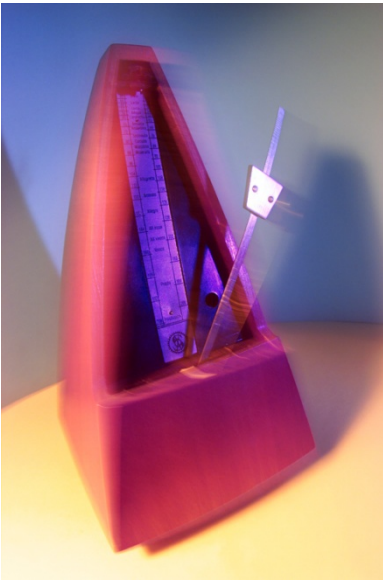


Here we go again!

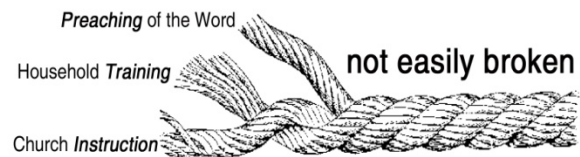
From the desk of Pastor Donovan



The beginning of another education year is upon us; too soon for some, not soon enough for others. As the people of God, the rhythm of our lives is most fundamentally set to a beat established by God at creation; the seven-day Sabbath rhythm. To that steady beat, we overlay more protracted rhythms in life; most notably, that of the school year. In many ways, the seasons of life can be marked off by changes in our relationship to the school year.

As important as the rhythm of the education year is, and as natural as it feels, it is and ever will remain a secondary rhythm. It is intended to be subordinate to, even as it enhances and reinforces aspects of, the Sabbath rhythm by which we live and move before the face of God. In particular, the rhythm of the education year is to assist Christian parents in training up covenant children in the fear and instruction of the Lord – a responsibility that continues day after day, week after week, without interruption.

I have reminded you at the beginning of each education year about three means God established for training up our covenant children.



The primary means God has given are those by which He has promised to both create and nurture faith His covenant people of all ages. The privilege of hearing the *gospel preached* and *displayed in the sacraments* is unparalleled in the life of God's people. These *means of grace* are preeminent in the Christian life and most closely tied to the Sabbath rhythm.

In response to the promise of God (the seal) of baptism, *believing parents acknowledge that their children are entrusted to them by God and promise to raise them in accord with His purposes.* Beginning with the fear of the Lord, we are to direct our children to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, and to equip them to rightly apply the Word of God in their lives. To aid us in fulfilling God's purpose and our promise, we may certainly recruit the assistance of others. During the week parents may find assistance at Calvin Christian School (education year rhythm), or elsewhere, but ultimately they are responsible for the content and character of the training their children receive (Sabbath rhythm).

Under the direction and oversight of the elders, *the church provides assistance to parents in teaching covenant youth the Word of God.* The church – many members bound together in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit – is equipped with diverse gifts intended for use by individuals for the benefit of the whole. Therefore, all congregants respond to the promise of God in baptism by promising to receive all covenant children in love, to pray for them, to help care for their instruction in the faith, and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers. This ongoing duty (Sabbath rhythm) has been accommodated to the educational rhythm (September through May) only for the sake of those do in fact give of their time and talents in the instruction of our covenant youth in Sunday School and Catechism.

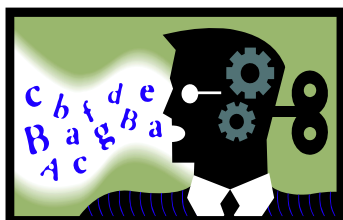
To this threefold strand, I want to supply a three-fold context that helps inform why church instruction is patterned the way that it is.

Dorothy Sayers, in her essay “The Lost Tools of Learning” identified three stages of childhood development that help orient our approach to instruction: “parrot, pert, and poet”.



In the “**parrot**” stage (~ ages 4-9) children delight in the accomplishment of memorization. They do so almost effortlessly, much to our chagrin at times! They do not always understand what they are memorizing, nor do they need to. Whatever they memorize serves as building blocks for use in the following stages. During this stage we want our covenant children primed with Bible stories and key doctrines (Heidelberg Catechism questions and answers) that will bear fruit in the future.

In the “**pert**” stage (~ ages 9-12) children begin to work with the raw data they have memorized. Their analysis and the questions they raise will most often be simple and incomplete. Nevertheless, they reveal that children are trying to make sense for themselves of things they have been taught. In addition to continued memory work (much of which is review) church educators encourage more in-class participation that promotes understanding. Parents must be prepared to give answers to their children’s questions. What better reason to be students of the Bible and our confessions that faithfully summarize it.



In the “**poet**” stage (beginning ~ ages 12-14 and continuing) youth begin to recognize that reality is greater than what their senses reveal. They begin to make connections between revealed truths they have learned and to make application to their lives. They begin to express themselves and what they have learned in a way that reveals not only understanding but also agreement with truth and assurance of faith in the Truth, Jesus Christ. Catechists work hard to help our youth give voice to that which they know and, Lord willing, believe.

2009 – 2010 Curriculum: Major components

- **Elementary** grades (3 year olds – 5th grade) – “**parrot**” - *Great Commissions Publications’* Bible curriculum along with memorization of some key Heidelberg Catechism questions and answers.
- **6th graders** – “**pert**” – *A Beginning Course in the Compendium of Reformed Doctrine*, by Peter Y. De Jong and John R. Sittema. This curriculum gives the 6th graders a survey of Reformed doctrine that introduces them to the catechism they will study in depth for the next four years. They continue to integrate memorization of some of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- **7th – 10th graders** – “**pert**” to “**poet**” – the Heidelberg Catechism, working through the book *I Belong* (Volumes I and II) twice over the course of four years.
- **11th graders** – “**poet**” – the *Canons of Dort* and the *Belgic Confession* as well as review memorized key Heidelberg Catechism questions and answers. They use the books *But for the Grace of God*, by Cornelis P. Venema and *Everything in Christ*, by Clarence Stam.
- **12th graders** – “**poet**” – *biblical apologetics*: how God requires and equips His people to defend and commend the faith – the gospel of Jesus Christ:.. They read, consider, and discuss *The Battle Belongs to the LORD: The Power of Scripture for Defending Our Faith*. Having been catechized in the faith, these young men and women will be enabled to better meet the challenges awaiting them in their college years and beyond.