

The lessons politicians can learn from children

Children are incredible! As I watched my son learn and grow over the early years of his life, I was constantly amazed at how quickly he learned and adapted.

Unfortunately, he would often learn things from me that I'd rather he not remembered. Children learn things that do not come "naturally" to them, and they pick-up these things with unfortunate passion.

There is one thing that I see so many children learning from adults, and it makes me hang my head in shame. Firstly, how about the way in which we treat the women, girl child and stranger?

By stranger, I mean, our sisters and brothers from outside our borders? Our children overhear the conversations adults have and they mimic us. And so, we promote the violent behaviour we see playing itself out in our country.

How did it come to this? Firstly, perhaps it is because we are prone to stereotyping others whilst we resist it when others do that to us. And I am addressing us males primarily here.

Religion and culture have been two aggravating factors which we have hidden behind, and thereby we have propagated patriarchy.

Secondly, and here is the most difficult lesson of all: Forgiveness? It is not so easy.

The scene is all too familiar.

Your child does something she/he's not supposed to do for the umpteenth time in 15 minutes and you give him/her another healthy reprimand – Oops! I nearly said "hiding" – and sit him/her down for a good "talking-to".

Within seconds, the tears have subsided, the smile has returned, and she/he's obviously not hearing a word of the "serious" discussion you are having with him/her.

Later, that evening, your child has just transgressed again but this time you've had enough. A further remonstrance.

Within moments the little person has bounced back as if nothing happened.

In truth, you are still brooding, and your agitation is hitting the red zone. By the time you've put your child to bed the request for a story makes you grind your teeth; possibly counting to 10!

Listen to your reply, "Why should I read you a story? You've been naughty all day! It's not funny. Do you think it's funny? Then what are you smiling about? You better clean up your act. Now sleep!"

Forgetful? – Maybe. Forgiveness? Definitely! I realised that whilst I was still smarting about my boy's actions, he had already moved on to something else.

My first reaction inevitably was: "Will he ever learn? Will he ever learn his lesson?" Almost immediately, it occurred to me that he was just a little boy. Here's the rub, he has a short memory. He has forgotten.

He did not move on because he was indifferent. His concern was not whether I'm still angry – or whether I still love him – or if I'll ever forgive him.

My son had already forgiven me for my anger, and he assumed that I have done the same for him. He didn't fret over who was "right" or who was "wrong" – he just forgave and moved on to the next bit of joy that life offered him.

If only us adults can learn from them. Dare I suggest that our municipal leadership should harbour the same forgiving spirit as a child?

If such an attitude is truly embraced – where cheap political point-scoring is not the issue – we would possibly live in a city that would be unrecognisable from what it is today – in a positive way.

The words: "If only there was forgiveness" admittedly, come to mind.

Holding a grudge is something that does not come naturally to a child.

Grudge-holding is a learned behaviour by children imitating us. It is a legacy that we parents hand down to our children whether we know it or not.

I perpetually reminded my son that a "grudge" is a place one parks a motor car.

I pray that our municipal city leaders will soon realise the necessity of parking their differences for the sake of all our citizens.

Therefore, we should take a lesson from our children. We need to re-learn how to forgive.

Maybe children just live the heart of God's Gospel better than adults do.

In closing,

There is a time for serving, and this is that time.

There is a time for sharing, and this is that time.

There is a time for listening, and this is that time.

There is a time for loving, and this is that time.

There is a time for forgiving, and this is that time.

Edward Daniels, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Port Elizabeth