in *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters* the court struck down an Oregon law requiring all children to attend public schools. In this and subsequent decisions the court has safeguarded the right and duty of parents to determine their children’s education. At the same time, however, the court affirmed the power of the state “to reasonably regulate all schools.”

Since many proponents of home schools have religious reasons for their action, the Supreme Court’s 1972 decision in *Yoder v. Wisconsin* is of interest. Here the court ruled that Wisconsin’s compulsory attendance law could not be applied to the Amish. The court held that the state cannot compel children to attend school after grade eight and until age sixteen. The basic grounds for the decision were that the Amish had a sincerely held religious belief that enforcement of the state regulation would harm their way of life, and that the state had no compelling interest since strong evidence was shown that the children were developing into self-sufficient, competent citizens, able to function adequately in their communities.

## Home School Statutes by State

State	Compulsory Attendance			Home School Statutes	Alternative Laws Permit Home School	Teacher Certification	Standardized Test	
	Ages	Laws Days	Subjects					
Alabama	7-15	180	(1)	N	Y	Y (3)	N (4)	N
Alaska	7-15	180	(2)	N	Y	Y (5)	N (6)	Y
Arizona	8-15	175	(1)	Y	N		N (8)	Y (9)
Arkansas	7-16	(2)	(2)	Y	N		N	Y(10)
California	6-16	175	(11)	N	Y		N	N
Colorado	7-15	172	(12)	Y	Y	Y (5)	N(13)	N
Connecticut	7-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	Y(14)N
Delaware	6-15	180	(2)	N	Y		N	N
Florida	6-15	(2)	(1)	Y	Y		N	Y
Georgia	7-15	180	(1)	Y	N		N	Y(15)
Hawaii	6-17	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Idaho	7-15	(2)	(2)	N	Y	Y(16)	N	N
Illinois	7-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Indiana	7-15	(2)	(2)	N	Y		N	N
Iowa	7-15	120	(1)	N	Y	Y	N(17)	N
Kansas	7-15	180	(1)	N	Y		N(18)	N
Kentucky	6-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	Y
Louisiana	7-15	180	(2)	Y	N		N	N
Maine	7-16	175	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Maryland	6-15	180	(2)	N	Y		N	N
Massachusetts	6-16	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Michigan	6-15	180	(2)	N	Y	Y		N
Minnesota	7-15	175	(19)	N	Y		N	N
Mississippi	6-13	155	(20)	Y	N		N	N
Missouri	7-15	(2)	(2)	Y	Y		N	N
Montana	7-15	180	(2)	Y	N		N	N
Nebraska	7-15	175	(1)	N	Y		N	Y
Nevada	7-16	180	(21)	Y	Y		N	N
New Hampshire	6-15	180	(1)	N	Y		N	N
New Jersey	6-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	N
New Mexico	6-16	(2)	(2)	Y	Y		N	Y(22)
New York	6-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N(18)	N
North Carolina	7-15	180	(1)	N	Y		N	Y(23)
North Dakota	7-15	175	(1)	N	Y	Y		N
Ohio	6-17	182	(2)	Y	Y		N	N
Oklahoma	7-17	180	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Oregon	7-17	(2)	(1)	Y	N		N	Y(22)
Pennsylvania	8-16	180	(1)	N	Y		N	N
Rhode Island	6-15	(2)	(1)	Y	Y		N	N
South Carolina	6-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N	N
South Dakota	7-15	(2)	(1)	N	Y		N(26)	Y(22)
Tennessee	7-16	175	(24)	Y	Y		N	Y(25)
Texas	7-16	165	(1)	N	(26)		N	N
Utah	7-17	(2)	(2)	Y	N		N	N
Vermont	7-15	175	(1)	Y	N		N	N
Virginia	5-16	(2)	(1)	Y	Y		N	(27)
Washington	8-17	180	(1)	Y	Y		N	Y(22)
West Virginia	7-15	180	(1)	Y	Y		N	Y(28)
Wisconsin	6-17	875 hr	(1)	Y	N		N	N
Wyoming	7-15	175	(1)	Y	Y		N	N

Notes:

- (1) a list of subjects is specified in the statute
- (2) same as the public school
- (3) if private tutor or school
- (4) if church school
- (5) private tutor
- (6) if approved by board or church
- (7) grades 4,6,8
- (8) pass examination
- (9) annual, parental choice
- (10) annual, choice from a list
- (11) English and others
- (12) basic academic education
- (13) if state board approved
- (14) most districts require
- (15) every three years
- (16) if district requires
- (17) if religious exemption
- (18) "competent," test may be required
- (19) common branches, similar to public school
- (20) repealed 7-1-84
- (21) U.S. and Nevada constitution
- (22) Annual
- (23) grades 1,2,3,6,9,11
- (24) no statute
- (25) grades 2,3,6,8
- (26) in litigation (4/86)
- (27) optional
- (28) if uncertified teacher

(From Klicka)

Lower courts have applied *Yoder* only when traditional religious beliefs are involved. One does well to note that the high court in this case was careful to restrict the scope of its decision. The Amish children exempted from the Wisconsin school requirements continued, in an informal way, their education in their communities. The maturity of the children (after grade eight), the cohesiveness and history of the Amish, and their long-standing religious beliefs were all relevant. Decisions outside these narrow confines have been mixed, with most courts turning their rulings on constitutional or statutory grounds. For example, in 1984, in *Duro v. District Attorney* the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit upheld North Carolina's prohibition of a home instruction program, despite religious objections from the parents. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review this decision, the most recent case to be appealed.

Some cases in lower courts have had an important impact on home schooling. A 1978 case decided by a lower Massachusetts court is one of the most significant. In *Perchemlides v. Frizzle*, Judge Greany of the Massachusetts Superior Court held that the Perchemlideses had a right to home instruction. In essence the ruling meant that the state could not deprive parents of this right for arbitrary reasons, but only for serious educational ones, which it must make known to parents with all the forms of due process. *Perchemlides* made clear though

that the parents could not remove their children from the jurisdiction of the school system without permission from the local school board. No religious beliefs were involved in this case.

In summary, the decisions in home school court cases are a mixture of approval and rejection which lead to uncertainty as to how a court might rule in any given decision. Much depends on the interpretation given to constitutional and statutory provisions and, of critical importance, how well parents have prepared the program of instruction and their ability to provide it for their children. Legal scholars who have addressed the issue conclude there appears to be constitutional protection for those who prefer to teach their children at home, but they also agree that the state has the authority to set reasonable regulations for how home schooling is accomplished.

### **Families as Educators**

Determining the effectiveness of parents to educate their children is a difficult task. When parents establish a home school, it is often impossible to give an objective evaluation of the quality of education that is being provided. The first difficulty in this evaluation is the tendency to judge education in the home in terms of its similarity to education in school. The evaluation of school education has produced a rich variety of measures and instruments to determine the effectiveness of teachers, materials, methods, social factors, and equipment. These techniques and instruments for measuring school effectiveness are, however, less appropriate when examining home schools. An example of the inappropriateness of applying measures of school effectiveness to home schools is the concept of time-on-task. The amount of time that a student spends actively engaged in a school task is a frequent and fairly effective predictor of school learning. Applying this measure to home schools can result in erroneous conclusions, however. Children in home schools generally do not spend the typical school day of five hours in formal instructional activities. Descriptions of home schools usually indicate that the school is “in session” only two to three hours per day. Using time-on-task as a measure of effective teaching would put home schools at a disadvantage with regular schools. To cite another example, some parents who establish home schools may set up a room in their home which has the trappings of a school: desks, chalkboard, shelves with books, etc. Other parents, however, do not attempt to imitate a school classroom. In the latter case, an observer accustomed to a regular school classroom, would be critical of the home school setting. Finally, parents interact with their children in a teaching situation differently from a teacher and his students. Again, using measures of effective teacher-student interaction can unjustifiably result in a poor showing for home schools.

A second difficulty in measuring the effectiveness of home schools is the subjectivity of the observer. The family is a very personal concept and everyone has his own picture of what a family should be. Our culture, our ethnic background, our own experiences in a family tend to make us critical judges of families which do not match our personal views. The amount and kind of communication, humor, physical expressions of affection differ among families and tend to become criteria for subjective judgments. Thus our personal satisfactions and regrets make us less than neutral observers of families and home schools.

Whatever subjective views we take into a study of families as educators, the question of whether family members are knowledgeable and competent to teach each other must be addressed. In an agrarian society a hundred years ago and in Amish communities of today, the question is easier to answer. Home school advocates do, in fact, use these examples as proof that home education can succeed. The examples of Abraham Lincoln, who was educated at home, and the Supreme Court decision recognizing the rights of Amish parents to educate their own children after grade eight are cited as proofs of the effectiveness and legitimacy of home schools.

Yet we do not live in the nineteenth century nor in Amish communities. Can parents in the age of a knowledge explosion that strains the resources of schools effectively teach their own children? The answer is a qualified “yes.” In the most basic part of education, religious training, parents should indeed be capable of teaching their children. If they are not, the church itself would stand accused, for it is the church which trained these parents. In the other areas of school learning, parents may not have the specialized knowledge in every area, yet in nearly every case a substantial range of content enters the home through television and the other

media. Parents can also acquire some of this specialized knowledge and they can use institutions such as libraries and museums in the education of their children. The knowledge explosion and the growing complexity of society has, at least in the past, been offset by the very technologies that accompany these changes. The printing press and the computer have contributed to a knowledge explosion and they have aided us in dealing with these changes.

Although a case can be made that parents have the knowledge to teach elementary school age children or have access to such knowledge, parents may lack the skill to choose wisely what should be taught. An important component of teacher education, particularly in our Synod, is that students acquire the ability to select from the broad range of knowledge that which should be taught children. Included in this skill is the ability to discern what is true and false as God's Word illuminates the wisdom of men and then to teach this knowledge from a Scriptural viewpoint. This ability is not easily learned, and parents, despite their best intentions, may not have this essential skill for Christian education.

The second part of the question, whether families have the competence or the necessary teaching skills, also has a qualified "yes" as an answer. Even in families which are not organized formally as a home school, there is an abundance of school-type activities. There are reading and writing activities, talking and listening, mathematics and science woven into the everyday life of the family. Advocates of home schools claim, with some justification, that these learning activities in the home are particularly effective because they are informal and occur in real-life situations.

Parental teaching may be more informal and happenstance than teaching done in school, but studies of parents as teachers show that parents use the same kinds of procedures or techniques used by effective school teachers. Cues, encouraging participation, and providing reinforcement and corrective feedback are not just techniques taught in colleges of education; they are also used, for the most part, spontaneously by parents in teaching their children.

Other studies have shown that with training and practice parents can improve their skills as teachers. In these studies, many of which were done in connection with the Head Start and Follow Through Programs, low-income and disadvantaged parents were taught simple teaching skills. These parents were then able to provide the kind of home instruction which contributed to their child's success in school. Those compensatory programs which provided this kind of parental training and home-school cooperation were the more successful programs.

The available evidence on the competence and skills of parents to be teachers of their own children tends to support the claims of the advocates of home schools regarding the capabilities of parents as teachers. Even for those parents who lack a basic knowledge of elementary school content, the materials published for home schools would seem to make up for this deficiency.

The conclusion, therefore, that parents are either ignorant or lack the skills of teaching cannot be definitively proven. Court cases have not shown this, the anecdotal evidence of the home school advocates contradicts this, and existing research does not specifically address the effectiveness of home schools.

### **Social and Cognitive Effects of Home Schools**

The advocates of home schools claim that children who are educated by their parents are more advanced in their academic and social development than children who are taught in school. Critics of home schools claim the reverse is true; the critics particularly assert that the social development of children in home schools is adversely affected. Unfortunately for those who seek definitive answers, neither of these claims can be supported as a general observation concerning the effects of home schools.

Logic and fairness suggest that the burden of proof for the effects of home schools on children's development lies with the critics of home schools. If home schools are as effective as regular schools, they can hardly be criticized on legal or moral grounds; they are one of the many existing alternatives to public school and thus should be allowed to exist. Although writers such as Holt and the Moores have tried to show how home schools benefit children, their "data" consist of subjective and personalistic testimonies and case studies.



Conclusions based on such data can hardly be applied to all home schools nor used as evidence of the general benefits of home schools. Yet the advocates of home schools do not have to prove the value of home schools as an alternative to public schools. If home schools are to be discouraged or restricted, they must be shown to be detrimental to the healthy development of children.

The difficulty in establishing the contention of the home school critics that such education hinders a child's intellectual and social development is that there are few studies which have examined the effects on children who have been educated at home. There are numerous studies which have studied the effects of social deprivation on children. These studies, however, have used children in institutions or child-care facilities in which children had little adult contact. Children are adversely affected, intellectually and socially, by these conditions, but such studies are hardly analogous to home schools and the results of these studies cannot be applied to home schools. There are also a few studies of children who have had limited contact with adults other than their parents. The results of these studies indicate that such children develop a language facility which is more limited than children who have contacts with other adults. These studies, however, also examine situations which are not comparable to home schools. Finally, there is a large body of research on how parents contribute to the academic and social development of their children and how this development is affected by variables such as the cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic status of the family or whether one or another of the parents is absent. The only conclusion concerning home schools that can be drawn from these studies is that the social and intellectual development of children in a home school will depend on certain characteristics of the family which operates the home school.

A large body of research also provides evidence that schools contribute to the social and intellectual development of children. These studies generally examined compensatory education programs such as Head Start and the conclusions indicate that schooling can, in part, overcome certain home and family deficiencies. Schools, therefore, can promote the healthy development of children, particularly children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or impoverished or broken family situations. Such family circumstances, however, are rare in home schools.

At this point and until and if data are ever gathered on the social and intellectual effects of home schools, the critics of home schools have not made their case about the deleterious effects of that kind of education. Logic might suggest that children who are educated at home and who have limited or no contact with persons other than their parents and siblings would suffer some kind of gap in their development. They may not learn appropriate ways of social interaction, they may be overly fearful or overly trusting of other persons, they may develop narrow beliefs or prejudices. Yet the descriptions of home schools do not indicate that this extreme form of isolation is typical. Children in home schools do have regular contact with neighbor children, relatives, and other adults.

The best conclusion which can be drawn at this point is that children will be hindered in their development in a home school if the family circumstances or situation is inadequate. If a family lacks the resources or if the language environment in a family is impoverished, for example, the effects of a home school will compound the developmental problems of the child because there is no compensatory agency such as the regular school. The descriptions of the persons who establish home schools suggest that this would be a rare circumstance.

We cannot look to the social sciences for evidence regarding the spiritual development of children and using comparative data on home education and Lutheran schools regarding this spiritual development would be inappropriate. Scripture, however, does suggest that the spiritual growth of a child can be enhanced or hindered by the circumstances within which a child learns the message of salvation. Certainly, the home is an appropriate and necessary setting for this instruction. The bond of love within a family and the daily life of the family members provide a rich source of illustrations and opportunities for showing and teaching the lessons of Scripture.

The Christian also seeks opportunities to exercise his faith through witness and example. The difficult question is whether the home, by itself, can provide sufficient opportunities for this witness and example. Whatever socializing opportunities are available for children who are educated at home, the home school is still,

by its very nature, a separation from others. The home school advocates say that such a separation from those whose faith is weaker or is absent is necessary to protect the child's developing faith. Yet faith is exercised and strengthened in interactions with others, including those whose faith is weaker. In addition, when parents establish a home school in preference to a Lutheran school, they are denying their child the opportunities to comfort, encourage, and admonish other children, and, in turn, to receive comfort, encouragement, and admonition. Such isolation could hinder the child's spiritual development. Because of the way God created us and the way in which He would have us live, children, as well as adults, need regular and continual contact with others. Home schools limit this contact. Parents must carefully consider whether this limitation is in the best interest of the child.

### **Concluding Observations**

Whether a congregation has a Lutheran elementary school or not, the establishment of home schools within a congregation has the potential of damaging the unity of the congregation. Home schools may lead to an *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* situation, churches within the church and the pietism which generally accompanies such a development. The second example (page two) of a home school in the section on definitions could be an illustration of this. Factionalism is not inevitable nor may it be typical in a congregation which contains parents who establish home schools, yet the danger exists. Parents who wish to start home schools should be counseled concerning this danger and they should be encouraged in their responsibilities for collective worship and instruction in the congregation.

Parents also need to consider their motives for starting a home school. Christian education, whether it is carried out at home, in a Lutheran school, or in any other education agency of the congregation has as its primary purpose to show the child his sin and his Savior. The development of the abilities and gifts the Lord has given children or providing what children will need for this life certainly also are purposes, but these are secondary purposes. The nourishing of a child's faith must remain the parent's first priority in any decision they make concerning that child's education. With this as their first concern, other issues in their child's education will assume their proper perspective.

Lutheran elementary schools in the Synod should avoid any questionable legal maneuvers in behalf of parents who wish to establish a home school. There are instances where parents who wish to educate their children at home make arrangements with a parochial school to continue to include their children on the enrollment roster of the school. In such a procedure the school remains responsible for the children's education and the laws of the state are satisfied. Such accommodation may be legally questionable and, in any case, it invites criticisms of the integrity of our schools.

Lutheran elementary and high schools, however, may find occasion to cooperate with parents who establish home schools. This cooperation would be appropriate when it does not involve questionable legal activities and when parents clearly are not rejecting the responsibility of the congregation for the Christian nurture of children. Such a situation could exist in the first two reasons for starting a home school cited in the beginning of this paper (page one). The kind and degree of cooperation between the Lutheran school and the home school would depend on the particular circumstances. For example, the school could furnish textbooks, assist parents in setting objectives, allow the child to participate in extra-curricular activities, or provide testing services. In such cases the Lutheran school neither encourages nor discourages the operation of the home school. Rather this cooperation makes available to parents the expertise of the professional teachers, reminds the parents of the congregational ministry of the teachers, allows the child to enroll in the school at some future time, and encourages the parents to continue their fellowship with the congregation. Circumstances such as these, where home schools are appropriate and Lutheran schools cooperate with these home schools, would be rare.

This relationship between the home school and the Lutheran school and the degree of cooperation between the two raises some sensitive and far-reaching issues. The Lutheran school does, indeed, exist to assist parents in the Christian nurture of their children. But the Lutheran school also exists, as this paper has attempted

to show, to enable a congregation to meet its responsibility and privilege to educate the generation to come and to reach out to the unbelievers. In a better world these two purposes would never be in conflict.

The third example described in the beginning of this paper (page three) presents such a situation where there can be a conflict between the purposes of a Lutheran elementary school. In cases where parents who establish a home school do not intend a criticism of the Lutheran school, the impression may be given that the Lutheran school is lacking or is a less effective agency of Christian education. In a Synod which has treasured, supported, and promoted the Lutheran school, such an impression can have long-range consequences. If, through cooperation and assistance to parents who establish home schools, the Lutheran school directly or implicitly encourages other parents to establish home schools, the Lutheran school could conceivably disappear. Certainly parents whose reasons for establishing home schools are appropriate do not foresee or desire that eventuality; yet the danger exists. In these latter days both parents and the church should move with caution and prayerful consideration lest it lose the blessing of the Lutheran school in exchange for a situation of unknown implications.

Many of the materials which are published at present expressly for home schools are highly questionable as to their educational and theological content. The Synod, however, would give the appearance of sanctioning home schools if we became involved in publishing such materials. For those parents who wish to educate their children at home, the religion materials already published by the Synod seem sufficient for the religious instruction.

Parents should never be in a situation where they must choose between the welfare of their children and the possible harm they may do to a congregation by establishing a home school. A congregation, therefore, ought to be responsive to the concerns of parents regarding the Christian nurture of their children. In the present times when parental apathy seems more prevalent than parental concern, congregations should be particularly sensitive. Home schools will increase if parents come to believe that congregations are not providing the support they feel they need in the Christian education of their children. In congregations which have Lutheran elementary schools, these schools should be the best possible agencies of Christian education. The teachers in these schools should communicate frequently and regularly with parents concerning the progress of their children and the goals of the school. Congregations which do not have Lutheran elementary schools should strengthen the part-time agencies of Christian education, such as the Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and the Saturday school. Every congregation should seek to provide information and encouragement to parents in their work of religious teaching in the home and to establish support groups where needed for parents. Home schools could well be a symptom of an unmet need, a need congregations should seek to identify and meet.

The interest, commitment, and concern of parents who establish home schools, even though their motives may be questionable, are laudable. Such interest, commitment, and concern should be fostered in ways that preserve the unity and extend the efforts of the congregation. Parents can take positive steps to encourage their children's growth in sanctification. If their child attends a public school, parents should take an interest in what their children are learning and provide the Scriptural perspective to those subjects. If their child attends a Lutheran school, parents should encourage the child in his studies and support the work of the teacher. In either case, a Christ-centered home life, regular family devotions, attendance at worship services, and involvement in the appropriate programs of the congregation should be part of the child's nurture.

This paper has noted a number of potential difficulties or problems in the home school movement: factionalism, isolation, legal issues, and others. These problems should not be dismissed lightly. Nevertheless, these potential problems do not militate against every home school. Concerned and sincere parents may find themselves in a situation where a home school is not only an attractive option, it is the only option. That such situations should exist is unfortunate. Until every congregation has a Lutheran school or access to a Lutheran school, some parents may find themselves in an untenable situation regarding the Christian education of their children. In such circumstances, home schools which have been carefully planned, which meet state requirements, which do not totally isolate the child, and which use appropriate materials are legitimate efforts in Christian education. If the parents who establish these home schools continue to involve themselves and their children in the activities of the congregation and if parents recognize and accept the congregation's

responsibility for Christian education, the unity of the congregation can be preserved. There are, therefore, circumstances where home schools can be an appropriate response. Such circumstances should be rare and home schools ought not become a typical or a hasty response to any difficulty parents may experience in the education of their children.

## Sources of Information on Home Schools

Gorder, Cheryl. *Home Schools: An Alternative*. Columbus, OH: Blue Bird Publishing Co., 1985.

This book supporting home schools contains the usual arguments plus an extensive list of materials and organizations.

Holt, John. *Teach Your Own*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.

A basic discussion of home schools. Legal information, case studies, and resources are included.

Hubbs, D. *Home Education Resource Guide*. Fremont, NE: Home School Headquarters Press, 1975.

This book contains extensive listings of publishers, support groups, and curriculum materials for persons wishing to start a home school. The resources generally include a brief description and the address of the publisher or organization. Topics include curriculum materials, magazines, Bible study materials, child training books, materials for teaching the handicapped child, support groups, and sources of legal advice.

Moore, Dorothy and Raymond. *Home Spun Schools*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982.

A collection of case studies on home schools.

Moore, Raymond and Dorothy. *Better Late Than Early*. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1973.

An extensive argument for the benefits of keeping children at home and beginning formal education at a later age.

Wade, T. *The Home School Manual*. Auburn, CA: Gazelle Publications, 1984.

This book is a comprehensive "how-to" manual for parents who wish to start home schools. Written by an educator who believes in home schools, the book is a balanced and practical guide. The author emphasizes careful planning and a systematic approach to teaching. Methods and curriculum suggestions are given for the major subject areas. Also included are lists of publishers and the school laws of the fifty states and the provinces of Canada.

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April 1, 1986