

this and other healthy activity. In our family we always discouraged participation in local sporting clubs or other activities, but in all these things parents have to make informed decisions, seeking to involve the children in the decision-making process, so that they understand and accept the outcome. For many, the demands of homework and the time needed for the readings, youth circle and other ecclesial activities will deter anybody from joining in local clubs.

How about higher education? Higher education can provide opportunities to gain qualifications that enhance a person's development and prospects. If our children have been firmly rooted in the life in Christ and have strong friendships in the Brotherhood, they will want to go to universities where they are close to a good ecclesia and other young people who will provide the right kind of support. Some parents try to make sure their children attend a university close to home, so they can stay at home. But if going away is needed, it need not be a disaster if we have laid good foundations and if our children can be anchored into an ecclesia. Think of Daniel.

Many of our young people grow very well in their faith and spiritual experience while away at university.

Conclusion

We have ranged over a number of issues in this article. The fundamental thesis is that we have to do everything by our example, conversation and behaviour to encourage our children to see the Truth as the centre of their lives and the priority in all things. For this reason, academic success or failure will be less important to us than the development of a positive attitude to the Truth and a living faith. If we "seek . . . first the kingdom of God" in all aspects of our family lives, we have a ready source of Divine guidance to help us make wise choices. If we do this, our children will gain from their educational opportunities, using the knowledge, understanding and skills they gain to good advantage in the service of the Lord, as they mature and assume full responsibility for their lives. They need our love and support. The best we can give is that founded on the rocklike values of the Kingdom of God.

Home schooling— what, how and why?

Home schooling has been popular in North America and Canada for some time, and also has its advocates in Australia. In the UK it is still very much a minority alternative to the standard educational system, but one which does seem to be growing in popularity, both in the Brotherhood and outside. John and Sarah Marshall (Halifax Balmoral Place, UK) provide an introduction to the subject.

WHEN FIRST confronted with the idea of home schooling, I felt quite overwhelmed. This was not the case for Sarah, as she had been investigating this opportunity for a while, as our concern for our daughter Abigail's education was growing. I can almost hear myself now: "Wait a minute, you can't do that—can you? What about . . . ?". Then there was a surge of questions that engulfed me as I tried to come to terms with this new idea.

Sarah had answers to a good many of them, but I admit I was fairly sceptical as to whether this would be good for the children and the family as a whole. However, six years on, and the questions and doubts have been replaced—completely—as we watch our children develop day by day as they are educated at home.

Is it legal?

There have been a surprisingly large number of brothers and sisters and friends who have asked, "Is it legal? Are you sure you are allowed to do this? I thought that the law stated you had to send your children to school; how come you don't?", etc. One thing many parents appear to be oblivious to is the fact that *they* (as parents) are responsible for ensuring that their children are educated; sending them to school is only part of what the law says.

Section 7 of the UK Education Act (1996) details the responsibility of the parents for securing their children's education. It states:

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient, full-time education suitable to—
 a) his/her age, ability and aptitude and
 b) any special educational needs he/she may have
 either by regular attendance at school or otherwise" (our italics).

Clearly there is the opportunity to opt out of the 'school' bit and complete the educating bit elsewhere.

What do you teach?

As we have seen, the law makes no reference to what must be taught, so there is no compulsion to follow a syllabus or the National Curriculum. There is no legislation that dictates that a parent has to be a qualified teacher to be able to educate their children at home. There is additionally no pressure to follow a set timetable or a fixed style or method of teaching. This allows the educating to be completed at times and in ways tailored precisely to what your children need. Not all children are the same, and we all learn at different rates. Home educating brings the freedom and variety (as much as the family are able and would like) to enable a rich and fulfilled learning environment. This is definitely enriched even further when a parent is willingly involved in the 'teaching' bit.

Materials, teaching aids, etc.

It may appear a little daunting thinking about the 'how' of teaching your children. I was surprised at the amount of suitable educational material there is available for a home-based education. There is a vast array of data, information and ideas available. We have found the Web to be a very good source, with a wide range of good material, but there is also much to be found in magazines, on CDs and DVDs, not forgetting the local library.

How do you start home schooling?

There is not sufficient space in this article to deal with this aspect of the subject in a meaningful way. Should you be thinking of investigating the opportunity of home educating your children then please see the information below regarding support. Plenty of information and support is available.

Support

Educating your children at home is much more popular in the US, Canada, and Australia than in the UK. However, the last twenty years have seen a steady increase in the number of families wishing to home school in the UK. This is true both within the Brotherhood and outside. Along with this rise in home educating there has also been a rise in the number of support groups available. Although there are others, the two we have been involved with are:

Christadelphian Home Schooling. This group has a website (www.christadelphianschooling.co.uk) that offers a range of practical and spiritual advice, contact details of Christadelphian families who educate at home, and a variety of ideas. This is described as a "site . . . for Christadelphians who home-school or are interested in finding out more about Christadelphian schooling". An annual gathering for those interested to share fellowship and their experiences is organised.

Education Otherwise (EO). This is described as "a self-help organisation for families practising or contemplating home-based education. It has around 3,000 subscribers and a network of over 70 voluntary local contacts spread over the country who are usually willing to give personal support to the members in their area. These local groups are active in many areas and organise their own meetings, visits and activities". Contact can be made through the website, www.education-otherwise.org.

Educational achievements

Our personal experience has been home schooling for the 7 to 12 age group (Key Stage 1 up to Key Stage 3). Other families within the Brotherhood have come to home schooling at a later age range than us and have successfully completed GCSEs with good results. Again, although this cannot be covered within this article, there are a number of different ways to approach this, and advice can be sought from the contacts detailed above.

A few years ago, while travelling on a train to a meeting for work, I engaged in a little 'small talk' with the mature lady I was sat next to. During the journey she asked, "Are the children looking forward to the school holidays?". It was at that stage that I 'admitted' that we were home educating our two and that they didn't really follow precisely the same routine of term time. The lady broke into an enormous smile and was delighted to be able to tell me that she had not

come across anyone of my generation who was doing this, for she had done exactly the same for her youngest son. She had home educated him from the age of 7 to 14, at which time he wished to return to mainstream schooling. He went on to pass his GCSEs and 'A' Levels, and had then gone on to University to study law.

When I was about to get off the train, the lady looked up and said, "Even though it is hard work, your children will benefit so much, and they will love it; keep it up, and all the very best". Needless to say she was convinced of the merits of home education, and so was her son! You will find that many who have tried home schooling for themselves will take a similar positive view, although this is not universally the case.

Why home school?

There is a myriad of reasons why parents may choose to give their children a home-based education. From the outset of our family's adventure into home education we have not tried to highlight the failure of the educational system or individuals within it, nor have we sought to apportion blame, an attitude we will try to continue to maintain. Rather, we believe that the benefits speak for themselves. Here are three:

- 1 You are together as a family more, which means the children are under the influence of someone who (even though prone to failure) is trying to be Christlike and to aspire to heavenly things.
- 2 Other than the Almighty, who loves and cares for our children more than we do? There is so much benefit for the children to grow up in an environment where one of the parents is an enthusiastic teacher (not necessarily a qualified one). When we look back to our own education we find that the subjects taught by someone who was passionate, and who conveyed that through the way they taught (both

in terms of method and style), often were the ones that were (consequently) easier to understand. It is worthwhile trying to replicate that enthusiasm and understanding. When I look back to my schooling, the subject that I remember more than any of the others is 'O' level Accounts. Old Mr Lake (the teacher) was a little eccentric, but he knew his stuff, and he was incredibly enthusiastic to the point that it was contagious. There were just six of us in the class, and many lessons included lengthy bouts of infectious laughter to the point of tears, even though we were trying to grasp the concepts of double-entry bookkeeping, credits and debits, balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, etc. I think there was a 100% pass rate, and all of this condensed into one double lesson (one hour) a week for a school year!

- 3 Your children benefit from more teacher-to-pupil time. No longer is there a need for them to take their place in a group of up to thirty other children, all rightly needing their own share of the teacher's time. Even if you have a large family, the ratio would be only 1 to 4, 5 or 6.

Children are a heritage from the Lord (Ps. 127:3), a gift from God to us to bring up as a part of His family. The norm within the world is to ship them off to school so that they can be educated to 'make it in the world'; but then as parents we can on occasion fail to help them 'make it into the Kingdom'. The decision to home school, as with all major decisions in life, should take time, with prayerful consideration being given to all the issues for this life-changing event. Educating children at home takes effort and energy, and inevitably has its ups and downs, but our experience of home schooling (along with that of many others) has been very rewarding, both for the children and for the family.

Undoubtedly some parents find adult company more enjoyable than that of their children. Spilled milk, dropped food and sticky hands can become an irritant to parents. The jumpiness of children and their excited chatter may grind at times on some temperaments. But even when little, some of the annoying traits are offset by the unrestrained and often undeserved love which a child gives to his parents. Furthermore, it is a duty before God to teach them, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This can only be done by spending time with them. When this is done effectively, later years normally bring great satisfaction as one looks at children grown to adults in the Lord. As the Lord sees the results of the travail of his soul and is satisfied thereby, so parents can look forward to a similar joy. Surely the last thing they should do is shun the company of their children for their own pleasure and in so doing sacrifice them to the idols of the flesh.

Don Styles, *Family Life in the Lord*, p. 159