

DR. CATHERINE STONEHOUSE PRESENTS
INAUGURAL MIRIAM HALL LECTURES
AT NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Summary of morning session given by Dr. Catherine Stonehouse:

Stonehouse's opening lecture included several key assertions that undergird her approach to children's ministry. She stated that a sound theology of childhood should be grounded in the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace, a healthy home life, and early engagement with the biblical story to offset secular or materialistic cultural narratives. Stonehouse noted that children will ultimately learn the culture's story; and then she asked, "which story (Bible or Culture) will children learn first and best?"

In addition, Stonehouse noted that research in developmental psychology and neuroscience indicates that children naturally engage in tasks that result in traits or virtues, such as hope and will, which are all learned through human interaction and empathy. These observations undergird the fact that repeated experiences in everyday life profoundly influence a child's spiritual formation. As a result, Stonehouse believes the church must partner with parents in nurturing both parents and their children. Many parents these days may feel ill-equipped to engage and respond to faith questions by children. Stonehouse believes that young parents need a church that partners with them in their faith journey and that children need authentic intergenerational friendships within faith communities. Stonehouse believes all of these efforts, which should occur at a natural pace, need to be saturated with the biblical narrative, with God as the main character in the story.

Summary of afternoon session given by Dr. Catherine Stonehouse:

Stonehouse's afternoon seminar highlighted two examples of providing sound communities and narrative teaching of the Bible. The first half of the lecture focused on new biological and social research which reveals that children are "hardwired to connect" to authoritative (not authoritarian) communities that shape their lives.* Attendees discussed the key qualities that mark these communities:

1. A social institution that includes children and youth
2. Treats children as ends in themselves
3. Is warm and nurturing
4. Establishes clear limits and expectations
5. The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists
6. It is multi-generational
7. Has a long-term focus, building lasting relationships and trust
8. Reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person
9. Encourages spiritual and religious development
10. Is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.*

Stonehouse noted that the broad study indicates the role of the church proves crucial, but only as congregations take seriously the lives of children.

In addition, Stonehouse modeled an approach to teaching the Bible with children in a narrative framework. Stonehouse emphasized a reflective structure that incorporated student imagination as well as deliberate engagement with the biblical story. The approach allows children to contribute life implications to the narrative rather than just receive information about the biblical story.

* For more information on *Hardwired to Connect* see booklet *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*. NY: Institute of American Values 2003, p. 34 also available online (accessed April 15, 2009)

<http://www.americanvalues.org/html/hardwired.html>