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The role of Christian education as a resource in the community

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PROJECT ESSAY

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE IN THE COMMUNITY.

Reflections on Research and Field Work

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Master of Religious Education (MRE) Degree

Submitted By

Deborah C. Maddox

April 26, 1979

Interdenominational Theological Center
Atlanta, Georgia
To my family who has given me inspiration and encouragement;

Dr. Jonathan Jackson, my adviser & Dr. Bennie Goodwin, both as my instructors in Christian Education who have stimulated my creativity and enhanced my journey in gaining wisdom to serve God more effectively in this area;

Dr. Josephus Coan for your encouragement and the work done in proofreading this manuscript.
THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE IN THE COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Christian education faces many problems when used in the community. However, the problem dealt with in this paper focuses on the limited use of Christian education as a meaningful, functional source of hope within the community.

The purpose of this study is to gather information concerning the role Christian education plays within the community by taking a look at its functions and methods of utilization. In this way, information may be presented for use by Christians for a better understanding of the value of Christian education as a ministry of the church in its mission in the world.

Although there are many areas of the problem stated above, this study has dealt only with The Role of Christian Education as a Resource in the Community. The information and suggested ideas are primarily for communities within the United States.

The basic information used in this study include books, journals, magazines and previous studies. These readings are compared with experiences encountered by the author in previous field work sites.
I. **The Church: Source of Christian Education**

For many years, the church has endeavored to fulfill Christ's command of the Great Commission. It has done so by means of witnessing, preaching, teaching and trying to set an example to establish the pattern of Christian living in the hearts and lives of those converted to Christianity. Historically, the church has been held responsible in society for formulating norms and morals as well as for exemplifying acceptable lifestyles for cooperative living among people no matter what their differences may be.

In its Christian teaching of the community, the church has based its method on not only the Bible but also its historical tradition, the theological understanding in its teaching content, the psychological relation of the teacher to the student and vice versa and, the sociocultural concepts in correlation to Christian education—the family, public education and religion. As a guidepost, the church stands as the example of a long history of the Christian faith. It includes in its teachings not only the dogmas of the church but also creeds and the teachings of Christ. Knowing that the Christian church is made up of people and that those
people are involved in the life of their own family and community, it had to make the educational word relevant to the needs of those very same people. This allows for the understanding that the sociological subsystems are interdependent. As the Christian educator keeps this in mind and the circumstances present in the life of the students, he or she is then able to create the type of program to support the needed kinds of ministry for the students' particular situations. Because environments differ according to geographic location, literacy level of the people and personal family problems, it is of great importance that these things are taken into consideration if the Christian education program is to be effective. Without such consideration, the program may prove to be irrelevant to the lives of those involved.

The church, then, is able to reach out into a spiritually and physically needy community often through its teaching ministry. It can then answer its call to go and teach all nations whether those nations are the hungry, impoverished, unemployed, illiterate, oppressed, faithless, addicted, sick, criminals, etc. In teaching them, the church makes relevant the gospel to those hurting needs as well as it does its best to fulfill some if not all of them as a part of its mission.

It is in this sense that many churches are making the attempt to utilize their Christian Education departments to the fullest extent. Others have not yet seen how Christian
it in such a way that it will not die but will be remembered. Belonging involves the continuing of Christianity as community which has adhered to Scriptures through generations, established tradition and solidified experience.\(^3\)

If Christian education is to educate the faithful and humanity to God's activity in the world, it must advance the responsibility of nurturing individuals through a process of education, evangelization, teaching and training. In this process, Donald S. Aultman contends that Christian education, which transmits God's truth as revealed in Jesus Christ by the Word of God, is a "biblically-grounded, Christocentric, church oriented, Spirit-enabled process" for the development of Christian discipleship. It is an encountering of persons with God's action involving the entire educational ministry of the church. It is the spiritual nurturing of all age groups in the church, including every agency contributing to spiritual wholeness and requiring a combined program of teaching, training and outreach to effectively achieve its aims of spiritual nurture. In other words, Christian education is the perpetual cycle of our Lord's mandate to:

"Go ye therefore—reach;
"teach all nations"—teach;
"baptizing them"—win; and
"teaching them to observe"—develop.\(^4\)

This means we reach them to teach them to win them and to develop them. The cycle then continues infinitely. This concept brings to light the seven headings of Dr. Paul Vieth which covers the areas under which are listed most of the
activities or efforts of the church—administration, extension, pastoral care, proclamation, teaching, fellowship and worship. Therefore, all seven headings may be included in the concept of Christian education.\(^5\)

B. Need and Purpose

According to Michael Leach, author of "The Future Game Yesterday," "a major effort is needed in Christian education to help churchgoers understand the bursting energies that are shaping society and church."\(^6\) By helping them to relate corporate relationships of life to their religious beliefs, there can be hope of making a new society. Recognition that group life must first be remade before a new society can be created is the main step in the church's realization of a community's needs. Because churchgoers are involved and are working in the community, it is necessary that they understand how their lives affect the lives of the many others with whom they come in contact.\(^7\)

It is often assumed and proven that the professing Christian is subject to inspection by non-believers. The world is sure to be curious to see if the things preached are practiced. Many times faults of Christians or so-called Christians are looked upon by non-believers as proof that there is no need to associate with the church. Still further, the lives of some non-believers are more ethical than the proclaiming chosen ones. Roy B. Zuck, in his article "Preventing Spiritual Dropouts," points out that young people
stop going to church for more reasons than curiosity for the outside. The situation creates a "concern for the total outreach of Christianity and a burden to meet the needs of youth in the critical adolescent years." 

For these reasons, the true Christian can see the need for Christian education in the community. It can stimulate ethical living and a foundation for surviving the severe pressures of this present age. At the same time, it can spread the knowledge and teachings of Jesus Christ.

However, Leach points out that until the church knows its own nature and purpose, it will not ever be a shaping force of society.

So what is the purpose of Christian education? It is "that all persons be aware of God through his self-disclosure, especially in his redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, and that they respond in faith and love—to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as sons of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope." 

Christian education, thus, helps individuals to understand the revelation of God and His love particularly in Jesus Christ and their Christian response to themselves, their environment and their fellowman in carrying out their Christian duty with eternal hope in Christ Jesus.

Rachel Henderlite has pointed out that, "the goal of Christian education is the life of faith." It is the
response to God's call in Jesus Christ and the living of men and women as children of God in all relationships and responsibilities that is its goal. In recognizing that "faith in God is a gift from God, . . . the task of Christian education is to bear responsible witness to Jesus Christ so that men may be brought to faith in him." This is to say that Christian education provides a means for the work of the Holy Spirit in the increasing of God's kingdom. Therefore, it is an instrument of knowledge used by the Spirit of God in speaking to the hearts of men and women to bring them into a right relationship with God.

III. Christian Education: A Means of Mission

In our rapidly changing world, things are happening so fast that people cannot be given enough knowledge to prepare them for life in a more technological near future. For this reason, educators have begun to discuss "education for a world of change." Technology, modern teaching aids and the sciences of learning and motivation must aid in the acceleration of education so that a wider knowledge of the world may be gained. An investigation of the structure of knowledge is taking place to get an understanding of the way a student is able to comprehend a discipline. Emphasis is also being placed on team-teaching with each person of the team working in a disciplined way toward the same goal. As we can see, therefore, much is going on in education in order to make available as much knowledge as possible presented in the
best way possible to create and stimulate good, clear
comprehension.12

Christian education likewise must deal with the same
problems. Instead of being urged on by the "space race," it
is coerced by the "death of God" theology which creates fear
on the part of those who are afraid that people will discover
that He has been long since the early church or longer buried
in the church for years. We are not able to make today's
Christians for a charging world; but, we can take part in
Christ's "invitation to join God's mission of restoring men
to their true humanity by trying to find how Christ is shaping
the lives of men and equipping them for this mission in the
world."

Letty Russell points out three clues regarding the type
of equipment and education we need to serve in the world.
They include having freedom and courage to live with questions
instead of answers, an intuitive knowledge about the Christian
faith enabling us to see the world through "eyes of faith" and
"being able to celebrate life in relation to God and the
world and our brothers."13

"Christian education is missionary education by defini-
tion."14 It involves participation in the invitation of
Christ to the mission of God in the world. The context of it
is a witnessing or missionary community. Its job is to par-
ticipate with Christ to prepare men for God's mission.
Because God does the sending, it is His mission rather than
that of the church. The church, as a witnessing community,
has a worldwide mission and is always in the world. That is its place, however, because that is where Christ is at work. Mission is spoken of in this sense as God's saving action in the world and our part in it. In summary, the only difference between mission and Christian education is that mission finds its place as the context, missionary education, which is the church's participation in Christ's invitation while Christian education is the place where Christ nourishes and prepares his people for joining God's mission of the renewal of men and women to true humanity.  

IV. Christian Education to Exercise a Contemporary Social Gospel

A. Liberation Education

As more problems of a social nature spring into existence on a worldwide scale, the church is forced to ask just how it will handle these kinds of issues. Many within the church hold the traditional stance that no change will take place. Though the issues themselves may awaken them to the fact that something is taking place, they still may not come to the brighter view of change.

Paulo Freire, author of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, claims that learning is a product of our change. He insists that creativity, as seen in radicalism and liberation of humankind, takes place by means of it. 16 For Freire, education yields conformity to the existing system or "becomes the practice of freedom." As a result of the situations of today's oppressed
peoples, conflict must be the result of either. It is his view that education of the oppressed must be organized and carried out by the oppressed due to the contradictory supposition that the oppressor would truly implement a liberating education.  

In light of the Black perspective, Christian Education should free oppressed Blacks, as well as other minorities, from having only an eschatological hope and help them to see the "now" hope. Christian education can then open the door for social change and justice.  

J. C. Wynn states that in community comes our realization of ourselves and God's action in history. Community brings about education concerning humanization and today's realities. Thus, Christian education should remind people that Christ lives and that God acted in him to liberate humanity and conquer sin and oppression.

E. A Relevant Gospel for Today's Problems  

One of the greatest problems we encounter today is that of living together. Because we cannot live alone, we must learn to live together. Ernest K. Ligon points out that we must begin to learn how to do this at an early age in his discussion of the development of the Christian personality. Bearing in mind the Christian personality, a Christian develops in stages. He or she must be taught Christianity as he or she goes through each stage so that the lifestyle, teachings and values may be understood in depth. So it is for the
entire Christian community.

Christian education, in this sense, develops growing Christians into an understanding of the faith by teaching them those things essential to it. In each stage of growth, those on the same or similar levels are taught the meaning of the particular experiences that parallel the stage. Newly converted Christians may be confronted with several problems of living in today's society—some psychological, some emotional and still others social. They may have problems in their family life, conflicts with friends, peer pressure in or for social events and any number of other problems.

The church can aid these individuals to overcome these problems and Christian education is one of the methods since teaching can get to the depth of an issue. By means of covering lessons that deal with many of today's most common issues, students in the Christian education program often gain a rapport with the Christian educator to discuss the issues covered in that they themselves may be experiencing those very issues, some similar to them or, they may know someone else going through them. The Bible, visual aids and other resource material produced by various publishing companies can stimulate more ideas/suggestions as to how to deal with many problems highlighted in discussion groups. This method, that of holding group discussions or seminars to aid a particular age group with their problems, is only one of many that can and are beginning to be used in the community. Here, the gospel is brought into a dialogue
situation dealing with present issues plaguing the minds, hearts and lives of the people.

In like manner, one issue may be chosen that creates a problem for many of the people. That one problem may be dealt with in one or several ways to improve that particular situation with the long term goal of completely eradicating it within the community. The problem of illiteracy may be attacked, for example, by sponsoring reading seminars or classes in which people are taught to read. As they comprehend, they can learn as well to read the Bible and other materials covering the Christian faith. They may as well be taught how their opportunity of learning to read relates to a particular subject in the Bible (assuming they may be non-believers) and/or they may be taught about Biblical literature, Biblical history or any number of other subjects relating to the faith. This yields the solving of the problem and activating evangelism as well. As a result, Christian education can reach out to the problems of today correlating the gospel, teaching how to overcome many of the problems and to endure the others with Christian hope.

V. Resource Usage of Christian Education

As we have seen, Christian education may be used in the community as a means toward mission, liberation and contemporary relevancy. The methods in which it is used allow it to be a creative and stimulating ministry. Briefly, let us view three areas to see how it can be used as a source in
the community within education, outreach and the fulfillment of needs.

A. Education

Christian education within the community has a challenge to educate the world not only witnessing of the revealed truth of God in Christ Jesus but also to destroy illiteracy among a technological community. People must be educated against social injustice, economic and political wrong and how they can eradicate it.

In raising the literacy rate and awareness, many Protestant churches have been found to have established denominational centers where people may go for tutoring, discussions on current issues, Bible studies training various arts and crafts. Others have been found establishing coalitions with churches of other denominations to attack the problem on a much larger scale. Programs resulting from these coalitions may be Adult Education, Job Training and Job Placement. Certain churches even organize daycare programs for parents involved in these programs. They, therefore, eventually include the whole family by involving other members in their other available activities. The family then may become involved in the ministry of the church in other ways such as the bus ministry, group therapy and other matters involving it as a whole or individually.
D. Outreach

A goal of evangelistic Christian education should be social outreach. There is a need for the church to, in some way, reach out to the destitute and lost sheep in the world and make known the love and saving power of Jesus Christ. This may be accomplished through a gospel of love, service and commitment. The love Christ has for the church can be shared with those outside of the church by means of serving those in need of our help. Many can be won to the church as they see God's servants devoted to the cause of helping them in service in the time of their greatest need.

By reaching out into the community in non-traditional ways, the church is often able to reach the hearts of some people who may otherwise not respond. Often day camps are held by churches for non-members, field trips including the public, seminars and workshops, visitations to senior citizens' homes and apartments, open Bible studies and arts and crafts activities. Christian education is involved in some way in these activities and the theological content is kept within them. This content may be paralleled to problems in their lives or issues of a general nature.

C. Fulfillment of Needs

A valuable resource is Christian education to aid those persons with problems concerning need, whether that need may be physical, psychological, social or emotional. It can function as an emergency agency giving aid in times of
crisis and then making a referral to an agency in the community supported for that particular problem; or, it can function as an organization employing Christians qualified for each of the needed areas so that the problems may be solved when they occur as well as being prevented by educating the people as to how to avoid their occurrence or stop them in their early stages.

The presence of the church to aid in the community in times of need may be seen in the organization of Apartment Ministries in apartment complexes or housing projects, Contact or Crisis phone services and in many other ways. Such organizations established by the church may provide not only referrals to a needed agency but also counseling, food, shelter, transportation and medical help on an emergency basis as well as in a general sense.

**Conclusion**

Christian education proves to be a valuable resource in many ways in the community. It can aid in raising the literacy of a community, educating and witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ with relevancy, provide an ethical example to lift the morals of the community and prevent abuse of the people by corrupt officials. A statement by Nietzsche speaks to my summary of this issue.

So men and women of God must bring to the streets the message of deliverance for the victims of sin. And they must do so with holy indignation against the social, economic, and political abuses of the day. 19
If there needs to be any suggestion made to Christian educators, pastors and church leaders, it is to allow for creativity in the Christian education department. Christian education is a valuable ministry of the church which may be used not only inside the church but outside as well. To use it to the fullest extent can open new avenues for the mission of the church in the world. Success of God's mission can be greatly enhanced as we seek to find new meaningful ways to use the resources we have, especially Christian education.

Reflections of the Present

At the present time, the author is serving as one of four student ministers on the Carver Homes Apartment Ministry staff. Carver Homes is one of the oldest housing projects in the city of Atlanta comprising 990 apartments and an approximate population of 2,000 residents. It is located on the Southwest side of Atlanta. The Apartment Ministry is a community ministry organization sponsored by a coalition of four churches in the city of Atlanta—First Presbyterian Church, Trinity Presbyterian Church, St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church and Cascade United Methodist Church. The purpose of the apartment ministry is to provide emergency transportation and assistance after the closing hours of other social agencies between the time period of 5:00 p.m. and 7:30 a.m. In addition to these two services, the staff provides counseling, general pastoral visitations and
schedules activities involving children and youth during the summer season. It works with other social agencies in solving problems and fulfilling the needs of the residents.

The author was recommended for the job by one of the staff members during the first year of the program's existence. It was six months after the program's inception in the community that she was interviewed and hired.

The Carver Homes Apartment Ministry began with the seed of thought planted by the Ecumenical Community Ministry (ECM) in April, 1976. It was the desire of the organization to touch the lives of those who may not have seen the church activate God's love and care for those with deeply rooted needs. This organization chose for its work one of the hearts of the black community—the Carver Homes Community. Going into the Black neighborhood, however, as a predominantly White organization they knew would present problems. The idea, thus, originated to work in cooperation with the Interdenominational Theological Center which could provide a staff of student ministers to live and serve in the community on a part-time basis from 5:00 p. m. to 7:00 a. m. every weekday and 24 hours during weekends. As a result, interviews were held and three students were hired from the Interdenominational Theological Center—Samson Babalola, Reginald Jackson and Judith Smith.

For a short time, the group worked out of the offices of the Family Services Staff (Community Office of the Housing
Authority). Then, after approval from the Housing Authority, the Family Services gave up one of three offices which was to be designated as the office of the Apartment Ministry. This brought about additional tension with the Family Services staff because there seemed to be an underlying desire to supervise the Ministry even though the jobs were of a different nature. The next problem encountered by the staff was when it was time to move into the community. Samson had a family and was assigned to another two bedroom apartment. However, Judy nor Reginald comprised a family. It was, therefore, decided that another female would be hired and the two would live as roommates in the apartment ministry office. Reginald was to receive an apartment in one of the apartment complexes just outside of the community a few blocks away. As a result, Deborah Maddox was hired as the second female and another problem was tackled in October, 1977. Since that time many other problems have been met and overcome. Continuous growth and progress have been made.

Since the initial problems and groundwork, Samson Babalola and Judith Smith have graduated. However, Ms. Smith stayed on and no longer qualifying as a student, she was hired as coordinator of the staff. Her job has been to represent the staff at meetings voicing its concerns and also planning activities in which the staff may become involved in the city. She also became student advocate to speak on behalf of the students' problems. This was good since she
had been in the position of the student and could not only empathize but reflect on her experience as well.

The Apartment Ministry, unlike many organizations that have entered the Carver Community, has been a successful one. It has not only served the people individually but also as a group. Many groups and people from other parts of the country now visit the community to see what is going on in it. Contributions are made toward the work from many of these groups and individuals.

As a result of the patterns of work seen by the staff, the crisis phone service is no longer seen as the greatest emphasized area of duty for the staff. Services are rendered now by means of referrals from other agencies and calls from tenants themselves as well as emergency calls. The calls from the tenants are the result of the staff members getting to know them on a one to one basis. Thus, emphasis is placed on getting to know the people in a one to one relationship. From understanding the needs of the people, the staff was able to find some of the underlying reasons for unemployment, lack of concern to be employed and disciplinary problems.

Because of some of these findings, the E. C. M. organization decided to plant another seed by solving some those root problems through the formation of an organization to be known as the Carver Community Comprehensive Family Development Program (CCFDP). This program is designed to provide a
daycare center for the community so that many unemployed parents may go to work. The parents of the children eligible for daycare are qualified for job training and placement, adult education, participation in a family development program and later as a long range goal may be eligible for housing options wherein the family may have progressed so much that they may be able to stand their own to maintain living standards outside of the project community. Refer to page 1 of the Appendix. This program therefore, brings solutions to the problems of illiteracy, lack of skills and education causing unemployment, child abuse, poverty, malnutrition and poor health as a result of self abuse. Thus, all of this, stemming from problems found in the work of the Apartment Ministry, has grown to corporation proportion because E. C. M. has other ministries going on in other communities in the city of Atlanta. Refer to page 3 of the Appendix.

Trends and Personal Feelings

The Apartment Ministry is still growing and participating in the outgrowth of it as an organization. This organization allows us to see what can happen when the church becomes involved in the community using all of its resources.

Other churches in Atlanta have founded organizations like the Carver Homes Apartment Ministry but they are not many in number. Out of the author's experience also comes her work in the West End and Memorial Drive Baptist Centers (Fall,
1976-Spring, 1977). These centers are sponsored by the Southern Baptist Association. In meeting with people of this body during a workshop, she discovered that some of the people within churches of this association have come together to form a crisis phone service known as "Contact Atlanta" involving trained volunteers serving at a central location to handle calls of troubled individuals needing to talk out their problems; an apartment ministry wherein a minister and his wife live in the residence of a community of apartments (privately owned) and serve the residents as community ministers and, a variety of other outreach ministries to solve social needs of the community in the city of Atlanta.

More and more churches in the city are forming coalitions to minister to the needs of the surrounding community utilizing their resources to make the ministry more effective. People who come from miles around to see what is going on are often inspired to take what they have seen with them to create new ministries in their geographic area. This plants more seeds in the field to grow and spread. Other organizations like this are sure to exist outside of Atlanta but it is not known how many. A few in existence known to the author are active in Dallas, Texas, Laco, Texas, Princess Anne, Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D. C. She ran across them accidentally in her experiences while travelling and working in those places.

Ms. Maddox sees the growth of outreach ministries as a
milestone in the history of the Christian church. It is her view that churches utilizing their resources to the fullest extent use their Christian education as a resource in a variety of ways—in training their people for community ministry, in teaching people within the community, in educational evangelism, in day camp and other outreach programs used in community ministry.

This is what give the author enthusiasm in her position with the Apartment Ministry. She feels that Christian education has enhanced the ministerial work in the community especially in activities with the children such as in Day Camp and her daily encounterings with them. Because the position allows for creativity, she can use it as much or as little as she needs to serve the people in the community. It also helps her as she projects future activities and objectives for work in that particular environment.

Summarization and Recommendations

The work of the Apartment Ministry within the E. C. M. organization is exemplary of the church's participation in God's mission extending beyond the walls of the church into the community. By utilizing all of its resources—its theological teaching content, the psychological relationship between teacher and pupil, historical tradition and socio-cultural concepts in correlation to Christian education—the church can be a source of Christian hope in the world.
This is the idea kept in mind in the work of the Apartment Ministry and it is the source of many of its successes. To reach out spiritually and physically as well as mentally to the needy community, it has found the need to fulfill physical needs as best as possible realizing that physical problems also create mental pressures and problems, teach keeping in mind the sociocultural conditions present in the environment to eliminate the root of some of the existing problems also illustrating God's presence within such a work and the ultimate results and remembering the historical tradition of the church and God's activity in society, moving toward man's response to God in light of his experience. In this way, Christian education has been used as a resource in the community by the Apartment Ministry. It is, thus, the education of the faithful and humanity to God's activity in the world.

Realizing that all things have their shortcomings in some way or another or at some point in time, the cites recommendations for increasing the quality of such a job to make it not only better but also more effective. These objectives she points out for students who become involved in ministries like or similar to that of the Apartment Ministry both during and after seminary training.

1. Get to know the community in which you are working well. This will help in getting to know the people and how to help them.

2. Write down your schedule keeping everything organized yet flexible. This allows for all activities and helps you not to overextend yourself.
3. Plan your personal time to get the most out of it. There should be time for prayer, devotion and meditation as well as study.

4. Get reports and paperwork done as the activity takes place to avoid a last minute rush and needless mistakes.

5. Have a positive attitude and share it. Your influence can mean a lot to those in the same environment and also those you serve.

These are some basic points in doing community work effectively. They can aid in effective, Christian community work.
FOOTNOTES


3Ibid., p. 16.


5Ibid., p. 16.


7Ibid., p. 200.


10Rachel Henderlite, The Holy Spirit in Christian Education

11Ibid., p. 36, 46.


13Ibid., p. 32.

14Ibid., p. 37.


17Ibid., p. 49.

18Ibid., p. 55-56.

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APPENDIX
This program can be viewed, as in the chart below, with the family at the center of a circle with each of the program components directing its services at each of the families as a function of each family's needs and ability to utilize the component services.