

Questions without answers

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Every Wednesday morning, our congregation holds a small Matins service in our small chapel. We pray, we sing, we hear the scriptures. There is a short homily.

Recently it was my turn, and, as I had Sunday school and Faith Formation on my mind, I decided to ask the worshippers about their experiences and memories of Sunday school. What did they learn? What did they remember? Several people remembered the songs that they learned, or a favorite Sunday school teacher. One woman offered that she learned in Sunday school that "the adults in the congregation cared about me." Others remembered memorizing Bible verses or the catechism.

One woman shared that one of her Sunday school teachers had posed the question, "Is it better to be in church, but thinking about being out in your fields, or out in the fields, but thinking about God?"

"And you still remember that, even all these years later," I said.

"Well, I'm still not sure I know the answer," she replied.

I thought that Sunday school teacher was awesome. I thought about it all week. This woman was given a question that has haunted her for her whole life, something she has been mulling over and considering. She doesn't know the answer, and yet she keeps coming back, keeps digging deeper into faith and life and doubt and hope.

When we think about Christian education curriculum, what do we think about? Songs? Stories? Prayers? I do believe that the foundations of faith are the stories of scripture, the songs and prayers we learn, the prayers we make out of our hearts. But then again, what if a large part of the curriculum is questions? And what if some of the questions don't have answers, except for the answers that you live every day of your life as a disciple of Jesus?

I can't help noticing that Jesus asked a lot of questions. He also prayed, and he told stories, too (although a lot of those stories held a lot of questions as well). In fact, when people asked him a question, he almost always answered them with another question. He gave them not just something simple that they could hold in their hands, but something they could mull over, consider and live with for the rest of their lives. He gave them something they could return to at different ages and at different stages of their lives.

"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Do you love me?"

"What do you want me to do for you?"

We have often thought of the value of faith formation for the answers it provides, and for simple foundational statements we can cling too. But what if the value of faith formation also lies in the questions that don't let us go but haunt us—and keep us coming back, digging deeper into the resources of scripture, song, lived experience and prayer?

A friend called me once because her three-year-old daughter was asking, "Where is God?" and she wasn't sure how to answer. I searched and searched around and finally found a wonderful little book for three-year-olds, and I sent it to her in the mail. But it occurs to me now that "Where is God?" is not just a question for three-year-olds. It is a question you can ask at three and at 33 and at 103. It is a question we can spend our whole lives asking and answering and asking again.

Is it better to be out in the fields, but thinking about God, or in church, but thinking about being out in the fields? What do you think?

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