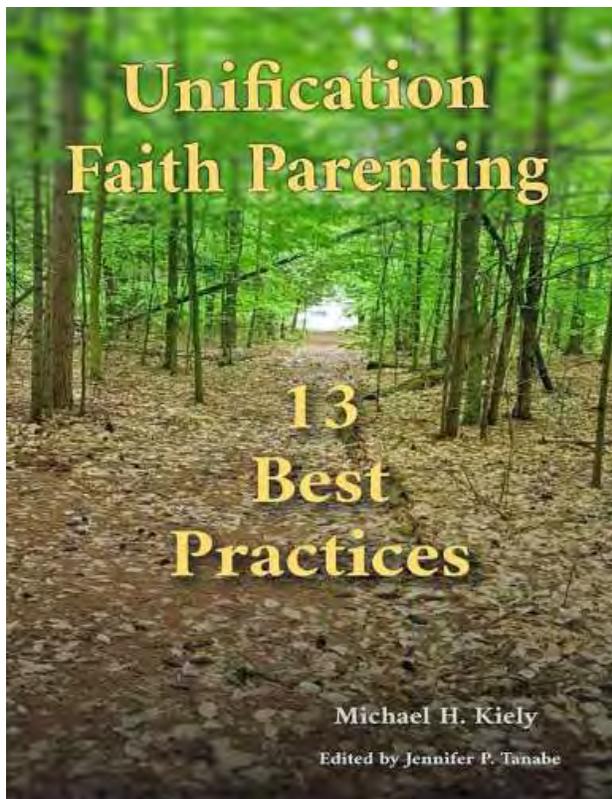


Unification Faith Parenting: Thirteen Best Practices

Jennifer Tanabe
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Unification Faith Parenting: 13 Best Practices, by Michael H. Kiely, a recent publication I edited, is based on his dissertation for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Unification Theological Seminary.

Much more than an academic exercise, it documents the real-life faith parenting experiences of six Unification families, an opportunity for first generation parents and their adult second generation children to share what worked and what didn't in passing on their faith.

Their honest testimonies are fascinating, funny, heartbreaking, and enlightening. They faced practical as well as spiritual challenges, adapted when things went wrong, and celebrated when they experienced success. The understanding gained from their experiences is presented in the form of 13 "best practices":

1. Attend passionately
2. Model attendance with love
3. Read the Word together and translate it
4. Trust in heaven and in original nature
5. Love each other, and love children unconditionally
6. Know and understand them
7. Converse with them
8. Practice heavenly tradition together
9. Pray for them
10. Protect their virginity for the blessing
11. Liberate ancestors and other spirits and bless them
12. Create and shape the environment
13. Keep learning, adapting and trying new things



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While some of these 13 practices apply to parenting in general (such as love each other and love your children unconditionally, know and understand them, converse with them), others apply to faith parenting in all Christian traditions (such as read the Word together, pray for them, trust in heaven), and still others are more specific to the Unification faith although not unknown in other faith traditions (like protect their virginity before marriage, practice heavenly tradition, and liberate spirits of ancestors). Parents of all faiths can benefit from the wisdom and caveats found in these families' stories.

The following is based upon excerpts from his book.

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Love each other and love children unconditionally

In all six families both parents and children testified to the parents' deep conjugal love. "We are very happily blessed to each other," one husband said. One wife spoke of the "strong bond" between herself and her husband, and her son said his parents "really loved each other," and added, "I have always felt my mom really loved my dad. My dad really loves and needs my mom."

Speaking of the impact of their love on their children, parents in three of the six families said their love relationship was a key reason their children maintained their faith in adulthood. One couple said their children told them that "our love as parents for one another was and still is an inspiration for them."

One father said, "When husband and wife are not united, that is the largest detriment to a life of faith." But one of the "most valuable gifts" you can give children is a "loving relationship between Mom and Dad," he said. "It is worthy of intense investment," he added. One mother said that what is "most important (in) raising children is the husband and wife relationship." She said hers and her husband's improving relationship "helped our children to have good relationships and to like church." Another mother emphasized the importance of parental unity "in front of the children," and her husband added that that unity "creates a sphere for the children to live in and feel comfortable and secure," and without it the children's lives are "chaotic," and they don't feel "safe and secure."

Hearing them say this their son responded, "I'm just laughing and smiling here." He related what happened when he and his siblings were growing up if they ever asked their mother a question, did not like the answer, and then went to their father. "It was so clear," he said, that "Oma and Opa were united, and if you ever tried to divide them (in this way), you would get in *big trouble*." Even though sometimes he was just being a "dumb kid," he said, there was really "no way of separating them." There wasn't ever any question about his leaving the faith, he said, because "My parents were happy, and so was I. So, I didn't have any reason to leave all that." He said he trusted them because they were happy and "didn't have any reason to believe that anything wasn't good for me." From his parents' example, he said he came to feel confident that such a marriage was possible for him as well. Having a strong marriage, he said, is "the best thing you can do" for children.

Two other sons in two families said they were inspired by their parents' continual efforts to improve their marriages. As the parents' marriages improved, both sons -- in separate interviews -- said they saw this "reflected" in the family. One of the sons said that as his parent's marriage improved, his own relationship with his parents "became a lot more free and smooth." The other son said his father had told him, "marriage is a living thing, and you have to keep working on it and keep adjusting."

Another young person said that his parents had "changed a lot" over what he remembers of the course of their marriage. He said his parents used to be "stressed out a lot" while he was growing up. "I didn't see my parents loving each other as much as I imagined a loving relationship to be," he said. However, he saw them work hard on their relationship over time -- reading books, attending workshops and doing conditions -- and eventually "became a lot more loving."

Practice heavenly tradition together

Each of the six families reported practicing heavenly traditions in their families. One parent and one child testified to the importance of the traditions in the life of faith of their families. Two families reported modifying their practice because of the struggles of elder children. "Our older son really struggled. So, it was hard for us to maintain an inclusive family environment and also keep our standards clear," one mother explained. "We worked very hard at doing that so that everybody felt connected and appreciated, even though they were making choices that were difficult for us," she said.

At least two young people said the traditions "didn't make sense" to them. "These are all things I had to do and had no understanding of why and no desire to do (them)," one young person wrote. Some parents said, however, that several traditions, such as praying over children on their birthdays and feeding them something delicious during Pledge, made them feel special and were, thus, positive for them, but they considered it wise to be prepared to adjust practices to children's situations. "Creating family traditions surrounding faith is important," one parent said, "and being flexible to adjust these traditions when necessary helps a lot."



Four families volunteered how they celebrated their children's birthdays. They said they prayed over their children. One mother observed, "Through this the children can feel loved by parents and by God. It helped them to think about where they came from." One young person reminisced about the prayer with his parents' hands on his head, "That felt really special ... to have a day in which your parents didn't pray for you but for the hope of what you would do." He said this is one of the images he has in mind when he thinks of his parents. "My parents thanked God for me," he said.

One mother spoke of praying with her husband for her children at 3 a.m. before going to work. "We would look at the situations (that) our children were going through," her husband said, "to try to get some new, very simple, practical advice from God that we could follow that would help our children feel God's love." He said he and his wife were "agents or channels for God" to their children. They said they prayed for "guidance from God how to handle situations." Often ideas came through prayer that "we would not have thought of on our own or from our own family backgrounds," he said. He felt that without prayer together he "could not start the day." His son said his parents prayed for him and his siblings every morning. "I remember waking up one morning and seeing them pray," he said. "I felt really good about it."

Read the word together and translate it

Despite positive experiences with *Hoon Dok Hae* (study of scriptures together, originally for one hour starting at 5 a.m.), resistance to doing it among the six families was universal. Members of five out of the six families characterized it as "boring." Several described it as "difficult." One mother said, "It is hard for everybody to do it together with happy feelings." One young person called it "forced reading" and said it was "just reading stuff to read stuff" that "didn't really make sense." Another young person described it as "a lot of reading and just waiting for it to be over." A third young person said, "Reading out of the textbook for a child was just impossible." In one family the children "made faces." In another, the children whined, "Mom, why do we have to do this?" And in a third the father worried that the practice as it was originally prescribed "caused everyone to be in pain."

One son remembers that to avoid doing *Hoon Dok Hae*, his father allowed him to clean up their new puppy's poop, which he gladly did in order to escape *Hoon Dok Hae*. Another tried consciously to get his parents to talk more in order to read less or none at all. Speaking of the practice, one father said, "We wanted to raise kids who at some point would fall in love with our church, not hate it!"

Converse with them

At the beginning of the *Hoon Dok Hae* tradition, all the families dutifully read from the eight textbooks, but as they encountered the reality of wandering attention and increasing resistance to reading "deep stuff" at five in the morning, families changed the time and reading material and increasingly introduced conversation about spiritual topics and family sharing.

Parents don't need to have all the answers. As one daughter shared, "My parents didn't have all the answers, and they admitted that they didn't have all the answers." Often it is better to allow the young person to try to figure out the answer. As one mother put it, "They can come to conclusions by themselves. Give them the dignity that they can figure this out by themselves. Then they own it much more than if I too strongly suggest what is right." She said that while adults may have a lot of wisdom to share, it is usually wiser to offer advice only when asked. Parents can ask questions and suggest areas for consideration, she said.

Some parents encouraged their children to research issues and develop their own views about them. "They encouraged (me) to develop my own opinions and investigate things for myself," one son said, "whether through Unification media or public." He said he felt there were "no restrictions" in his family, even about non-negotiables. "We were always pretty open," he said. He valued the freedom he had to come to his own conclusions.

Keep learning, adapting and trying new things

In order to cultivate and perfect the previous twelve best practices in the spiritual formation of their children, parents recognized that their faith parenting skills were always a work in progress:

It is a journey. Being in a family in any situation in any faith is a journey. Know you will make mistakes and will not be perfect from the beginning. Have an attitude of constant improvement. Have a fresh attitude and a fresh heart. That is the most important thing.

As the families Dr. Kiely interviewed recognized, faith parenting is a process, a journey. This journey is seldom smooth. It is filled with unexpected twists and turns, as children grow and mature and as their faith community changes. Perhaps the most important "best practice" is the last one: to keep learning, adapting and trying new things, always with a heart of unconditional love. Surely God's love is the bedrock of a life of faith and it is truly unconditional.

Unification Faith Parenting: 13 Best Practices *is available for purchase in paperback or as an eBook.*

Dr. Michael H. Kiely earned an M.Div (1995) and D.Min. (2014) from UTS and an M.A. in journalism from New York University. He was blessed in 1975 to Maria Pascher. They were original foreign missionaries working underground in a Muslim nation. While Unification Faith Parenting is not autobiographical, it was inspired in part by the challenge Maria and he faced rearing their three children of faith in a highly secular and anti-family values culture.

Dr. Jennifer P. Tanabe was born in Scotland and earned both her bachelors and doctoral degrees in psychology from the University of Edinburgh. She moved to the United States as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development. She has served on the faculty and in various administrative and consulting capacities at UTS, and currently teaches a Research Methods course in its D.Min. program.