

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR EVANGELIZATION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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1. Introduction

a. *The mandate of family witness in the seventies.* Significant trends and strides are emerging in the seventies both in the local and international scene, of which Christian educators are acutely aware. The family is caught in this maelstrom of change. These changes have dislocated family relationships. Some of the factors which left a shattering dent in the family and community relationships are industrialization, increase in technology, mobility, urbanization, and decline of religious influence. These warrant innovations and new shapes in teaching families to witness in the community.

(i) *Industrialization* — With the advent of industrialization, more families are employed. With it came bigger incomes and more material things. Industrialization means affluence and leisure. It also means disintegration of family life. The younger children are left in the care of a maid or a *yaya* while mothers go to work. In the mad rush for acquisition of things, especially in Asia where people had so little for so long, children are given secondary attention, but religious values and practices have been relegated a second place in the lives of families.

(ii) *Mobility* — This is characterized by geographical movements from place to place so that family members can no longer determine where their real home is. The social mobility is movement from one stratum in society to another. Whether going up or coming down the ladder, this change creates loneliness and bewilderment. There is also a chronological mobility especially traumatic for an older person because it may mean loss of job due to early retirement, loss of money and better living conditions, loss of home, or even loss of a loved one. The problems triggered by mobility are rootlessness, alienation, and loneliness.

(iii) *Technology* — Advanced technology brought explosion of knowledge. Along with this is an assumption that man is supposed to know more and therefore act more maturely. This is more myth than truth. Educational principles repudiate this assumption, because maturity does not come by mere acquisition of knowledge but is a process of nurture and growth. Advanced technology inevitably brought on problems of anonymity and depersonalization with its emphasis on automation. Man has been reduced to a series of slots on an IBM card. Children now have more free time because chores have been taken over by gadgets or by maids in more affluent homes. Living has been so modernized, but not without attendant hazards to family life.

(iv) *Urbanization* — This has contributed to "immunization against contacts with people." The urbanites are characterized by "indifference, reserve and a blasé outlook." Louis Wirth explains this as "devices for immunizing themselves against personal claims and expectations of others." Urbanization hurt both the rural areas and the cities by creating an imbalance in population distribution as a result of the exodus into the urban areas. The more fortunate city migrants may rent an apartment or live with relatives; but the poor and jobless, with no relatives to live with, settle in slum or squatter areas — a phenomenon flourishing in most Asian cities. Here they achieve some kind of community life reminiscent of their rural life. Urban life is fragmented and segmental, it is referred to as a society (*or Gesellschaft*) by Ferdinand Tönnies, while the community (*or Gemeinschaft*) is characterized by cohesiveness, inclusiveness, and organic togetherness. The *Gesellschaft* is a product of urbanization. People have become anonymous to each other, even if they carry on transactions regularly, but the contacts remain "unifaceted and segmental."

(v) *Energy crisis and run-away inflation* — These twin stark realities confront every family in the seventies. Is there hope of survival? What can evangelical Christian families do to help alleviate these fears? There is hope in Christ, and this hope must be communicated through the Gospel witness by families. This paper is addressed to the subject of "Teaching Families to Witness in the Community," the *Gemeinschaft*, where people are known as people, not just faceless ciphers. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me ..." (Acts 1:8); this is the mandate for family witness in the changing seventies.

b. *The meaning of the word "witness."* The term "witness" comes from the Greek word *martureo*, which means "to bear witness" and from which the English term "martyr" is derived. A martyr is one who is convinced that his testimony is true and therefore would give his life to defend it. Acts 1:8 is a standing order for the witness to give evidence or substantiation of the truth that the message of Christ is authentic. In the context of Luke 24:36-48, it is implied that what was seen, heard, or experienced must be told. The first-hand testimony must be substantiated by personal experience and by God's Word. A witness does not give his opinion. A witness appears in person. There is no witness by proxy. No Christian is exempt from witnessing. In fact the New Testament roster of witnesses to our Lord includes God the Father (John 5:37), the disciples, the early Christians, and us today.

c. *The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to families.* A rather cursory study of the ministry of the Lord would reveal that he did not limit himself to the ministry of crowds or individuals, but included also homes and families.

(i) *Ministry of healing* — We find Jesus in the home of Peter rebuking the fever from the mother-in-law of Peter (Matt. 8:14); the healing of the blind man was in a house (Matt. 9:27-29); the nobleman's dying son was restored to health (John 4:46-54). Even if Jesus did not step into the house, the ministry was within the context of a family. The miracle resulted in the conversion of that entire household.

(ii) *Private instruction and conversation* — He made the home the setting for further explanation regarding tribute (Matt. 17:25); for elucidation

tion of the problem of marriage and divorce (Mark 10:10-12); and to teach humility he used a child, probably a child of the host (Mark 9:36-37).

(iii) *To get in touch with people* — Jesus took time to be with the Pharisees and sinners in the home of Levi (Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:14ff.). He visited in the home of Zacchaeus and the private conversation with his family resulted in the salvation of the whole household.

(iv) *To comfort in time of sorrow* — Matt. 9:18-26 and Luke 8:49-55 recorded the raising to life of Jairus' daughter. Another well-known account of the comforting presence of Jesus in a home was the raising of Lazarus back from the grave (John 11). Jesus availed himself of the opportunity to help in time of sorrow.

(v) *To enjoy a family fellowship* — Perhaps there is no other household in Judea where Jesus was more at home than in the closely knit family of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. The Lord stayed in their home to instruct, to comfort, and in fact to rebuke at one time (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-8). This was the house in Bethany where Jesus was at home.

(vi) *To bless a new couple* — The first miracle of the Lord was performed at a wedding. He not only graced the occasion with his personal presence, but blessed the home by providing for its need. The new couple started their life with the Lord in their midst. Even if the Scripture is silent as to the sequel of that story, we can surmise that they must have made a dynamic witness about the Lord's being their wedding guest. (John 2:1-11).

What are the implications of the ministry of Jesus in the home for family witness today? Heb. 13:8 reminds us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." In this context, it implies that Jesus is just as interested to minister to the varied needs of families in our communities today as he was in the past, but that he would like for us to do the honors of presenting him to others.

2. Community witness of families in the New Testament

a. *The witness to families as recorded in Acts.* Luke sketched the witness made to families in a very interesting manner. It must be noted first of all that the disciples witnessed from house to house (Acts 5:42), and without doubt families must have been saved through this witness. Acts, chapter 10, gives an account of Cornelius and his family being prepared to receive the witness while at the same time God was dealing with the witness. This seems to be the first account where a family invited its neighbors to listen to the Gospel (vv. 27, 33). The result was conversion of the whole family as well as those who listened to Peter. In Acts 16:11-15, God prepared hearts in Thyatira to receive the witness of Paul. There Lydia and her whole household believed and were baptized. In Acts 16:25, for the first time, prayer and songs were recorded as a form of witness heard by prisoners. The more glorious note in this account is the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his family (vv. 30-34).

Throughout the New Testament it is noticed that the witnesses took their message to people, except for a few "Come and See" invitations to meet the Lord Jesus (e.g., John 1:39 and 4:29). It is said of D.L. Moody that "he never waited for open doors, he went instead to closed doors

and threw them open." He went after souls. If our faith is worth having, it is worth sharing. Acts 8:1-4 attests this truth. The story of the dispersion of the early Christians was in the eyes of unbelievers a tragic event. But this was a blessed dislocation — for men, women, children, most probably entire households — for the Christians testified wherever they went. One can imagine that people were curious to find out what kind of faith this was that would warrant such persecutions. They must have asked, "Why do you adhere to your faith if all it brings is persecution?" To this they gave dynamic witness for they went everywhere preaching the Word. They put legs to their faith. They verbalized their witness. What they believe mattered. Christianity is not mere credence but also conviction and knowledge of what we believe and why we believe. In the words of a noted physicist, "To be a Christian is to be personally and individually involved in one's belief, an involvement that orientates the life in accord with one's beliefs." This necessitates sharing of one's beliefs in the daily round of activities as opportunity presents itself.

b. *The witness of families during the time of Paul* — Paul started his witnessing ministry right after his conversion. The first record of a household conversion as a result of his witness is found in Acts 16:14-15. This is the family of Lydia, the seller of purple in Thyatira. Aquila and Priscilla, an Italian couple from Rome, were converted through the witness of Paul (Acts 18:1-3). This family shared with Paul the ministry of witness (Rom. 16:3-5). Their house was used as a church (I Cor. 16:19). In Acts 18:7-8, Paul used the house of Justus who was saved at an earlier date, as a base to reach Crispus, a ruler of the synagogue. The family of Crispus came to know the Lord and many other Corinthians believed and were baptized. The household of Aristobulus, and the household of Narcissus (Rom. 16:10-11) imply families who were won to the Lord. I Cor. 16 gives a list of Christian households, e.g., of Stephanas, first believers in Achaia. The home of Nymphas was a church in Laodicea (Col. 4:15). The household of Onesiphorus was included in the greetings of Paul in II Tim. 4:19. Once more, we see in Philemon 1:2 a church in the house of Apphia and Archippus. Evidently, Archippus was the leader of this church in his house because in Col. 4:17 we read this reminder from Paul, "And say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it."

Though this is but a brief perusal, a few implications may be gathered from these passages reminding us that Christian households saved through the ministry of Paul offered their homes for church services. This was a bold form of witness in communities where Christianity was suspect among its pagan neighbors. God used one man to begin the work but God also used families to do a continuing witness. It is not presumptuous to say that God reached Asia Minor through Paul and these Christian families. The Pauline Epistles are a commentary to this outreach.

The privilege and responsibility of witnessing

In the early sixties the spotlight was focused on laymen and the responsibility to witness. The seventies should rise up to another challenge and must begin to tap the potential of families and to mobilize

them for the work of witnessing. According to the 1970 survey of MARC and COFAE the whole family ranks number two in influence and in leading respondents to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is significant as coming from Asia and the South Pacific countries, because central in the value orientation of individuals is the family and its authority.

The family is strategic in witness. The family is here to stay. Institutions come and go, people come and go, ideas come and go, but the family remains basic in the midst of change. The family is strategic because it provides church leadership through its adults, it is the source of financial support in the church, and also supplies the constituency of the church for all its agencies and programs.

Oscar Feucht makes the cogent observation that the home is "the school of Christian living, the most fundamental institution in the world, the nursery of every generation, the college of life, and the training ground of the child." In this same vein, he further states,

The families are launching pads for their children...parents are not all authors of books, but they are all writing the lives of their children...parents can enrich life or they can mar or scar a life depending on the type of nurture they give or the lack of it.

Incidentally, many families today are destitute of good relationships. When they reach out for help even from Christians, they are electrified and hear only the noisy static of our harried busy lives. It is the responsibility of Christian families to reach out. In an era of super-markets, superstars, superjets, and super-everything, it seems as if man has succeeded in "super-ing" everything to cover the emptiness within. Man is almost afraid to be left alone lest he be confronted with the impoverished state of his own life. So super-fences have been built around the homes and personalities. Psychologically, the more elite, moneyed and sophisticated families have built walls of complacency, nonchalance, and smugness. The poor level also built walls of "bahalana" and "I couldn't care less" attitudes. Walls of anger, apathy, resignation, even shirking of responsibility, have been put up. The emerging middle class has built walls of competition, drudgery, and busyness, hence there is no time for the family, no time for God, no time for the church. These are formidable phalanxes that need to be broken down or penetrated by family witness. It is to families like these that we have been commissioned to communicate the Gospel.

On the other hand, criticism has been hurled at the Christian community because they have organized walls around them also by creating Christian ghettos. Bible classes have degenerated into a comfortable fellowship of the same Christian people. These activities are good but often sap the vitality of Christians because they spend so much time together for a long time thus robbing themselves of the opportunities to make aggressive witness. Some Christians in walled compounds hardly reach out to people outside their fences. This unity is more like "glued-togetherness." We have not been called to a cloister or to build a city of the redeemed here on earth. Would to God that Christians in the Christian Gemeinschaft would take the initiative to reach out to other families.

a. *The goal of family witnessing* is to interest another family in Christ through a Christian testimony; to represent Christ before other families; to contact families in the community needing witness; and to win families for Christ.

b. *The qualifications for family as a witness* include the following: (i) a conversion experience; a definite point in time and in history when one can say, "I have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord." (ii) A conviction that souls are lost and going to hell if Christ is not accepted. (iii) A compassion for or sensitivity to the needs of the lost and a sense of urgency (Rom. 9:2). (iv) A concern which follows rules of courtesy and consideration in witnessing to others. "The right to talk intimately to another person about the Lord Jesus Christ has to be earned, and you earn it by convincing him that you are his friend, and really care about him" — this is sound advice. It will help us to be careful that we do not nag people into heaven.

c. *The message of the witness* — I Cor. 15:3-8 is the Gospel message in a nutshell. Paul Little expresses it this way, "The Gospel, then, is Jesus Christ Himself, who He is, and what He has done, and how He can be known in personal experience." Or it can also be expressed in the Roman Road of Salvation (i) Rom. 3:23 — man's need of salvation; (ii) Rom. 6:23 — the penalty of sin; (iii) Rom. 5:8 — God's provision for salvation; (iv) Rom. 10:9-10 — man's response to God.

d. *The methods of witnessing* — The pastor is the key to family witnessing. He is the main teacher and the rallying point. So he must personally challenge families in his church through his pulpit messages, through personal counseling and personal approaches, to sell the idea of witnessing.

The writer has delineated four kinds of witness to aid in the teaching of families in order to witness in the community:

(i) *Silent witness* — Some people are suspicious of words but an eloquent silence proven in the Christian family living together, playing, working, or serving the Lord together in loving harmony will be used of God to draw others to himself. Not shouting out but shining out the transforming power of God in the family life. To help families shine out for the Lord is to deepen their spiritual foundations by strengthening the family altars. The pastor then should provide guidelines for establishing the family altars. Many families do not have family altars because they simply do not know how to go about having one. It would be a good idea to demonstrate through skits or dramatizations actual family devotions in church. Or the pastor might invite one family at a time throughout the year to join his family during family devotions. Or the pastor may go to the homes and help families conduct devotions. When the family altars are strong, the blessings do not stop within the four walls of that home. They will naturally live out their religion. The family altar is the first base in witnessing. This kind of witness is witness by life. This is not the "tongue-tied" kind of silence pointed out by John Stott in his book. Tongue-tied silence has been used as a cloak for timidity and unconcern for the lost. This silent witness is really a transformed life wrapped up in a person or family and that person or family is sent walking and living in the community for the Lord Jesus Christ. The home is the showcase of

God's grace and, as such, a godly family is a silent witness to God's goodness, more eloquent than a torrent of words.

(ii) *Verbal witness*.— Teach families to verbalize their witness. This is the other side of the coin of witness. While there is place for silence, it can never fill the hunger for spiritual things any more than a horse can live on shade. So verbalized witness is also called for. A meaning that cannot be verbalized remains a private meaning. So teach families how to give a surefire three-minute testimony. The following are borrowed ideas and have been adapted for teaching families how to testify: (1) what we were before we became Christians; (2) how we became Christians; (3) what Jesus Christ means to us now. Another is a suggestion by C. S. Lovett: (1) why we call ourselves Christians; (2) what is our authority for this?; (3) how do we know that we are really saved? Finally, this last one is recommended as a way to help make the testimony coherent and clear. First, write a friend about your experience, and then invite a non-believer to read the letter and find out whether he understands the message. Then practice verbalizing it to your family, and after you have gained some confidence, share it with an unchurched family. Perhaps these ideas have been taught to individuals but have we tried to teach them to families?

Teach families to memorize Scriptures. The Roman Road to Salvation cited previously is a good set to begin with. Families must be taught some witnessing phrases to memorize as well. Also they must be encouraged to underline some witnessing verses. When a family knows some of these functional things, fear for verbal witness would be alleviated.

Challenge newly baptized Christians to witness. Bishop Azariah of Dornakal, South India, has a unique way of inviting newly baptized members to witness. He asks them to place their hands on their head and say after him, "I am a baptized Christian, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." There is no need to copy the practice, but surely the pastor can impress this urgency upon new believers to witness verbally.

(iii) *Active witness*.— This implies putting legs to our witnessing. The pastor can teach active witness by his personal example. He can also take families along with him during his visitation. He should teach them how to make a community survey. He should teach them how to visit first among their own friends and then visit the folks who are friendly with the people in the church. These are low-threat levels of witness. Then teach them how to go prospecting.

Of course the pastor should find those families who have natural talent for public relations, especially for the active witnessing ministry. The shy family may be given less threatening assignments than those suggested above. One word of caution is in order at this juncture: extra care and skillful diplomacy must be applied so that a family which possesses "tongues loose on both ends," as one writer picturesquely puts it, should not be assigned to go out doing verbal witness. Appeal to them about doing work on the home base, such as preparing snacks, recording, filing, etc.

Teach families to make friends with their neighbors by a vase of freshly cut flowers, a crocheted doily, a book, a hot dish, or any small gift items taken personally to the family for which it is intended. Watch the

"For Sale" or "For Rent" signs and be the first to welcome the family to the community. New couples and new babies are opportunities for friendship and witness. Assign a family for each of those to be visited. Teach them to sponsor newcomers to the community. Assign families to be on the lookout for guests in the worship service and to follow them up at home. "Some families would never be reached without a warm handclasp, an earnest searching gaze, a quiet word and occasionally a tear and a prayer." Assign families to visit before the special services of the church, to interest guests in the activities of the church. When families go calling it would be a nice idea if they could bring along a church activity handbook with pictures of the activities in the church. Pictures usually will catch attention. Teach families to find out avenues to people's hearts and then to show care and concern in practical and visible means. This is active witness.

(iv) *Creative witness*.— This does not mean the spectacular but the innovative or unique approaches to family witnessing, like sharing a cassette tape of music and messages, loaned out or listened to together. Also capitalize on the relevance of cultural values to Christian life, for instance, the Filipino value called *utang na loob*, — a positive human experience which can be the basis of the Christian value of gratitude and loyalty. For *utang na loob* speaks of a deep sense of gratitude to a person, for example, who saved another from drowning. It speaks of a commitment in return for a debt that cannot be paid. The implication of this value in witnessing is to appeal to a family's debt of gratitude to the Lord Jesus for what he is and what he has done for them on the Cross. It would be a part of wisdom to understand the cultural values of a people and to capitalize their relevance for the ministry of witnessing.

Encourage a family to adopt an unchurched family. Then sponsor a "Come Double Sunday" when this adopted family comes to church with the foster family during a special service.

With the present energy crisis, more families stay home. They are forced by circumstances to be together. Take advantage of this opportunity of non-activity. Share hobbies and other wholesome activities together — like gardening, fixing a fence, painting for men and crocheting, knitting, or sewing for women, and take this opportunity to "gossip the Gospel." View slides or filmstrips together and draw some lessons from them. Read the Bible together, underline words or phrases that are significant, and give some explanations.

Again, in the Philippines, families put a premium on special days and thanksgiving occasions for graduations, promotions, a new house, a successful venture, healing, or a family "balikbayan" (back-to-country). Christian families who have built bridges of friendships with unchurched families have a natural entree into these homes, and what a tremendous opportunity for witness. Families have a unique constellation of influence within the community; they must be taught to look for and recognize opportunities for witness, or encouraged to create openings for witness.

The more affluent Christian family may take advantage of vacations, weekends, or other holidays, and plan to go off with an unchurched family. The close association during the few days together will provide

avenues of witness. The privacy of the occasion will contribute to greater openness to the Gospel. A creative family may also use a one-day or a few hours trek, ride, walk, or cycling and picnicking with another family. In the course of this fellowship, try to get in a word for the Lord.

These are only a few ideas which a pastor or a Christian educator may use to challenge Christian families to witness in the community. It would be a good idea to highlight the completion of this training by a commissioning service dedicating the families for the task of witnessing. Below is an example of a certificate that might be awarded to the candidates.

"We the *Isidro Family* will be responsible for the *Herrera family*, to pray for them, to make a regular visit in their home, to fetch and bring them to church when opportunity affords it, and we are responsible to introduce them to the Pastor and to the church family."

Signature of Family	The Pastor
Date	Church

4. Contemporary Filipino families who witnessed

From the upper middle class suburb of Manila comes this example of a family whose Christian life was strengthened through a personal visit of a family, which eventually led to a home Bible study in the house and to the conversion of the husband. This family began eagerly and earnestly to share their faith. They witnessed to another family who were their close friends and invited them to the home Bible class. After a few months of classes this family also found the Lord. Both men are retired commodores of the Philippine Navy. The excitement about families reaching their own community, is that they minister to the families on their level.

A Bureau of Internal Revenue official was converted in a home Bible class in his own house. One Sunday morning he heard the dynamic preaching of the Word in a church. He decided to bring along his wife. She came, although reluctantly, but enjoyed the message and the warm fellowship extended to her. They kept coming. During a Holy Week family camp the family attended, and in one of the evangelistic meetings the wife came under deep conviction and accepted the Lord. Later the children came to know the Lord. Mr. Isidro had the privilege of baptizing the entire family. The man started a Bible class in his home for his neighbors. At the end of the first set of lessons he conducted a graduation ceremony for about twenty-six people who completed the course. These folks had never been in a Protestant church, so he personally chauffeured two carloads of them to observe the service. They were introduced to the pastor and to the church family. They liked the friendly atmosphere. They just started coming of their own accord. It is exciting to note that these folks witnessed to their families first, and entire households have

come to know the Lord. This is the story of a family who was used to bringing to the Lord some ten households which built the Tagalog congregation in Caloocan City.

5. Conclusion

Families are like "God's stock market" to borrow the phrase of G. Christian Weiss. The more Christian families invest in it the more the dividends are reaped in terms of families won to the Lord. Therefore it is imperative that families be encouraged and taught to reflect upon the possibilities of multiplying their lives by witnessing in the community. There is a need to teach families to claim unsaved families in the community as their personal responsibility or liability on their account to God — families who will resolve with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," (Jos. 24:15). We need families who will say with Charles Wesley, "Let me commend my Savior to you." We need families who will sustain faithfully the three-dimensional relationship of witness in the community as very succinctly pointed out by Dr. Gangel: "...first of all, very presence and behavior in the community is an example of Christ and his Church and a demonstration of the grace of God to all of those who know them and can observe their life. Secondly, the family actively witnesses together through the program of its church, through personal sharing of faith on the part of the family members, and perhaps through collective witness of one kind or another. Finally, the extension of family witness finds fruition as young people go out from the home, and like the displaced children of the Bible, carry their witness with them into various forms of Christian service or a multitude of other occupations and geographical locations.

Any dedicated Christian family can be a 3-D (three-dimensional) witness for the Lord. The following chorus is a pertinent reminder of the nobility of the task of witnessing:

"Lord, lay some soul upon my heart, And love that soul through me;

And may I nobly do my part, To win that soul for Thee."

This paper does not pretend to offer a panacea for all the implications of teaching families to witness in the community, but it has tried to stir our imagination to do creative thinking regarding ways and means of tapping the potential of Christian families for witness in the seventies.