



A COLLISION OF FAITH

Church · Home · School

Our higher calling—and God’s ultimate desire—is for our students to connect, in a real way, with Him. We fight to compete for the attention of our students in a modern world that pulls at the materialistic, mind dulling, self-loving human nature in all of us. How then, can we truly nurture in our students a meaningful encounter with God? (From the “Encounter” Bible Curriculum Overview)¹

“Growing in Discipleship” is the mission statement for the Greater Sydney Conference in Australia. All of the conference’s ministries, including the church’s educational system, are working together to create a disciple-making en-

vironment. The *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples (TGFD)* model is being used extensively in this process.²

The *TGFD* model provides a framework for developing a shared understanding of discipleship, as well as for shaping and delivering resources. Pastors, teachers, and church leaders are able to see how the various resources and processes being promoted by the conference fit into the overall discipleship picture.

A key focus area in the discipleship strategy is being intentional about creating disciple-making environments for children. It is during childhood that worldviews are shaped, values are formed, and most decisions for Christ are made.³

No one program, event, ministry, or

even school can do it alone. We must connect the dots between home, school, and church. While spiritual growth is the Holy Spirit’s work, the Greater Sydney Conference believes it is called to do all it can to create environments conducive to the Spirit’s leading.

Church

Over the past four years, the Greater Sydney Conference has invested significant resources into creating healthy church discipleship environments. The conference has trained its pastors and elders extensively in the *TGFD* discipleship model, and much work has been done to help pastors grow in their spiritual walk with God. This has included

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spiritual growth workshops, a guided reading program, emphasis on personal spirituality, as well as pastors' meetings and retreats.

Every second week, pastors from across Sydney come together for discipleship resourcing and to discuss how they are implementing their discipleship plans. The conference discipleship coordinator meets with church leadership teams to guide them in discerning God's guidance for their congregation. The team then maps out its next step. The *Growing Disciples Inventory* (see pages 24 to 29 of this issue of JAE for an overview of this tool) is used to give a quick overview of the congregation. The *TGFD* framework helps the church identify areas of needed growth, as well as ways to synergize the ministries of the church toward discipleship.

Conference leaders are pleased with how congregations have embraced the model. While each church expresses differently what it means to "be church" and may be working on a different "next step," overall the churches are working together with a common framework.

Conference leadership has observed significant increases in various measures of church health. Nonetheless, the conference's strategic planning team still felt they were missing the mark. It was then that they developed and began to implement the "Home Grown" discipleship strategy.

Home Grown

The Home Grown strategy still uses the *TGFD* framework as a base but modifies it to function in a home environment. The Greater Sydney Conference recognizes that, for the most part, the church is the watering can while what happens at home is the soil of discipleship. It is in the home where most children come to understand how to interpret the world. It is here, too, that most children are first exposed to a model of what it means to be a disciple.

In the early chapters of *Child Guidance*, Ellen White spells out the importance of the home being the primary environment for discipleship:

"It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life."⁴

Subsequent chapters outline the important role of the school in shaping a child's character. Chapter 54 describes how teachers and parents can work in partnership:



"The character of the work done in our church schools should be of the very highest order . . . both at home and at school simplicity and godliness should be maintained."⁵

"Our schools are the Lord's special instrumentality to fit the children and youth for missionary work."⁶

"In the formation of character no other influences count so much as the influence of the home. The teacher's work should supplement that of the parents, but is not to take its place. In all that concerns the well-being of the child, it should be the effort of parents and teachers to cooperate."⁷

Later chapters of *Child Guidance* emphasize the place of a healthy church community in the spiritual formation of children and the need for coordination between the home and the church.

The Home Grown strategy aims to empower every family to take the "next step" in terms of discipleship. From initial observations of its implementation, it appears that once a home takes one discipleship step, other steps soon follow.

One father who joined a Home Grown Sabbath school class realized that he rarely prayed for his children.

Thus, he decided to begin to do so when he dropped them at school and watched them walk through the gate. The next Sabbath, he described how taking this step brought him to tears. He then found himself praying for his children throughout the day. Furthermore, he began to pray that he would be the husband and father his family needed. His family now participates in family worship together, as one step led to another.

The local church, with assistance from the conference, provides supporting ministries: The conference coordinates Home Grown parenting workshops and makes available an electronic newsletter with Home

Grown ideas.⁸ It also schedules family worship resourcing events, trains children's ministry leaders to have an impact on the home, and is developing a coaching system in which more-experienced parents mentor younger families.

In the Greater Sydney Conference, the departmental team is working with churches and schools to deliver and promote resources for family worship, tools for growing in faith as a family, and ideas to help in shaping faith-building conversations and experiences.⁹ One such resource is the Table Talk tin. This resource, which is being well received, includes conversation-starting questions for families to discuss at mealtime.

Pastors and teachers in the Greater Sydney Conference are being taught that

the home has a very significant impact on young lives. If we fail to influence the home, we will never make a lasting impact on students. The "Think Orange" material by Reggie Joiner¹⁰ has been adapted and used extensively in training churches to synergize ministries with a focus on re-activating the home.

The Home Grown strategy invests a great deal of energy and resources to address the consumerist worldview. Marriages, church involvement, and personal spiritual practices are being strangled by this orientation. Church members have beautiful homes that lack spiritually fertile soil, and many need help in understanding and developing a commitment to biblical values. The conference is doing what it can to make the home the primary place for spiritual growth. The Greater Sydney

Conference Stewardship Department is addressing worldview issues and promoting a biblical worldview that is conducive to discipleship.¹¹

School

Parents are not the only adult influences children need for healthy faith development. Educators also play a significant role in a child's discipleship training.

The Adventist schools of the Greater Sydney Conference are eager to connect the dots between home, church, and school. Denominational schools also participate in the Home Grown strategy, which provides another resource base for parents. Various workshops coordinated through the school,

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newsletter sections, and send-home materials are available to assist parents with discipleship in the home.¹² One campus leader teaches a class on Sabbath mornings at a local church to prepare parents for discipleship. This class also has proved to be a useful outreach tool for parents who are not members of the church community.

Our educators understand that while it is important for children to succeed academically, the only thing that will matter in the long run is the child's relationship with God. One school is testing the use of the *TGFD* framework individually for each student, after which the teachers help the children plan their own next step. One principal commented, "We have very intentional programs in place for developing children academically. What would it take to be even more intentional about their faith development?"

Once again, the *TGFD* framework provides a template for understanding for how the home, church, and school can work together. Some educators are using the key discipleship areas to help them craft homework assignments.

The schools provide healthy role models and environments that promote spiritual discovery and growth. A child's faith development is significantly enhanced if other adults who have a relationship with him or her give the same faith message as a parent. Schools are an ideal place for this to happen.

The Adventist schools in the Greater Sydney Conference are currently implementing "Encounter," a new Australia/New Zealand inter-union-coordinated biblical studies curriculum. This curriculum is based on the building blocks of healthy faith development, using the Spiritual Growth model developed by Ben Maxson.¹³ The curriculum promotes a worldview that integrates faith into all aspects of life by using the Transformational Planning framework developed by Lanelle Cobbin.¹⁴ The Greater Sydney Conference discipleship coordinator is

making pastors aware of this curriculum so that their sermons, terminology, and local church initiatives can work with the same foundations in mind. The Transformation Planning framework provides a delivery system for sharing the *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples* concepts.

Some churches work with their local Adventist school to integrate the GraceLink Sabbath school curriculum so that one main message and set of memory verses are being presented at church and school.¹⁵ While still having more work to do, the Greater Sydney Conference schools and churches are committed to collaborating to facilitate faith development. Imagine the synergy if parents, educators, and Sabbath school leaders all come together to pray for and discuss the faith development of each child!

Visions of a Collision Course

The church and the school cannot take the place of the home. Even though amazing stories show how the Holy Spirit changes lives in these environments in spite of difficult home situations, the ideal is to have the school and church complement what happens in the home.

- Children need parents who will help them advance in their relationship with God.
- Children need teachers who promote healthy pictures of what it means to grow in faith.
- Children and youth need churches where they feel welcome and can play an active role.
- Parents need churches that will help them know how to be spiritual leaders.
- Parents need schools that will help them integrate faith and learning.

Imagine the positive impact when faith development in the home, school, and church collide! ✍



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is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. research program examining how consumerism impacts faith development.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Geirfie Winzenried, Nina Atcheson, and Lanelle Cobbin, *Encounter: Loving God, Living Like Jesus*, Overview of the *Encounter* Bible Curriculum from the Australian Union Conference Education Department, n.d., p. 3.
2. See page 15 of this issue for the article that explains the *TGFD* model or go to <http://www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com> for more information.
3. George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2003), p. 47.
4. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1954), p. 17.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
8. To obtain a list of Home Grown resources, go to <http://www.gsc.adventist.org.au>.
9. Go to <http://www.gsc.adventist.org.au> for additional resources.
10. Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2009).
11. To gain a fuller understanding of a biblical worldview, see George Barna, *Think Like Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2003). For an overview of how the Christian worldview relates to other worldviews, see John Dickson's chapter "God's Signpost" in Simon Smart, ed., *A Spectator's Guide to Worldviews* (Sydney: Blue Bottle Books, 2007).
12. Go to <http://www.gsc.adventist.org.au> to view samples of these resources.
13. Ben Maxson, *Get Normal* (Silver Spring, Md.: Stewardship Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), pp. 131, 132. This model is explained in the *Encounter* Overview, Footnote 1.
14. Lanelle Cobbin, "The Transformational Planning Framework: A Pathway to Holistic Biblical Teaching?" *Teach Journal of Christian Education* 5:1 (2011), pp. 10-15.
15. The GraceLink Sabbath School Curriculum, the four focuses of Sabbath school as outlined by the General Conference Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, and the processes of discipleship as illustrated in the *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples* framework are similar in scope.