



Ms Deb Magill, BEd MECh MACE MACEL
Principal

Christian Values and Our Children's Education.

School communities, in general, mirror the wider communities they serve, reflecting a range of faith traditions and cultural backgrounds. The recent Australian census reminds us that our national cultural landscape is increasingly diverse, reigniting commentary about the appropriate place, visibility and involvement of "religion" in a contemporary education.

Australia remains a country where diversity and freedom of religion simultaneously validate the importance of value-based schooling to serve those with shared beliefs. Compared to other countries around the world, Australia ranks near the top of those that spend the greatest amount of time in formal education each year – across all age levels.

As schooling consumes such a significant proportion of a child's time, Australian parents are justified in asking how their child is or will be influenced during this formative time away from their family. Christian schools, for example, are the intentional choice for families seeking to reinforce the Christian values from home with those played out in their child's school.

Increasingly, Christian schools are also attractive to families who themselves may not identify as Christians, but who appreciate how Christian values are expressed as part of a caring learning environment for their children while they are at school.

At Roseville College, an Anglican School for Girls located on Sydney's mid-North Shore, Christian values are integral to who we are, as a school and a community; a leader in the education of girls, governed by and infused with authentic faith in Jesus Christ. On these foundations, we equip girls through a rigorous and high quality academic program, and inspire them with innovative, meaningful student wellbeing

and service initiatives. Enduringly, we maintain that each girl matters; each girl is inherently special, created as unique by God and loved personally by Him. In 2018, we celebrate 110 years of realising purpose in the lives of thousands of Australian women, who call our school their own.

For Christian families who seek to underpin their child's education with Christian values, what can you do?

1. Talk to God – and About God – with Your Children

Through prayer, we look to God for the answers and direction. By encouraging reflection, we guide children to think about how their learning fits in to their moral framework and belief structures.

PJ Palmer, a leading US author and educator on the issues of education, spirituality and community, believes that education is at its most powerful when it is prayerful. It is then, he says, that we can relate in a spontaneous and authentic way with our world, and learn to connect with one another and our purpose in life. Pray for your children and pray with them. Empower them to pray for themselves and for others – friend and foe. Empower them to pray for situations and pray they have eyes to see solutions and opportunities where they previously saw none. Empower them to be peacemakers in prayer and in practice.

We want our children to wonder, to contemplate and analyse, and to explore ideas and ask questions. We want them to think beyond the mandated curriculum about life's big questions.

Putting this into practice:

- Help your child develop their own specific goals and actions around academic and spiritual growth over the coming months or year. Share your own goals with them too, so you can work together to encourage each other along the way (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Make intentional times for reflection within the habits and routines of your family. Routinely share and pray together after dinner, or try techniques like social stories or reflective journaling to nurture Christian reflection about the day's ups and downs: "If that happened again, how would you respond?" "Thinking about it now, what might you have done the same or differently?" and "What have you wondered about today?"

2. Listen to Your Children's Developing Faith-views

Like home, school should be a "safe place" for our children to express their views, explore ideas and do all the things that are normal and right for them to do at their age: engage in problem solving, navigate relationships, and study the popular philosophies of modern education. However, standing firm to Christian values is, sadly, counter-cultural and, even in a Christian school environment, it can be hard to navigate.

As parents, it is important to our children that they feel heard – even if what they are saying appears to counter our ideas or values. There will come a time to guide them – even correct them; but first listen and ask questions to understand.

Putting this into practice:

- Let your child speak openly with you about what they learn or hear, without judgement, as we speak less and listen more. Give them room to ask questions and court new ideas, then come alongside them with God's word as the voice of truth (perhaps at a later time when they are more receptive). This equips them to wrestle with controversy and allows them to discover their own revelation of God, as we trust He has their eternity in His hands.
- Guide children using Scriptures that impart lasting wisdom, inspire compassion and establish a sense of justice and mercy. This is a great avenue to involve Jesus as part of normal conversation, so children glean a broader picture of His deity, His character, His ministry and expectations of His followers – while learning what the Bible has to say. It's never too late to start praying with (not just for) our children, to read the Bible with them, to join a local youth group at Church, or to apply practical scriptures to everyday life.

3. Practice Christianity

The most indelible lessons that impact our children are the formative ones that shape their character and their view of people. Just as the world is more interested in our actions than our words, our children are the same! They are watching us all the time. They listen to our tone and observe our expressions. They witness our mutterings and mirror our handling of big emotions – both positive and negative.

Based on our example, they learn how to regard other people, and; for example, how to be compassionate, kind, patient, merciful and gracious. They look to us to learn respect and empathy, how to be forgiving and kind, and how to apologise, or demonstrate selflessness and generosity.

Service in a Christian sense means acting as the hands, feet and heart of Jesus to those around us. Just as going to the gym strengthens and refines our body, service does the same for our faith. For example: to serve the less fortunate, a child might sacrifice some of their pocket-money for a sponsor child as they learn about compassion, privilege, poverty and responsibility. Volunteering time or effort for a local charity reinforces how to be mindful of unfortunate situations in life and how to live out Jesus' example by caring for the fatherless and the widows in their distress, or serving the disadvantaged, lonely or suffering.

Putting this into practice:

- While being the perfect parent would be lovely, it's impossible! Of course, try your best and where you are strong, impart those strengths to your child freely. However, being a Christian role model means being transparent, fallible and humble in the face of your own shortcomings. Admitting this shows our children that everyone makes mistakes and, just as you encourage children to turn the other cheek and try better next time, they see you doing that, too. This is a building block for developing resilience and optimism in children.
- As children participate in "service learning" opportunities at school or in the community, talk with them about how and why they want to be involved. If donating or raising money, allow them to work for and earn money so their experience of sacrifice and service is authentic. Remember the end goal is that children are motivated to serve because God calls us to love others.
- Teach and model actions that are kind yet often unnoticed, when no one else realises: such as private prayer and humble service. Write a thank you card, provide for someone in need, help prepare a meal for a family going through a tough time, or sit next to someone who is by themselves (Hebrews 6:10).

Children need the positive encouragement and influence of their parents and wider Christian family (including, ideally, teachers) as they navigate the power of their own free will and the freedom of independent learning. We can do this by guiding children in prayer and reflection; listening to their developing views; and demonstrating authentic Christian living and service. In doing so, we teach our children how to hold fast to Jesus and love one another.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples." – John 13:34-35