

## *Mothers and toddlers*

Embarking on motherhood is no light thing. It is a bitter-sweet experience, for along with the wonder and joy of 'new creation' come crying babies, disturbed sleep, demanding siblings, feeding, weaning, toilet-training, tantrums and, often, isolation. It is a time of enlightenment and appreciation for what mothers have experienced and managed for generations.

Perhaps this is why most new mothers turn to their own mothers for help and advice. Paul recommends to Titus that "The aged women . . . teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:3-5). This passage shows the value of experience kindly shared; to help avoid pitfalls, establish good routines and maintain spiritual habits to the glory of the Father. What better people than mothers, grandmothers and 'aunties' in the ecclesia for such support?

Another avenue of support within the ecclesia is toddler play-groups, an informal activity organised by mothers on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis in homes or at the ecclesial hall. These activities allow mothers and children to mix together, and can form a basis for childhood friendships and for relationships between sisters in the Lord. It is also a time to share recent joys and frustrations, to pass on practical tips and to give and receive understanding.

It is not always feasible at these activities to read a portion of the Bible, due to the age of the toddlers and their continual needs and demands. However, it is possible for mothers to share what they have been reading or discuss some aspect of the Truth. Frequently these discussions get back to the issues mothers face: the need to develop patience, to show love and to 'do all as unto Christ'.

For the children, it is an opportunity to visit other homes, thus expanding the horizons of their small worlds. They may learn new skills by watching other children; they will discover 'sharing' and will have opportunity to develop their social manners. Sometimes a Bible story and related activity are organised by the 'hostess', and this may be the children's introduction to the concept of 'fellowship' in spiritual things. What a joy it is later to witness our babies, now grown, mixing and working together in youth group and ecclesia with a trust and familiarity that began in a childhood together!

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