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Examining the role of the church in the community

Tony Sanders

I recently received a letter from Communities in Schools of Davidson County. I was interested but not surprised by a statistic that shows many of our children end up in the juvenile system by age 12.

As I continued to read the letter, something hit me like a bolt of lightning. Many children have parents who are unable or unwilling to supervise them properly.

There, my friend, is the problem in both the church and the community. The church is the institution that is supposed to make a positive difference in and around the community. But if the church were to be frank, it would admit that the situation inside its walls is no different than what is found in the community. No matter the economics, the scourge of drugs and the problems of peer pressure, the bottom line for our children is that parents for one reason or another will not get involved with their children.

This problem has always persisted, but never has it seemed to be so common as it is today. Why hasn't society developed a plan to fix this problem? And, closer to the answer, how can we seriously address the plight our children face without placing equal emphasis on the parenting problem?

We at Greater Faith Christian Church developed an afternoon tutorial program a few years ago. We asked members who were knowledgeable to volunteer their services. Then, we had 40 to 60 children involved in that program. Many of the children in the church's program improved their grades and their behavior. With that experience, I can say the problem with today's children seems to stem from a lack of involvement by parents.

I often wonder if there have been steps taken to find the root cause of such behavior. If we are to change these horrible trends, there must be a sound way to analyze the psychological reasons behind it. We can't continue to patch the problem. We must truly fix it.

How times have changed in the last three decades. When I was a child, an 83-year-old woman decided she would fulfill the request of a dying woman, agreeing to raise six children. She could neither read nor write, but each day she asked to see the children's homework. She asked them to explain to her what all of it meant.

I remember one day in particular when she asked my baby sister to read her lesson. Then, my sister wasn't the best reader, and she had a habit of making up a word whenever she came to a word she couldn't read. My grandmother, being the wise woman she was, would kindly ask my sister to repeat the word again. Though she could not read or write, she was excited about what we had learned each day.

Further "handicapping" her as a parent, she didn't own a car. But on those rare occasions when a teacher requested her presence, I remember that she would put on her Sunday best and ask a relative to take her to school. She cared, and that care showed and made an impression on me and my siblings.

I do not suggest that I have all the answers, but I cannot understand how Grandmother was able to raise six children with such limited understanding of reading and writing. Yet, the parents of our day have 100 times the assets she had but still can't get the job done.

How does a society tell people that their past failures do not have to be passed on to their children? How does one in such a politically charged environment get parents to understand life might be difficult and even unfair but that should never become an excuse to rob them and their children of the possibilities the future holds?

I know many will say we approach such matters with tenderness and love. Of course, love also has opposition.

The church and the community must act as one institution, must share the responsibility to better the human race. There is enough psychological data to rectify such problems if there is only caring to back it up.

My grandmother and millions like her had something that many in today's times seem to lack. She actually cared. I believe we can handle this problem with savvy and diplomacy, but we must find ways to make someone care who's life is now defined by doing the opposite. This dilemma faces both the church and the community. The church and the community must come together. Parents must invest in the future by assisting their children with direction and purpose.

The Rev. Tony Sanders serves as pastor of Greater Faith Christian Church of Lexington.