

Peter and Penny Go Swimming

A Parable

Soon after Peter and Penny were born, their parents began taking them to the local swimming pool every weekend. The parents were enthusiastic swimmers, and they hoped their children would be keen swimmers too.

Of course, Peter and Penny were not allowed to go into the swimming pool itself; they were looked after in a little room right beside the pool. Sometimes they cried because they wanted to stay with their parents, but that wasn't allowed because they might disturb the adult swimmers. Besides, they were too young to understand swimming, and they wouldn't appreciate it fully.

When Peter and Penny were three years old, they were allowed to go to another room just down the hall from the swimming pool. There they heard stories from the Swimmer's Manual, and they coloured pictures of people swimming.

When they were six years old, Peter and Penny went to another big room -- a big room with lots of children. Here they began to get really serious about swimming. For the first 10 or 15 minutes, they were allowed to take off their shoes and socks and splash around in the wading pool. Then they went to classes with other children their own age to learn more about swimming. They were taught by some very dedicated people who loved swimming, but who hardly ever swam themselves any more because they were busy with the children.

By the time Penny and Peter were 13, they had studied the Swimmer's Manual in even more detail and had learned the rules of the swimming pool off by heart: "You shall not run on the deck. You shall not bring flotation devices into the pool area ..." They had also learned about the properties of water, the muscles used in swimming and the various swimming strokes. They had studied great swimmers of the past, including Olympic medal winners. They had heard about Canadian swimmers who went to other countries such as Africa or India to teach swimming, and they had seen slides of groups of African or Indian swimmers standing beside their swimming pools.

On special occasions, Peter and Penny had been allowed to go with their parents into the pool as long as they didn't splash around too much and disturb the other swimmers or bother the life-guard.

At last, Penny and Peter finished swimming school and were allowed to accompany their parents into the swimming pool every week. They tried it a few times. Much to the disappointment of their parents, Peter and Penny had lost interest and preferred to watch television instead.

Questions for discussion with a congregational group or parents

How do you think Peter and Penny interpret and feel about this experience?

Have you ever had an experience of exclusion or a long initiation time in your life? How did it feel? What was its effect on you?

In what ways do you see coming to church with your children to be like taking Peter and Penny to the swimming pool?

How are we treating the children and young adolescents in our congregation?

What are the risks involved in the way we treat the children in our congregation?

What are we doing well? What might we do differently?

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