

1) Conception: Gifts of God and sources of joy.

Commitment: Enjoy and be grateful for them!

In Luke, the angel promises Zechariah and Elizabeth that their child will bring them “joy and gladness” (Lk 1:14).

Comenius states that children are dearer than “gold and silver, than pearls and gems.”

Reflection: When have you experienced joy or delight around or with children or youth? What examples come to your mind?

2) Conception: Fully human and made in the image of God.

Commitment: Treat them with dignity and respect!

...adults are to treat children, like all people, with dignity and respect. Genesis 1:27 states that God made humankind, male and female, in God’s image. It follows that children, like adults, possess the fullness of humanity.

Reflection: Who or what inspires us to see all children as fully human?

3) Conception: Vulnerable orphans, neighbours, and strangers.

Commitment: Provide for, protect, and seek justice for children (not just your own children but all children in need)!

Deuteronomy 10:18, God is a God “who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.”

Christians around the world are outspoken advocates for children’s rights and political policies that protect children and families.

Reflection: What stories of compassion for children do you tell in your family or church? What institutions or initiatives do you admire? Consider telling these stories of authentic service especially to children and youth in your midst.

4) Conception: Developing beings who need instruction and guidance.

Commitment: Instruct, guide, and bring them up in the faith, helping them to love God and the neighbour!

Deuteronomy 6:5-7: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 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.”

...faith formation is a cooperative and intergenerational task involving home, congregation, and the wider church. We cannot “out-source” or “in-source” this task. We have to do it together.

Reflection: As you think about the spiritual formation of children, what practices helped deepen your own faith as you grew up? Which ones are helping to deepen the faith of children in your midst?

5) Conception: Sinful creatures and social agents with growing moral capacities and responsibilities.

Commitment: Model for them compassion and accountability, and cultivate with them practices of mutual confession, forgiveness, and renewal!

The view of children as sinful is based on interpretations of several biblical texts. For example, Genesis states that every inclination of the human heart is “evil from youth” (Gen 8:21)

Thus, the language of children as sinful, when used cautiously and with attention to child development, can strengthen our awareness of a child’s growing moral capacities and responsibilities...as well as the lifelong importance of forgiving ourselves and others.

Reflection: As you think about your relationships with children, how have you helped them develop responsibility and the language for confession and forgiveness (of self and others)?

6) Conception: Models of faith and endowed with particular strengths, gifts, and talents to contribute to the common good now and in the future.

Commitment: Listen to and learn from them! Honour their contributions! Provide them with an education!

From a biblical perspective, we are to listen to and learn from them, honour their current relationship with God and their contributions...so that they can continue to cultivate their gifts and talents and contribute to the common good, both now and in the future.

All three synoptic gospels give an account of Jesus welcoming and blessing little children. (See Mk 10:13-16; cf. Lk 18:15-17; Mt 19:13-15; also Mt 18:2-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48.) The Bible also proclaims that children are Spirit-filled. God’s is already working in children and young people.

Reflection: Can you add insights from your own experience about the strengths, gifts, and contributions of children?