

# Why A Christian Preschool?

*by Mrs. Joan Huiskens*

Over the past few years there has been a remarkable growth of interest in young children and in the preschool education they receive, especially that year prior to kindergarten. I'm sure we all know that children are not just wasting time until they are old enough to formally enter school. These youngsters possess a great thirst for knowledge and at the age of four or a little later, many of these children would benefit from an experience outside the home.

I've been asked to write an article concerning preschool. Some of you may know that I am presently teaching a small group of preschool children in the basement of Hope Protestant Reformed Church. This is the second year we have been meeting. This hardly qualifies me as an expert—I don't claim to be one. I do have a special feeling for small children and in connection with that a very real concern as to the readiness for kindergarten of these little students.

A decade and more ago, I taught kindergarten and as a result became aware of the fact that readiness for school is a very important factor in a child's life. There are many aspects included in this readiness. The fact that a child is five years old by December 1 is only a part of that readiness. At the time I taught, many people didn't like the idea of holding a child back in order for him to mature and thus be better able to cope with kindergarten and the years following. It was rarely done. However, the past few years have brought changes in these attitudes. Parents are more aware of their child's readiness. They observe motor skills, personality traits, the ability to communicate with friends his own age and also with adults. They are more

concerned about their child's ability to adjust to a new life—a life away from the home—a world that this child will be a part of for many years to come. They want that child to be happy and to be confident when he encounters new experiences. Readiness makes this adjustment easier. I am so happy that parents are taking the time to take a second look. However, I was not asked to write about kindergarten. I am using it to lead into the subject of preschool.

During the summer of 1978, a few parents came to me and asked about the possibility of starting our own preschool. They were concerned about this very subject of readiness in their children. They wanted their little ones to have a good start in kindergarten. To attain this, they felt a preschool would be beneficial. A preschool taught by someone who believed as they did. I was delighted with the idea. After much talking and planning, our little group started meeting in January of 1979. We met three mornings a week for approximately three hours a session. It was fun, exciting, enlightening, but above all, very rewarding for the children as well as for myself. I'm convinced that the experience was enriching for these children.

I did discover at the time the school started, that some people are opposed to the very idea of preschool. They feel the home is the most important part of a child's life; that the mother is the one who must ready the child for school. I am certainly not going to argue with this view. As a matter of fact, I firmly believe it myself. The normal time for our children to begin school is about five. Until that time, these children develop and learn a fantastic amount of information. The home is the area where this growing takes place, specifically our Christian home, with God-fearing parents and siblings. No one is able to take the place of a mother; she is with her child twenty-four hours a day. That's quite a responsibility as we well know. The preschool and the teacher of that school do not want to replace mothers! What I want to say, is that there can be more for that child. There's a way to help parents with the adjustments to school that the child will encounter later.

In the past few years, Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School has grown by leaps and bounds. The classes coming up are large and even though some of them are split, the child is still in a large group. I feel the child needs all the help he can get; all the advantages that are possible. If the period of adjusting to school life is over when he enters Hope P.R.C. School, this is beneficial for him. He has learned to be away from home and

away from his mother; he has learned to interact with his peers; he has learned to follow directions; he has learned to listen to stories and retell them; his large and small motor skills have progressed; he has become somewhat independent. These are vital parts of readiness. The most important aspect of preschool is that it is an extension of our Christian homes, if even for a short time.

I would like to give a general idea of what is done each session. The emphasis is not on the academic side of education. In fact, I do not teach the alphabet, sounds or number concepts. That is taught in kindergarten. We begin each morning with a Bible period. The stories taught follow Gertrude Hoeksema's Bible curriculum, *Suffer Little Children*. God's covenant with his people is stressed. The children love the familiar stories of the Old Testament saints. We learn verses that coincide with the stories. "Show and Tell" is a good way to encourage children to become confident in themselves and to talk about favorite items. We have art each day and try to do projects that aren't usually done at home. The artistic ability of the children varies greatly. Thus, the results aren't always equal. The main objective is that the preschoolers become acquainted with various materials. Each morning we have a snack. The mothers help with this once a week. The child of the week feels very important passing out his treat for his classmates to admire. Music takes up about thirty minutes during which time we sing and also have rhythm band. They learn to listen to music and play rhythmically. Free play gives the children the chance to do what they want whether it be block-building, playing house, making puzzles, lacing cards or reading books. In addition, we play records and tapes, read stories, and play games. The morning goes by very quickly.

It isn't my intent to try and persuade those opposed to preschool to become firm believers in it. I only ask that you think about it; talk to people connected with it and then decide if it is possible for an endeavor such as this to be helpful and in certain cases, even necessary for some. If I thought for one moment that what I am doing is undermining the parents' responsibility, I would not be teaching. It is not a time for mothers to be "free" from their duties. Many of these mothers go through extra work having their children attend school. Most of them have other children at home. They firmly believe their child will grow emotionally, mentally, and socially in this preschool program. They do this to help their child. They want to know if their child is ready for kindergarten. Maybe preschool will show that

another year at home is required. The parents are interested in this year of their child's life and are happy that a Christian preschool is available to aid them.

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"Since baptismal vows are made before the church, it stands to reason that the church is interested in all aspects of the instruction of covenant children. It is not correct to say that this applies only to worship, catechism, society, etc. It also includes the Christian day school. Consider Article 21 of the church order, 'Consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demand of the covenant.' . . . It is of interest to the whole church that the children have good instruction. The future of the church is directly connected with faithfulness in instructing the children. Consistory members must provide leadership and moral support. All the members must work together for the good of the church."

Newsletter of Hull Protestant Reformed School Society  
by Rev. Jason Kortering

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"After the building is up, the principles printed, and the teacher-training completed, Christian education begins—the mystery of teaching. It is a mystery. It is more than a good lesson plan. It is more than a brilliant scholar before children. It is a gift. A good Christian teacher and good Christian instruction are great gifts of the Holy Spirit. There was good reason why the original 21st Article of the Church Order of Dordt called for good schoolmasters: 'The consistories shall everywhere see to it that there are good schoolmasters. . . .'"

*Reformed Education*, p. 60  
by Rev. David Engelsma

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