

## INTRODUCTION

The phone rang. It was a pastor calling to ask a favor. In the course of the conversation, as so often happened with these calls, we found ourselves talking about the educational ministry of his church. We shared a mutual interest in, and commitment to, this important ministry.

He voiced his ongoing concern about what was and was not happening in Christian education with his congregation. He knew that Christian education was vital to the life of the community of faith. Yet the traditional approaches did not seem to be working. Sunday school attendance was down, the lack of participation by the youth of the church was a continuing problem, and it was an ongoing struggle to find church school teachers and youth group sponsors. Any attempts at adult education drew a meager response. He wondered aloud, "What can we do?"

This was not a new conversation for me. I have shared in many such conversations in the course of my work as a seminary professor of Christian education. And I hear this conversation taking place in the wider church, given impetus by the results of the major study on effective Christian education conducted by Search Institute and first published in the spring of 1990. This study highlighted problems related to Christian education in several of the mainline Protestant churches and raised many of the same issues and concerns voiced by my pastor friend.

Called "Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations,"<sup>1</sup> the study grew out of the concern of Protestant Christian education staffs at both the denominational and local levels about the health of Christian education. These concerns involved several areas. Prominent among them were (1) a disinterest among adults in adult

educational programs, (2) the failure of congregations to maintain involvement of their youth after the eighth grade, (3) the increasing difficulty in finding and keeping volunteer teachers, (4) the apparent lack of interest of clergy in education, (5) a problem in drawing parents into the educational process, and (6) the apparent failure of current programs and educational methods to address adequately and appropriately the changing needs and interest of adults, adolescents, and children.<sup>2</sup>

Needing information with which to analyze and address their concerns, six major Protestant denominations,<sup>3</sup> representing about 85 percent of the membership in what is called "mainline Protestantism," launched a national three-and-a-half-year study of Christian education. What they discovered was sobering. Their findings included:

Only a minority of Protestant adults evidence the kind of integrated, vibrant, and life-encompassing faith that congregations seek to develop. For most adults, faith is underdeveloped, lacking some of the key elements necessary for faith maturity.

A majority of adolescents fall into the faith type called "undeveloped faith."

Only about three out of ten high school students (grades 10–12) and adults in mainline Protestant denominations are actively involved in Christian education.<sup>4</sup>

Researchers concluded that:

Christian education in a majority of congregations is a tired enterprise in need of reform. Often out-of-touch with adult and adolescent needs, it experiences increasing difficulty in finding and motivating volunteers, faces general disinterest among its "clients," and employs models and procedures that have changed little over time.<sup>5</sup>

A critically important finding of the research was that Christian education mattered! It mattered even more than had been expected, especially in terms of a person's growth in faith and

ability to be an active part of the community of faith. Researchers found a strong relationship between growth in faith maturity and active participation in a quality Christian education program. More than any other factor in congregational life, Christian education was key in the development of faith maturity and active church involvement. The research report concluded:

In summary, Christian education matters. We see its power in the area of both life biographies and current congregational life. And we see it in both faith maturity and loyalty. The practical implication is clear: If a congregation seeks to strengthen its impact on faith and loyalty, involving members of all ages in quality Christian education is essential.<sup>6</sup>

It went on to say, "Effective Christian education has the potential, as much or more than any other congregational influence, to deepen faith, commitment, and loyalty. Its revitalization must therefore move to center stage."<sup>7</sup>

To me it seems important for the vitality and future of the church that we take seriously these issues and findings of the national study and that we give ear to the concerns it raised and to those expressed by my pastor friend. For the sake of the future of the church we must give our attention to Christian education and move this important ministry to center stage. It is important that we find ways in which to renew and transform this vital ministry of the church.

However, we also need to hear a word of caution. In our desire to respond to the findings of the Search Institute study and to address my pastor friend's question, "What do we do?" we need to be careful that we are not seduced by the "quick fix," grasping for the latest technique, technology, or newest prepackaged program that suggests to the church that uses it that it will then have a successful educational ministry (success here is usually defined and measured in terms of numbers).

Hopefully, our desire in addressing the question, What do we do? about Christian education is not to "create a nation of McChurches with bland, prepackaged programs and innocuous

decor.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, our purpose should be engagement in the kind of serious, creative, and intentional reflection, analysis, assessment, and planning that will enable us to renew and transform our understanding and practice of Christian education.

So where do we begin? What could my pastor friend “do” in response to his concerns? One of the responses that has emerged in the wider debate in our country about public education is captured by the slogan “Back to basics.” Although I believe there is a danger in thinking that the way we did things and understood them in the past is the solution to present-day concerns, there is truth in the call to look at the “basics,” at what is central and necessary for education. Too often in the church we have not talked about the basics. Instead, we have assumed that we know what we are doing and why we are doing it, and we’ve looked for “quick fixes” for anything that went wrong. I see this reflected in the students who arrive in my seminary classes. They often assume that they know what Christian education is all about, and they are merely looking for some new methods, techniques, curriculum resources, or *the* current program that will solve the Christian education problems in the churches they serve. But they have seldom thought about the basics.

Let me give an illustration. I am an amateur quilter. I have been sewing since I was a child, but I became interested in quilting about a decade ago. At first I thought quilting was as easy as sewing a seam together. I would look at the quilts on display at a quilt show and think, *I could do that!* But my first attempts at quilting never looked quite like those I saw on display. Then I took my first quilting class and was introduced to the basics. It was a whole new world. I learned about fabric and its selection, about piecing and constructing a quality block, about assembling the parts of a quilt, and about the quilting process itself. All these are basic to making a quilt. Even though the quilts that are created look very different from one another, the basics that one needs to know and understand remain the same.

I believe the same is true with educational ministry in the church. Although each church, given its own unique context

and people, will have a Christian education program that is particular to that gathered community of faith, the basic concepts and building blocks necessary for developing a dynamic and nurturing Christian education ministry are the same. I believe it is vitally important at this point in the church’s life that we take the time to consider these basics. We need to look at the foundational pieces by which a Christian education ministry is built. When we have an understanding of these pieces, we are then able to plan and build an educational ministry appropriate to the needs and concerns of a particular community of faith.

Another illustration I use with my students is that of a doctor and a patient. When a patient comes to a doctor wanting to know what he can do to feel better, the doctor does not begin with telling the patient what to do, drawing on the latest fad or technique in the medical world. Instead, she does a careful examination of the patient and what is basic to him—his symptoms, his lifestyle, and his family history. Only after this descriptive process is complete does the physician offer a plan of treatment, a prescription based on a basic knowledge of the patient himself.

Too often in the church we begin with “prescribing a course of treatment,” choosing to use the latest denominational program or the newest curriculum resources, before we have given careful attention to the basics of educational ministry: what it is, why we do it, and so on. Only after we have done this basic work will we know what we need to do, what we need to “prescribe” for our particular educational ministry.

What are these basic building blocks for educational ministry? I believe at least six basic areas should be given attention when we are planning for and building an educational program in the church. These six foundational areas are (1) concept, (2) purpose, (3) context, (4) content, (5) participants, and (6) process and method. Each of these basic building blocks calls us to ask key questions. For CONCEPT, the main question is, *What is Christian education?* How do we define this term? What does it mean to call something *education*? And what does it mean to say that it is *Christian* education? PURPOSE asks, *What*

is the purpose of Christian education? Why do we do it? What do we hope to have happen? For *CONTEXT*, the question is, Where does Christian education occur? What kinds of settings and environments are important? *CONTENT* draws our attention to what is taught, studied, and learned. What kinds of knowledge do Christians need to have? What will we teach? *PARTICIPANTS* leads us to the question, Who are the participants in this ministry? What do we need to know and understand about them? And finally, *PROCESS AND METHOD* raises the question, How do we do it? How will this education be done? What process and methods are appropriate to use, and how will we choose them?

In the following chapters, each of these basic building blocks will be discussed, and we will look at the issues and concerns the questions posed raise for us. At the end of each chapter, questions and exercises are offered to help readers use the particular building block in the planning and developing of educational ministry in their own unique settings. In addition to the six building blocks of educational ministry, I look at two other issues of importance to the vitality of our educational ministries. The first is the issue of *ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION*. We need to have ways in which we look at what we are doing and assess how it is working. Too often in the church we undertake a program, it doesn't work in the ways we had hoped, and it is abandoned without any effort to find out what really happened. This can lead to waste and a constant "reinventing of the wheel" syndrome that does not reflect good stewardship on the part of the church. Learning to assess and evaluate is an important part of a vital educational ministry. The second issue I have named *HINDRANCES*. We need to look at the kinds of resistance we will face, both in ourselves and in our congregations, when we commit ourselves to renewing and revitalizing our educational ministries. However deep our passion, there is still that within us, both as individuals and as communities of faith, that resists change. Understanding this can help us keep resistance from blocking our efforts.

I am aware that you may not hear much that seems new to you in the pages that follow. You may think on occasion, *Of course, I knew that*. As I said at the beginning, this is about the

basics and recalling to our attention what is foundational to the educational ministry of the church. My hope is that the pastors, Christian educators, seminary students, concerned laity, and others who read this work will be renewed in their commitment to this vital ministry and will build on the basics to renew and transform Christian education for the sake of the church and its mission in the world.

## Chapter 1

## CONCEPT: What Is Christian Education?

It happens each time. Everything is quiet as they sit with somewhat puzzled looks on their faces. It is the first day of class, and I have just asked the students in the seminary's required course on the foundations of Christian education to respond in writing to the question, What is Christian education? After a few moments, there is a rustle of papers as students begin to write, many of them still with a little frown wrinkling their foreheads.

As we talk afterward, I find out that this is the first time many of them have thought about this question. In fact, it is the first time many of them have had the question asked of them. They have heard the term *Christian education* used often, but they've never stopped to think about what it means. They simply assumed that they knew, that everyone else in the church also knew, and that they were all in agreement.

This same phenomenon happens with regularity when I work with a local church's Christian education committee. When I ask them to respond to the question, What is Christian education? one of two things generally occurs. Either committee members seem puzzled and, after some reflection, indicate that they have never really thought about it before, or they begin talking about Sunday school and teaching children. Their primary points of reference for Christian education are children and Sunday school. Although I would not argue that Christian education involves Sunday school and children, to define it in these terms is limiting and does not provide an adequate foundation on which to build this important ministry.

Why is our CONCEPT of Christian education a basic building block for educational ministry? Why is it important to ask

the question, What is Christian education? I believe it is important because it will determine what we do in the name of Christian education. Our understanding of what it is will influence and shape what we do, why we do it, and how we go about this vital ministry of the church. As one of my mentors, Dr. Charles Melchert, once said,

If we are unclear about what it is or what we are looking for in the process, the best we can hope for is to get where we are going part of the time by accident. I would suggest both our people and our God are entitled to expect more of us than that.<sup>1</sup>

Like Melchert, I believe we should not be carrying out the church's educational ministry by accident or happenstance. We need to have some clarity about what we are doing. It is too important a ministry not to have thought through what it means in order to then give it our best efforts.

When I look at the life and ministry of Jesus, I am struck by how important it was that he named clearly who he was and what he was about. The story of his temptation seems to me to be a story of his coming to clarity about his own identity, of his being able to name both what it meant and what it did not mean to be called the Son of God. It seems significant that Luke's telling of the temptation story (Lk. 4:1–13) is followed by a description of Jesus' visit to the synagogue in Nazareth where he boldly names the ministry to which he is called (Lk. 4:14–21). In this naming, he places before himself and his listeners a clear picture of the path he will follow. And the gospels bear evidence that he was true to his name and to the claims of his ministry.

However, I want to speak a word of caution here. I do not think that the goal of working with the building block of concept is to come up with one common definition, a kind of "one-size-fits-all" approach. Like the noted Christian educator Thomas Groome, I believe that the enterprise of education is too complex for there to be one universally agreed upon definition.<sup>2</sup> Instead, my goal is for the church to have an open and honest conversation about what Christian education is, what we think we are doing. Through such a conversation we can

name those assumptions we take for granted, we can talk about the concept of Christian education that seems to be implicitly at work in our congregation, and we can look at ways in which our taken-for-granted definition may be limiting or preventing us from carrying out a more effective educational ministry.

### Ways of Defining Christian Education

What are some ways in which we might define Christian education? How might we give some shape and form to this building block? When working with the issue of concept with students or local congregations, I often begin by asking them to tell what Christian education already means to them. The list of words and phrases has grown considerably over the years. Those I have heard repeated time and again include:

nurture	conversion
instruction	habit formation
teaching	indoctrination
development	catechesis
critical thinking	socialization
transmitting the faith	character formation
growth	moral development
conserving the faith	transformation
faith development	schooling
spiritual formation	belief formation

It seems to be quite a varied list, and the words don't all appear to suggest the same thing. However, I think there is a way to make some sense out of this rather diverse list and begin to distinguish some core characteristics of Christian education.

As I studied these responses over time, they suggested to me four ways of understanding Christian education.<sup>3</sup> The first sees Christian education as *religious instruction*. The terms *teaching, instruction, transmitting the faith, conserving the faith, indoctrination, catechesis, belief formation, and schooling* suggest this understanding.

This definition of Christian education highlights deliberate and intentional efforts by the church to transmit the knowledge and practices of the Christian faith. Although I agree with Sara Little that we must be careful not to equate instruction

with the school setting,<sup>4</sup> this definition does focus on the more formal and structured teaching process for the passing on of knowledge, especially facts and information, and the acquisition of certain beliefs.

The second definition of Christian education that emerges from our list of terms is that of a *socialization process*. Jack Seymour and Donald Miller call this the faith community approach.<sup>5</sup> Others have called it the “community of faith enculturation” model.<sup>6</sup> Terms like *nurture, socialization, habit formation, enculturation, and even conversion*, depending on how one understands this process,<sup>7</sup> point to this definition.

To define Christian education in this manner highlights the ways in which people become a part of a particular group, take on its identity, and acquire its beliefs, habits, and behaviors. It calls attention to how people come to know who they are and what they believe through their interactions with those in the church. Such an understanding of Christian education would certainly value participation in the worship services—hearing the hymns, prayers, and spoken word and taking part in the various ritual acts, such as communion—as an important way in which children and youth learn what it means to be a Christian. As Charles Foster says, “We know we are Christian because we participate in Christianity’s historical embodiment (i.e., the church).”<sup>8</sup>

The third way of defining Christian education that I see reflected in the list is the *personal development approach*. The words *growth, faith development, spiritual formation, moral development, and character formation* are suggestive of this approach.

This understanding of Christian education finds its roots in developmental theory, which suggests that there is a structure of growth involving various steps or stages through which every individual moves and that education is a process that assists this growth. Defining Christian education as personal development highlights the need for an environment that nurtures all persons in whatever stage they are in on their faith journey and helps them move from stage to stage. The reliance on age-graded curriculum resources in the church school is one indication of the presence of this approach. The key characteristic to remember here is the emphasis on nurturing and assisting

individuals in growing and maturing through their own personal spiritual journeys. Education is understood primarily as an individual rather than a communal activity.

The remaining definition of Christian education that I see reflected in the list of terms is a *process of liberation*. The terms *critical thinking* and *transformation* point to this approach. Education as liberation is concerned with transformation, the “forming over” of the church, of persons, and of society. Such education emphasizes the “development of a new Christian consciousness which will be aware of the global context of oppression and will lead Christians in constructing new, faithful, lifestyles.”<sup>9</sup>

Seen in this way, education becomes a prophetic activity. It seeks to develop critical reflection skills and enable participation in social action. This concept of Christian education calls for direct involvement in the world through activities such as mission trips and community service projects rather than remaining in traditional church contexts such as church school.

My own experience tells me that these four definitions of Christian education—as religious instruction, as socialization, as personal development, and as liberation—are present in the church, shaping what we do as educational ministry. Although I believe that these are not the only concepts of Christian education at work in the church today, I do think that these are representative of the more prevalent viewpoints. I also believe that these seldom exist in “pure form.” You may have been thinking as you read each of the descriptions that some aspect of each description would fit your setting. The church with which you are familiar may emphasize the church school and formal religious instruction. Yet it also uses age-graded curriculum resources. And it encourages participation by children in the worship service so that they can come to know the appropriate responses and behaviors for members of that faith community.

My purpose for naming these various definitions is not to create a set of mutually exclusive concepts from which we are to choose the “correct” one. Instead, I see these various descriptions offering us an opportunity to reflect on and think about how each of us would name Christian education in our own church setting. Are there ways in which we limit ourselves

because we have defined education from only one perspective? Are there ways in which we need to expand our definitions in order to carry out more vital educational ministries? This important building block is the key to such vitality.

### Laying the Foundation: Developing a Definition

Although each of these meanings of Christian education is present in the church, I believe that any given congregation tends to emphasize one over the others. Much of this is rooted in habit—we’ve always done it this way—and the fact that we do not often talk about such basic things as our concepts of Christian education. We tend to emphasize a certain approach, and it becomes the primary vision that shapes our educational ministry. Many churches emphasize formal religious instruction as the primary meaning of Christian education and put their energies into formal church school programs and Bible studies. Other churches give emphasis to the personal development approach and build their education programs around small sharing groups that provide nurturing environments for exploring one’s life journey and discerning God’s presence and leading. Still others take a strong liberation approach and focus energy on mission and service as the means by which one truly learns about the life of discipleship.

The difficulty comes when we operate out of one narrow definition of Christian education and are unable to see other ways of understanding what we are doing. Daniel Aleshire points out, “One purpose of a definition is to erect a fence to distinguish what is inside from what is outside.”<sup>10</sup> However, he goes on to argue, the fence can be too small and leave too many things outside. He calls for a broad definition of Christian education. As he puts it, “A broad definition does not require us to change what is done at church so much as it causes us to look at it differently.”<sup>11</sup> Given the shifting sands of the times in which we live, there is strong evidence of the need for the four approaches to educational ministry mentioned, and I believe our task in the church is to work at integrating these perspectives into our own definitions of Christian education.

Aleshire offers a definition that is suggestive of how we might integrate various approaches into a broader vision. He defines Christian education this way:

Christian education involves those tasks and expressions of ministry that enable people (1) to learn the Christian story, both ancient and present; (2) to develop the skills they need to act out their faith; (3) to reflect on that story in order to live self-aware to its truth; and (4) to nurture the sensitivities they need to live together as a covenant community.<sup>12</sup>

I believe he is certainly getting at the basics of Christian education and, in doing so, integrates the various approaches named above. “To learn the Christian story” suggests an instructional process that provides people with the information and facts that they need about this story. “To develop the skills they need to act out their faith” suggests a focus on action in the world and points to a liberation process. “To reflect on that story in order to live self-aware” calls for a personal development approach with an emphasis on growing and maturing in knowledge of self and one’s individual faith journey. “To nurture the sensitivities...to live...as a community” suggests a socialization process with its emphasis on participation in the community of faith as a way in which to learn what it means to be Christian.

In presenting Aleshire’s definition, I am not proposing that you adopt it as your own. Each congregation, working together, needs to do the work of defining education for itself. Instead, I offer it as an example of the kind of broad vision that I believe is needed in order to engage in effective educational ministry in the years to come.

I do not believe that a broad definition of Christian education is the result of sloppy thinking. I believe that a broad definition helps us to see the basics that are necessary in developing a strong and vital educational ministry. Education in the church calls for religious instruction, socialization, personal development, and liberation. There is a need for transmitting knowledge, for shaping people through their participation in their community’s activities, for helping people on their individual faith journeys, and for developing a critical consciousness that leads to faithful service in the world.

Nor do I think that a special emphasis on a particular aspect of this broad definition means the absence of the other approaches. Even as my husband and I emphasize a certain

color in the decorating scheme of our home, the presence of accent colors enlivens and enriches our living space. Even though a church may emphasize religious instruction in its educational ministry, the presence of an intentional socialization process, of efforts to nurture personal spiritual development, and of activities involving people in liberating service in the world can add vitality to that church’s educational ministry and increase its effectiveness.

### Broadening the Foundation

As you begin work on your own definition of Christian education, I believe that there are some other aspects of this foundational building block you need to consider. To do this, it is helpful to turn to another definition of Christian education, this one provided by noted educator Thomas Groome. He defines Christian education as:

a political activity with pilgrims in time that deliberately and intentionally attends with them to the activity of God in our present, to the Story of the Christian faith community, and to the Vision of God’s Kingdom, the seeds of which are already among us.<sup>13</sup>

There are three terms Groome uses in his definition that I believe are important to consider as we do our work of defining. Those words are *political*, *deliberately*, and *intentionally*.

When my students first read this definition, they often express a strong resistance to the term *political*. It is almost a dirty word in our society. We equate political with the kind of partisan battles we see taking place daily in our governmental structures. At its root, however, the word comes from the Greek word *polis*, which means city, and refers to our social interactions as citizens. In using the term, Groome is highlighting the *social nature* of education.

Groome calls our attention to the communal and social nature of Christian education. What he helps us consider is how our education helps people to live in community, to participate in the wider society, and to live out their faith in and on behalf of the world. What he helps us remember is that Christian education is not an individual activity. It may be personal in that it is concerned with persons and their personal



faith journeys. However, at its heart Christian education is a communal activity done by the community of faith on behalf of the community of faith for the benefit of, and for service to, the world. As we give thought to the definition of Christian education for our particular congregations, it is important that we remember the political nature of our work.

With the words *deliberately* and *intentionally*, Groome raises for us another important aspect of our educational work. To approach something deliberately means to give it careful thought. To be intentional about something means to plan for it to happen. The *Effective Christian Education* study discovered that planning was one of the vital elements in building and maintaining a strong educational ministry.<sup>14</sup> Yet it also discovered that many churches wander aimlessly, not knowing what they are doing or where they are going in Christian education.<sup>15</sup>

As I stated earlier, I believe Christian Education is too vital a ministry to let happen by accident or happenstance. We cannot wander from program to program and hope to prepare people for the life of discipleship in today's world. To be faithful to the mandate to go and teach (Mt. 28:20) requires our most intentional and deliberate efforts. However we come to define Christian education in the church, my hope is that we will faithfully carry out this ministry with deliberateness and intentionality.

There is a final aspect of this foundational building block of concept that I want to discuss. It has to do with the relationship of education and schooling. When I ask people to define Christian education for me, the most often used terms are *school* or *schooling*. For many people, Christian education is equated with school, specifically the church school.

I do not want to demean or diminish the role or place of the church school in educational ministry. I will say more about this in the chapter on context. However, I think we create problems for a broader and more vital vision of Christian education when we limit ourselves to the image of school. Maria Harris talks about this as “the false identification of education with only one of its forms: schooling.”<sup>16</sup> As she points out,

In this view, the participants in education are always “instructors” or “learners,” the place of education is

necessarily a school (or a setting that replicates the school); the stuff of education is books and chalkboards and lesson plans; and the process involved is mental activity.<sup>17</sup>

Let us contrast this schooling image of education with an image we find in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. In this passage, Israel is given the heart of her religious teachings, the great commandment: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” This is followed with the way in which this teaching is to take place, with the presentation of what I would call an educational process. The Israelites are told:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

As we examine this text, we discover that education occurs in the context of the family, and that it is done in both formal (recite the words) and informal (talk about this at home, display signs and symbols that recall the teaching) ways. This seems to me to be in distinct contrast to the schooling model as described by Harris. Perhaps our Hebrew ancestors had a broader vision of education, a vision that is important for us to consider.

Connecting the activity of instruction only with school is limiting. If we identify instruction only with school and formal teaching settings, we overlook the fact that instruction can take place in a variety of settings other than school.

I think of my husband, Brent, and his young grandson, Phillip. Brent is a bread baker, and Phillip loves his grandpa's banana bread. Whenever they are together, Phillip wants Grandpa to make banana bread, and Phillip wants to help. So they gather together in the kitchen and Brent carefully and patiently guides Phillip through the process of making the bread. He is “instructing” him, although there are no signs of “school”

around. In time Phillip will learn to make banana bread on his own. He will have been taught, “instructed” how to do it, but none of that experience will be thought of as “school.”

Just as the kitchen becomes a place of instruction, so too does the church sanctuary or the fellowship hall or the church-sponsored soup kitchen or the family living room. We provide religious instruction in a variety of ways and a variety of settings. To understand Christian education as more than school and to see the possibilities of religious instruction beyond the schooling model offers us a broader and more vital perspective on this important ministry.

### Summary

A definition of Christian education is a foundational building block in the educational ministry of the church. It is through our definitions that we become aware of the essential aspects of this important ministry and enable ourselves to be more effective at it. I trust that this discussion about the various perspectives on Christian education has stimulated the readers to give careful thought to both their own and their churches’ definitions and to consider ways in which these definitions might be broadened to bring new energy and life.

Recall the finding of the *Effective Christian Education* study that Christian education matters, and it matters a great deal! Being clear on what it is that we are doing can only increase education’s ability to make a difference in the life of our own church.

The word *education* comes from the Latin *educare*, meaning to lead out or to lead forth. At its heart, education is an activity of leading out or leading forth. If we hope to lead people forth into lives of faith and committed discipleship, we will need our clearest and best thinking and the most deliberate and intentional efforts we can muster. The church of Jesus Christ deserves no less!

### Reflection and Application

The following exercises are offered to assist readers in their engagement with the ideas presented in this chapter.

1. Brainstorm your own list of synonyms for Christian education. Compare and contrast with the list presented in this chapter. What is the same? What is different? What do you think your list reflects about your understanding of Christian education?
2. Interview several church members (include people of all ages), asking them how they would define Christian education. Add their words to the above list. What do you think this list reflects about the wider church’s understanding of Christian education?
3. Rank your list of terms. Which words or phrases come the closest to representing the definition of Christian education at work in your church? How would you describe this understanding of Christian education? Compare your definition with the four approaches to Christian education presented on pages 10–12. Is there a similarity with one of these approaches? Which one? Do you find the presence of any of the other approaches in your church? Which ones?
4. Write your own definition of Christian education. What is emphasized in your definition? What is not? Why?
5. How might you share this definition with the wider church? How might you invite its input? Prepare a plan of action for doing this.