

Editorial

Ministry Today 33: February 2005

By Paul Beasley-Murray

A course for grandparents?

As a minister I am accustomed to helping people through the various rites of passage. Recently, however, I went through a rite of passage myself when Caroline and I became grandparents - and proud ones at that!

As I reflected on this experience, I suddenly realised that we had not prepared ourselves for entering upon this new role. What's more, while there are parenting courses, as far as I am aware, there are no grand-parenting courses. I wonder, is that something which needs to be addressed? In addition to marriage preparation and marriage enrichment, divorce recovery programmes and parenting courses, should churches be considering putting on grand-parenting courses?

From a Christian perspective, grandparents can have an important role to play. Only this week I was reading of an American Presbyterian minister working in one of the more deprived areas of New York who said: "We never tell the kids to say 'Our Father' in the Lord's Prayer, because most of their fathers are alcoholic or absent. The person who represents God to them most of all was their grandmother". That's a sobering thought: grandmothers, and grandfathers for that matter, can have a real influence on their grandchildren's understanding of God. Certainly this was true of Timothy: as the Apostle Paul reminded him, his faith had in the first place been shaped by his grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1.5).

Clearly, with our first grandchild (at the time of writing) only a week or so old, we have a lot to learn. So I turned to a book entitled *Grand-parenting - the Agony and the Ecstasy* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 1994) by Jay Kessler to see what nuggets of wisdom I might find. If I were to run a grand-parenting course, then I would probably include the following five 'nuggets', adding a few comments of my own..

1. "We cannot stop the passage of time.... We can merely learn to accept our new roles graciously". Yes, there is wisdom in that. In one sense few of us want to become a grandparent - it's a sign we are getting old. Yet none of us can turn the clock back. Far better to accept graciously the challenge of our new calling.

2. "We've had our shot at parenting. Now, as grandparents, we become a support to our children as they attempt the confusing and demanding task of parenting". That's so true. I guess I'll find that there are times when I am tempted to interfere in my new granddaughter's upbringing. But my new role is to affirm and cheer on her parents.

3. "We need to restore the values, loyalties and security of family life to provide an environment in which children can grow up safe and healthy to become what God intended them to be". Yes, indeed. Sadly we live in a world where many families break down, where many grandchildren are confused and hurt and often filled with anger, resentment, and perhaps even guilt as a result of their parents' divorce. In such situations grandparents have a special stabilizing role to play.

4. "We can't change society. But what we can do, as grandparents, is to provide for our grandchildren a solid moral framework, based on biblical principles, to help them establish their own moral standards". True again. We can't control what our grandchildren see and hear and experience. We can, however, listen, empathize with their struggles, and offer them guidelines.

5. "We cannot spare them most of the struggles and failures of life. We can, however, demonstrate that after a long life filled with battles and victories, we can come out on the other side and do so with grace". Even more true. Grandchildren aren't impressed with grandparents who are forever moralising - what really counts is to see and hear how they have coped in the tough times, how their faith in God has enabled them to come through with a thankful and loving spirit.

On reflection, perhaps a course as such would not be necessary. Perhaps just an evening once a year to which new grandparents could be invited. What do you think?