

Including the Children

What about the children? They belong to Christ's congregation. They are the lambs of his sheepfold and therefore must be cared for by those who are the overseers of the flock. Paul says to the elders of the church at Ephesus, *"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son"* (Acts 20:28).

It is important that the elders talk with the children about the promises and obligations they receive in the covenant. Their questions should go far beyond "Do you like school?" or "How's catechism?" An elder ought to be familiar with the needs and concerns of today's teenagers. He can only be a good pastor and shepherd if he knows the family. Just as Christ knows all his sheep by name, an elder must know the children in his ward. He must develop a relationship with them from a young age so that he is able to help them and talk to them during a home visit. The elder must see to it that the children are part of the conversation that takes place.

Children do not have to be present during the entire visit. The parents may have confidential matters they wish to discuss with the elders and vice versa. Whether they are present or not should be left to the discretion of the parents and the visitors. On the other hand, family life will be enhanced by fathers and mothers who can openly speak of their love for the Lord and the evidence of his grace in their lives.