

**Children's Ministry :
If It Does Not Kill
You It Can Only
Make You Stronger**

by

Darrell Fraley

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Only Make You Stronger**

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Foreword

After 12 years as a children's pastor, serving in four mega-churches, working as a consultant with Cook Communications Ministries, conducting training for children's pastors through the International Network of Children's Ministry, teaching family ministry at George Fox Seminary, and giving oversight to a non-profit children's ministry organization, I am continually humbled by how much I do not know.

We have heard over the past decade that knowledge is power, but in ministry, knowledge is responsibility, and truth is power. What we do with knowledge and truth is of greater importance than merely engaging in the process of information collection. By acting upon knowledge and truth one exercises obedience, the key benchmark in living the Christian life.

In writing this book I feel compelled to share knowledge as it applies to vocational children's ministry and discuss principles of truth that can serve as both guardrails and mileposts to those in what can often be a very isolated, lonely and underappreciated profession.

I wish someone would have suggested a book like this to me when I began as a children's pastor. Resources in children's ministry often focus on craft ideas, games,

**"And you
shall know
the truth,
and the
truth shall
make you
free."
John 8:32**

curricula or music. All of these are extremely valuable, but a gap exists when it comes to books on leading a children's ministry. This book is an attempt to narrow that gap.

Another reason that I wrote this book is that when I speak at conferences for children's ministry leaders, I always receive the most favorable responses when I talk from my heart about topics that reflect day-to-day on-the-job experiences that are common to everyone, but seldom discussed. I have

"If your journey is guided by truth, you'll always know that your destination will be the right place."

tried to include some of those topics in this book.

Finally, truth stands any test of time. We live in an age of change: approaches to ministry must adjust daily. Ministry pundits abound, advising anyone who will listen and heed their words. But does this contemporary wisdom find its basis in truth? We need information for children's ministry can be a complex endeavor; but everything must be measured by truth as revealed in the Word and illuminated by the Spirit through obedient, faithful servants.

I hope you find this book educational, funny, encouraging, and all the things that make a book enjoyable. But above all, may you find it truthfully relevant to your ministry.

Darrell Fraley

Darrell Fraley (m.a.) is family ministry pastor at Overlake Christian Church in Seattle, Washington. Darrell is married and has two children. The most important ministry he has is to his family.

Other books by Darrell include:

Personnel Development System

Family - Friendly Ministry

Principles of a Purpose - Centered Children's Ministry

Growing Spiritual Sensitivity in Your Family

Dedicated to the monkeys - Nathan and Natalie.

What others are saying about this book -

"This book is full of practical examples and compelling information on the state of the child's life in today's society. It focuses on the Biblical basics and provides creative ideas that will enrich your children's ministry."

**Maxine Waldman
Executive Director - Caribbean Children's Ministry
Allentown, PA**

"Darrell brings a wealth of experience, a love for the Lord, and infectious enthusiasm to children's ministry. A must read for all children's ministry leaders. I have had the privilege to work with Darrell and have seen him live out these truths in ministry and in his own personal life. His creative genius and heartfelt passion for children's ministry can be felt throughout this book."

**Dr. Jonathan D. Burnham
Sr. Pastor - Hope Church
President - Burnham Ministries International
Cincinnati, OH**

"All of this is grounded in the Word of God and delivered with an obvious passion to see leaders in children's ministry grow. Thanks Darrell."

**Rick Hubbard
Children's Pastor - Christ Fellowship
Palm Beach Gardens, FLA**

"Every children's ministry leader should be required to read this book. Once again Darrell has written something that both educates and encourages children's ministry leaders to fearlessly tackle common children's ministry challenges."

**Jessica Feammelli
Early Childhood Director - Overlake Christian Church
Seattle, WA**

"An excellent resource for anyone in children's ministry, whether you're a seasoned professional or just getting started. Darrell addresses the key issues that children's pastors struggle with most, and provides realistic proven strategies and insights for creating a successful ministry to the kids and families of today's church."

**David Furnstahl
Children's Pastor - Eastside Foursquare Church
Bothell, WA**

"You cannot afford to ignore this book! It will shake and shape your ATTITUDE and ACTIONS toward effective children's ministry leadership in the 21st century. Darrell's insightful analysis of children's ministry in a highly secular and rapidly changing world is a clarion call. This book will become a key resource for leaders who want to make a difference."

**Rick Wulfesteig
National Minister of C.E. - International Church of the
Foursquare Gospel
Los Angeles, CA**

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Introduction

Every church is different - yet in some ways every church is the same. Let me explain. Every church I have ever served as a children's pastor has had a tremendous problem recruiting children's volunteers. Two of the four paid their Sunday school teachers of infant through three year olds. At times all four had to post numerous "class closed" signs because of the vacuum of volunteers to work with the kids. In all four churches, the pastors spoke the same words to me, verbatim: "You've got to get this recruiting problem fixed."

"Disorganization is the first signal that apathy exists, and chaos is certain proof."

Make no mistake: recruiting is the number one priority for every children's ministry leader. So how did I turn the ship around and succeed at recruiting when the situation seemed abysmal? It wasn't easy after the 1st and 2nd churches, however, I did see a pattern and I implemented a specific prescription in the third church that proved I had learned a valuable lesson. I committed myself unswervingly to a strategy that had worked before but that I had not systematized until my start at the third church. Without oversimplifying or trying to suggest that this system is guaranteed, it has proven to be workable, and the results have been predictably positive. Here goes:

1. *Implement a classroom management plan with expectations that both volunteers and students can count on.* Then, follow through on those expectations. If you set the behavioral standards low in a group, you will reach them every time. If you set them high, the expectations may take time to reach, but it will be worth it to both the leader and the children. This step is important because no volunteer wants to be thrown into a chaotic, uncontrollable environment. Very simply, our classroom rules are as follows:

- ≈ each person will be treated with respect and dignity
- ≈ during prayer heads are bowed, eyes are closed, and mouths are quiet
- ≈ the teacher is the boss
- ≈ cooperation, sharing, helpfulness and good attitudes characterize our conduct
- ≈ only one warning will be given by the teacher
- ≈ each student is responsible for his/her own behavior

If you don't begin the recruiting process by addressing classroom management issues, you will only be treating the symptoms of your problem and not the core issue. Begin with a classroom management plan.

2. *Evaluate teaching resources.*

What curricula is being used? Does the curricula support the belief system of the church? In one situation I inherited a Sunday school curricula that significantly differed from the basic

doctrine of that church. It was used because the previous children's pastor had come from the traditions and beliefs reflected in that curricula, and though she worked at a church with a differing viewpoint from the curricula, she continued to use it because she differed with her employer's doctrinal position on several important points. Needless to say, this caused some disagreements among volunteers and ultimately produced divisiveness and problems because of its use.

In another situation, I found myself in a mess because the church had written its own curricula, most of which had been organized, catalogued and produced by several teachers in the children's ministry. I do not have words to describe how utterly horrible that curricula was. Essentially, it was unusable by anyone other than the person who had created it. It did not follow a scope or sequence, or even the Bible, for that matter. It was a collection of confusion, resembling a pile of used baling wire. Need I say more? I think you've got the picture.

"The healthy growth of any organization can be ascertained by the quality of individuals that it recruits and retains."

“Volunteers in the 21st century expect access to the best resources available.”

Implementing Bible-centered curricula that teaches volunteers how to use it as they go along was something that had to be done, but could it be done? Yes it could, and I

have the scars to prove it. Was it hard? Yes. Was it worth the difficulty to implement? Yes. Good, usable curricula that accurately represents the Bible is the anchor to any children's ministry. Your curricula decision is the single greatest indicator of your own commitment to develop volunteers. If you don't provide quality curricula resources you will frustrate and lose recruits. Needless to say, you won't attract new recruits either if quality resources are not in place.

3. Recruit one-on-one though personal contact by phone. I have often wished there was a magic wand to wave or some pixie dust to blow onto people that would cause them to respond to the urgency we have in ministering to kids. Unfortunately, there is not. In fact, the only thing that really works is day-in, day-out, people-to-people contact, with a prayerful verbal challenge to be involved.

Most of the time people at my church find a way to avoid me, because they know my *modus operandi*. Everyone is fair game to be recruited as a volunteer among the kids. And even when I ask someone to be involved, and they tell me “No,” that just means “not today,” but tomorrow is a new day, and I may repeat the invitation the next time I bump into that person. Persistence, saturation, and prayer are the key ingredients to non-stop recruiting.

The final element is that you, as a children's ministry leader, have to believe with all your heart, soul and strength, that volunteering in children's ministry will provide for that person a sense of significance and spiritual fulfillment that can only be obtained by being with children. I know this is true for me, and I have seen it bear out in the lives of others. So why do we soft-sell something that is so potentially life-changing for the people at our church? I'm afraid to admit that it is because we really don't believe it. You and I have to change our perception; then recruiting can become a key to spiritual formation and growth in people's lives.

“Recruiting is the toughest job in children's ministry. It is also the most rewarding job in children's ministry.”

To summarize -

Step one: implement and follow through on a management plan at every level of your children's ministry. Standardize behavioral expectations.

"The key survival skill for any children's pastor is the ability to recruit."

Step two: evaluate teaching resources. Be sure your selection is aligned with God's Word and consistent with the doctrinal position of your church. It should also teach volunteers how to use it as they go along.

Step three: recruit person-to-person, one-by-one. Persevere, saturate your niche and pray. Quit thinking about it; just get on with it.

Why begin this book with an introduction devoted to recruiting? Because, at the center of a children's ministry leader's make-up must be an ability, or at the very least, a capacity, to recruit.

This is the universal quality of an effective, long-term children's ministry leader. Can recruiting be a learned skill? Yes. But an inbred ability, combined with learned skills and raw motivation, will grease the strategy for better productivity.

CHAPTER 1

A Formula For Relevant Ministry To Kids

All my life I have resisted believing in “one-size-fits-all” formulas, because I don’t think life offers those kinds of neatly packaged guarantees. I do, however, believe in general principles. In children’s ministry I believe there are a few basic principles that transfer across the board regardless of denomination, geographical location, or size of the congregation.

**“Truth,
Music,
Humor.”**

In this chapter I will present a few of these corollary principles, generally enough so as to appeal to the widest readership possible, but at the same time adding specific suggestions that can be used as strategies to implement these general principles.

Children’s ministry, in any church, is responsible for the broadest developmental range of people in our society. Within a twelve-year span, ministry must be able to meet the needs of those who cannot speak or take care of themselves, yet also hold an appeal for sophisticated preteen age people, fluent in technology and computers, CD players, cell phones, palm pilots and Micro Lego’s. What corollary principles can possibly be applied to people of such wide-ranging intelligence capacity and interests? There are three components which can span the vast twelve-year diversity in children’s ministry: *truth, music and humor*. These three components are the

standard for communicating with people of our culture at any age, but especially with children.

Unfortunately, throughout history the church, as an institutional structure, has had difficulty

“It doesn’t matter which side of the horse you fall off, as long as you’re off, you’re out of the race .”

connecting timeless truth to rapidly changing culture. Consequently, churches often make one of two mistakes. We either spend all of our time and energy protecting and defending the truth that is under constant attack from a radical, vocal fringe of culture, or we compromise truth so as to be accepted by that radical, vocal fringe. In either case we, the church, lose.

Churches that can find a well-thought balance, that can evolve and change with culture, yet not compromise truth on the altar of public acceptance, are surprisingly effective in ministry today. Specifically, churches that are culturally relevant at every level seem to have a grasp on the importance of the three components this chapter is about - *truth, music, humor*.

It is highly incumbent upon children’s ministry leaders to value these three components and use them to infuse the ministry; otherwise the church will lose its youngest constituents. Let’s look at each of the three components separately.

Truth

Truth does not change over time. Rather, truth is the standard by which the eras of history are judged. Truth is a constant. Therefore, as truth is taught to children and youth it holds the greatest propensity for preparing them for both life on earth and eternal life.

The single most damaging influence against the concept of truth in our culture is postmodernism. Postmodernism protests the idea that anything can be absolute. For instance, you may have heard someone in conversation say, "What you believe is *your* truth, and what I believe is *my* truth." A generation ago the same statement would have been phrased in this way: "What you believe is your *opinion*, and what I believe is my *opinion*." The difference is that a postmodernist, uses the words "truth" and "opinion" interchangeably.

Postmodernism redefines truth as subjective personal experience or belief. With this idea, truth is something which is unnecessary to prove or to be objectively evaluated.

**"Pilate said
to Jesus,
'What is
truth?'"**

Truth in a postmodernist mindset is based on how you feel about something and on your own personal, preferential interpretation. Therefore, by nature truth based on your experience and feelings is different from truth based on my experience and feelings. Another word that defines the postmodern view or interpretation of truth is *relativism*. For the postmodernist truth is viewed through the

interpretive lens of feelings and personal experience. Instead of truth being the lens which interprets feelings and personal experiences.

James Sire has identified several characteristics of postmodern thought:

- 1. The first question postmodernism addresses is not what is there or how we know what is there, but how language functions to construct meaning itself.**
- 2. The truth about reality itself is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories.**
- 3. All narratives mask a play for power. Any one narrative (such as the Bible) used as a metanarrative is oppressive.**
- 4. Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.**
- 5. Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be.**
- 6. The cutting edge of culture is literary theory. When God dies, both the substance and value of everything else dies with it.**

The acknowledgement of the death of God is the beginning of postmodern wisdom. It is also the end of postmodern wisdom.

The Universe Next Door, James Sire, Intervarsity Press 1997

Postmodernism has attempted to redefine truth as we have known it. Postmodernism says that epistemology (the study of knowledge) and ethics (the study of moral behavior) and metaphysics (the study of being), are irrelevant to what is real, and they are unimportant to the ultimate functioning of society. Here are a few misconceptions that have crept into the thinking of children and families under our ministries, because of the influence of postmodernism.

Family relationships are disposable

Life-long marital commitments have been jettisoned for any and every thinkable reason, and the children of those families have paid the price. "Today, only 50% of children in the U.S. will spend their entire childhood in an intact family." (p. 58, *Index of Cultural Indicators*, Bill Bennett) The rate at which church families break up is only slightly less than the break-up rate of families in society as a whole.

Scripture is a collection of unimportant, unrelated stories that contain no absolute truth or moral imperatives superior to those expressed by any other religion or social movement. Instead, the will of the people determine social law and morality

The ten commandments have become the ten suggestions. In a zealous effort to separate church and state, our lobbyists and legislators have instead mistakenly overreacted and separated the state from morality. Our cultural roots are most obviously traced to Judeo-Christian moral law.

" Respecting and accepting people of different faiths is not the same as synchronistically fusing their views with Christianity."

However, multicultural, pluralistic and political influences have demanded that all religions and metaphysical concerns be elevated to a status of equal acceptance. This has left our nation without a compass to guide moral absolutes in

decision-making, and has reduced “doing the right thing” to taking surveys and gathering public opinion polls. This has had a profound impact on today’s youth culture. Distrust, suspicion and cynicism are common attitudes among children and youth, a predictable consequence when absolute moral truth is no longer accepted as the standard for conduct.

Adherence to moral absolutes is unnecessary

For those who believe in moral law, character is simply the behavioral outcome of a person who holds to the existence of moral truth as an absolute. If moral truth is not absolute, then character does not matter and can therefore be forfeited at no

“Listen to me: I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinski.”

perceivable loss to one’s reputation or convenience. I can remember viewing sound bites on the evening news of President Clinton testifying before the grand jury regarding the Lewinski affair. With the media saturating television 24/7 with details of the sordid mess, and people everywhere discussing it, my nine-year-old son was exposed to language and sexually explicit concepts, and I had little control over it. The look of disgust on his face when talking about the matter indicated that he had the imagination to vaguely understand the issues being broadcast. Ultimately though,

every discussion he and I had on the topic framed the incident in a context of moral absolutes, which then circled back to the core issue. Moral conduct matters to your family, friends and people who count on you. Whether you're a nine-year-old boy or a 53 year-old President of the United States, infidelity, lying and manipulation are sin, and sin is clearly defined in Scripture as any infraction of God's absolute moral truth.

Josh McDowell has identified trends within "Christian" youth culture that indicate that churches are not fulfilling responsibilities in teaching or reinforcing moral absolutes:

- 1. Only one in eleven youth shows that he or she has a consistent, cohesive belief in absolute truth.**
- 2. Fifty percent hold that love, not marriage, makes sexual intercourse right.**
- 3. Forty percent think no one can prove which religion is absolutely true.**
- 4. Fifty percent base their choice in moral matters on feelings and emotions.**

Right from Wrong, Josh McDowell, Word Publishing 1994.

The value of the church worship experience is primarily therapeutic on a human, experiential level.

During the 80s, church movements sprang up everywhere, revitalizing interest in worship services. Many of those movements brought about new freedoms, allowing people to

"If church is all about me, then how does God fit into the picture?"

be more expressive in worship, emphasizing the imminence and closeness of God to His people. Constituents shed traditional worship formalities for more meaningful participation in worship. At the same time all of this was happening, church attendance overall became more irregular. George Barna's research has found that people consider themselves "regular" attenders at church if they are present at a worship service 25 times a year. That's only half of all the weekends in a year! To many people, worship has become a therapeutic experience, with more focus upon themselves and their emotions than upon God. Sporadic attendance has tremendously affected children and youth. To them, church has become somewhere you go if there isn't anything else going on at that time, such as a soccer game, a birthday party or some, other kind of recreation. And for most families, church is only important when a crisis occurs. Attending church has gone from being a discipline of the Christian experience to being a marginal event that you participate in if your spirit needs an emotional uplift. To the post-modernist, God really doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is you, and how you feel. Church worship has been influenced or affected by this thinking, as we have observed many new worship strategies focusing on people and how

they feel, as opposed to helping people connect with God and focus on Him.

Fundamental tenets of postmodernism

- 1. You can never assume that knowledge is proof of anything. There are no basic principles to base anything on.**
 - 2. Knowledge is not necessarily good. For example, knowledge led to the atomic bomb.**
 - 3. You can't find an answer to everything through history or theology.**
 - 4. It is in community - not as individuals - that we operate at the higher level.**
 - 5. Science is not the answer to every problem. Truth is not limited to facts but includes intuition.**
 - 6. Knowledge is not a neutral force in learning; it is biased by its environment.**
 - 7. The world is not necessarily getting better. There are things that can't be fixed.**
- Getting Real, Ken Baugh & Rich Hurst, Navpress, 2000.***

Each of these assumptions has had an enormous effect on how people think, and more importantly upon what they believe.

More than ever before, youth, children and parents need ministry that is established on absolute, moral truth. People crave truth. The Bible is the standard for all such truth.

“What you believe determines the way you behave.”

Here are a few implications of emphasizing truth in your ministry:

- misperceptions will be corrected.
- less importance will be placed upon subjective experiences.
- the Scripture will stand as the final

authority.

Are these the kinds of results you would like to see in your children's ministry? Living and ministering out of truth refreshes the servant of God for lasting, significant ministry. It also helps to prevent the unhealthy side of postmodern mentality from infecting the children and families under your ministry.

Truth is the basis of the Christian message. It also remains the standard for ministry strategy and practice at every level. Children's ministry must set the stage for a life of learning and spiritual growth in today's culture and in the church, and truth is the distinctive characteristic that makes the most influential difference.

Music

Music is a powerful, moving, motivational influence. Children and youth are either drawn in or turned off by a certain style of music.

A good relevancy indicator of a children's ministry or youth leader can often be measured by his or her ability to use music as an outreach and discipleship device. Music that is dated or irrelevant to a specific age niche can actually be a repellant to the kids you are attempting to reach. So, before you spin that vinyl, you may want to spend some time finding out what style of music the kids under your ministry are listening to.

As a non-musician I have become a student of the Christian music industry. I take notice of the groups

featured on store end-caps and top ten charts. I put on the headphones and sample the music to discover what is popular and has a good message, and to filter out what is mindless, noise-garble. I also force myself to sit down for a few minutes each week and view MTV's - Total Request Live (TRL) to sample what most pre-teen kids are listening to. I'm certainly not impressed with what I see and hear; yet exposure to what's out there enables me to appear as though I'm currently aware of what's captivating the attention of our kids it helps me communicate on their wave length, and it demonstrates to the kids that I care about their lives.

Here are a few important principles to keep in mind as you set out to use music as a connection device in ministry to children.

Dean-O suggests the following when using music to reach kids for Christ:

- 1. Never talk down to the kids with music. Your target is the oldest boy in the room.**
 - 2. Think bigger: choose music that aims for the kids OUTSIDE the walls of your church.**
 - 3. Three musical keys: teach Scripture, initiate worship, motivate kids with the Gospel truth.**
 - 4. Heads up: Never let an adult's musical heritage decide what is right for kids today.**
 - 5. Go "live," and if needed, hire the talent. Two musts: spiritual maturity and enthusiasm.**
 - 6. Look these up: impression, impact and influence. These are your three musical goals with kids.**
- Dean-O and the Dynamos, Bible Beat Music,
www.biblebeatmusic.
For booking information call 1-866-656-2328.**

Music sets an atmosphere for ministry

Consider the difference between walking into a room with no music and entering a room with

“Can you hum the tune that goes with these words? - Two all beef patties, special sauce lettuce cheese, pickles onions on a sesame seed bun.”

music playing. Music sets the atmosphere. Whenever you go to the supermarket, for instance, you can expect to hear shopping music; when you go to a restaurant, you hear eating music; when you go to the dentist you hear soothing music meant to provide a diversion from the dreaded sound of the

drill.

We hear music jingles and identify them with specific brand products and images. Certain kinds of music automatically connect our memories with personal experiences during various periods in our lives. Music has the power to influence and create a positive or negative atmosphere. As children's ministry leaders, we need to harness the power of music and use it to make our ministry a better place to be. Here are a couple things we've done to use music in creating a positive atmosphere:

1. Install a *BOSE* CD player system in the nursery check-in area. Often nursery-age children have the greatest difficulty with separation anxiety. A child may have determined before he walks through the door that he doesn't want to be away from mom or

dad. With the *BOSE* CD system playing through its five cube speakers, the child is immediately surrounded by happy kid music. It sets a tone that makes it hard for a child to be upset. Fill your nursery with good background music.

2. Have CD players going in each classroom during the initial entry time. Make three or four popular CDs available to each classroom. Whatever expense this requires, time will prove that it is a wise investment.
3. Install a quality sound system, console and speakers in your large group meeting room. Kids today know a good sound system when they hear it. A cheesy system can make the best music sound bad. Good sound systems are affordable. Contact a knowledgeable sound technician, and get advice about the best system configuration for your room and application. Doing this first will save you from having to correct uninformed, bad decisions later.

Music frames a context for relevancy

If you want to reach kids, you must understand the developmental stage of the group you are working with, and supply appealing music that is age appropriate. For instance, if you play a Miss Pattycake CD to fourth grade kids, you can expect them to cop an attitude, complete with eye-rolling, sighs and “this is boring” remarks. On the other

hand, three-year-old kids will be elated with Miss Pattycake, and their response will be enthusiastic.

Music is best used when matched accurately with the niche you are attempting to reach. If it is not, you will be “branded” irrelevant. When that happens, you have at best crippled your outreach growth, and at worst have etched your own ministry tombstone.

When working with children or youth, do not make the mistake of allowing your own music taste to overshadow the music taste of your students. You must use the songs that appeal to kids and adapt your own musical taste for the sake of reaching them.

Music stimulates interest and learning

I can't say that I have learned a lot from listening to music, but I can say that music has enhanced my learning process and early developmental growth as a child. Research has shown that the mere presence of music has an enhancing effect on intellectual growth.

“Child psychologists tell us that a child learns more during the first half-dozen years than at any other time, and that (music) deprivation during these years can inhibit intellectual growth.”

(Musical Growth and Development, by McDonald & Simons, 1989.)

Psalm 150

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Humor

Laughter is evidence of a healthy, growing children's and youth ministry. Unfortunately, many churches undervalue this important component in the formula. Part of being a well-adjusted person involves having a sense of humor. All good communicators understand the importance of a well-placed pun. A smile and positive presence invigorates learning and makes the exchange of information a pleasant experience.

Comedy is an inseparable part of my children's ministry programming mindset. We include everything from prop comedy (Billy Bob teeth) to stupid Milton Berle standup routine jokes, to top ten Letterman style puns to spontaneous Leno street video interviews. We like to keep the kids surprised and guessing.

One of the great things about children's ministry is that even if your humor is goofy and slapsticky, kids will enjoy it. If you find humor something difficult to integrate into your ministry, consider a few of the

“When you laugh, you release some of the joy with which God wants to fill others.”

following suggestions:

Puppets

Purchase an audio cassette tape or CD with brief puppet sketches. This is a very easy way to inject humor into your ministry with kids. Put a puppet on your hand, and move its mouth in sync with CD. Below are a few of the more humorous CDs that I have seen used with puppets:

-Pathetic Prayers

-Adventures with Clyde and Camille

-Life with Ebb and Flo

-Beyond Words

-Puppets in Action Vol. 1-4

The above brief sketches are available through One Way Street. A catalogue may be obtained by phoning this toll free number (1-800-569-4537) or www.onewaystreet.com

Clowning

Clowning is all but a lost art. Mime and clowning are highly effective ways to visually communicate a powerful message. Since children and youth are seldom exposed to these once-popular art forms, a quality presentation can make a memorable mark on a child's heart. While clowning and mime can inject humor, remember that children younger than five years old can fear clowns or mimes. The unfamiliarity of painted faces and out-of-the-ordinary costumes may scare young children.

Several ways puppets can infuse humor in children's ministry:

- 1. The element of surprise - puppets popping up and startling the audience.**
- 2. Carrying on a conversation with a puppet that takes everything literally.**
- 3. Silly, goofy motions.**
- 4. Puppets can misquote or misunderstand Bible verses, inserting silly words that rhyme or don't make sense.**
- 5. Puppets can imitate the children's pastor or a volunteer.**

Gary Strudler, Children's Pastor, Rolling Hills Community Church, Tualatin, OR. www.rollinghills.org or (503) 638-5900

Hilarious Active Games

Active games are a great way to stimulate fun and laughter. The goofier the better. Here are ten of our favorite active games:

☐ Sour Gummy Worm Relay

Materials: 200 sour gummy worms, 2 large plates, 1 table.

Set Up: Place 100 gummy worms on each plate, set on a table. Form two relay lines 20 feet away from the table.

How to Play: Two evenly divided teams line up equidistant from the table. Each plate of worms is assigned to a team.

When the referee says go, one person from each team runs to the table, and begins eating gummy worms, one at a time. These two players continue eating until the referee yells "switch." Then the first players return to the end of the relay team line. The next 2 players

run to the table, and in the same way, begin eating gummy worms. The referee yells “switch” at random intervals. Each time the referee yells “switch” a new player goes to the table. The first team that consumes all the gummy worms is the winner.

□ Shaving Cream Relay

“If you can get people to laugh, you can get them to listen.”

Materials: Six cans of shaving cream, 2 paper plates, 1 plastic table covering, 1 table.

Set Up: Place two plates on the table with the plastic cover.

How to Play: Two evenly divided teams line up equidistant from the table.

Each plate on the table is assigned to a team. When the referee says go, one person from each team runs to the table and begins squirting shaving cream in a pile on a plate. When the referee yells “switch,” the player returns to the end of the relay team line, and the next player runs to the table, and in the same way, begins squirting shaving cream, adding to the shaving cream of the previous player. The referee yells “switch” at random intervals and each time a new player goes to the table. After a predetermined

amount of time the team with the tallest pile of shaving cream wins.

☐ Pudding Sucking Contest

Materials: Four pre-packaged, lunch-size type pudding snacks, four one half inch clear plastic tubes, ten inches long (can be purchased at a hardware store or plumbing department) one table.

Set Up: Place each of the four pudding packs on the table with one plastic tube next to each one.

How to Play: Four players are picked from crowd. Each stands behind the table in front of a pudding pack and tube. When a referee yells go, each player inserts the plastic tube into the pack of pudding and begins sucking the pudding through the tube. The first player who sucks all the pudding through the tube is the winner.

“People who laugh and have fun, are the most pleasant to be around.”

☐ Snow Ball Fight

Materials: Four Hostess Snowball cake snacks, one table, one plastic table covering.

Set Up: Place each of the Snowball cakes on the table with the plastic covering.

How to Play: Choose four players from the crowd. Players line up at the table.

The referee yells go. Players pick up the snowball cake and begin eating it. The first player who has consumed his cake and closed his mouth is the winner.

❑Tape Head Relay

Materials: Six pairs of full-figured women's hose, 1 roll of two-inch-wide masking tape, several balloons, 30 lbs of packing peanuts available at mail box etc.

Set Up: Dump all the packing peanuts into a corner in the room. Place inflated balloons in the pile of packing peanuts. Place one leg of the women's hose over each player's head. Wrap masking tape, sticky side out, over the hose.

How to Play: Evenly divide players into two teams (at least three on a team). The referee says "go." One player from each team uses his head to find the balloons in the pile of packing peanuts. No player can use his hands to attach balloons. The referee yells "switch," and players go the back of the line on their team and a new player from the team begins the search for balloons in the packing peanut pile. The team with the most balloons after several turns wins.

❑Shaving Cream Hairdo Contest

Materials: 4 cans of shaving cream and four chairs, and four bath towels.

**“Laughter is
the best
medicine in
life.”**

Set Up: Place the chairs, three feet apart, in a row. Put a can of shaving cream and towel by each one.

How to Play: Select contestants from the crowd. Seat each contestant in a chair. Choose a hairstylist for each seated contestant. The hairstylist uses the shaving cream to sculpt a creative hairdo on one of the contestants. The most creative hairdo wins.

□ Pictionary Teams

Materials: butcher or mural paper, 16 markers (four per team), Bible.

Set Up: In each of the four corners of the room, place a large piece of butcher paper or mural (one piece per each round to be played) and place four colored markers.

How to Play: One participant at a time from each team will receive the topic from the leader to be drawn on the paper from the group to guess. Evenly divide participants into four teams. Clearly state the rules: the person drawing cannot speak and cannot write down the words to describe the clues. Once a person on the team makes a

guess at what is being drawn, she cannot guess again. One participant at a time from each team will receive the topic to be drawn on the paper for the group from the leader for the team to guess. The topic may be a Bible character or Bible story. When someone from the team guesses correctly that team wins. This is a variation of the popular pictictionary game.

□ Twinkie Eating Contest

Materials: ten twinkies, five paper plates, one table, one plastic table covering.

“Humor will maximize your effectiveness when communicating with kids.”

Set Up: Choose five participants from the crowd, and have them stand behind a plate on the table containing the two twinkies.

How to Play: The referee says “go.” The first participant that can close his mouth after jamming the twinkies in is the winner.

□ Underwear Balloon Relay

Materials: Two pairs of one-piece long underwear (size 3x adult), and 40 assorted balloons.

Set Up: Divide the uninflated balloons into two equal piles. Place one pair of long underwear next to each pile of 20 balloons.

How to Play: Choose two small people from the crowd (1st or 2nd grade). Put one pair of long underwear, on each participant. Button the front of the long underwear but leave the back fly open. Now choose 20 participants for each team. Each

participant receives one balloon to blow up and tie off. When the referee says "go," those with the

"It's easy to find humor, when you enjoy what you do."

balloons must put them through the back fly of the person wearing the long underwear. The first team with all of their balloons jammed inside the long underwear wins.

□Lemonade Race

Materials: four plates, eight fresh lemons, 32 small dixie cups of water, 32 sugar packets, sharp knife, one plastic table covering, one table

Set Up: Place the four plates on the table. Quarter the lemons, and place eight quarters, eight small dixie cups and eight sugar packets by each plate.

How to Play: Pick 32 participants from the crowd. Divide them evenly on four teams. Participant runs to the table by their team's plate, pick up a wedge of lemon, and eat the lemon off the rind, then tear open one packet of

sugar and eat it. Next, they pick up a cup of water and drink it. Finally, the participant has to jump ten times and run to the next participant on the team, who must repeat the process. The first team to finish is the winner.

□Bible Verse Balloons

Materials: Balloons and paper, Bible for each team.

Set Up: Choose a Bible verse (one that has 10 words or more) and print it onto a small piece of paper. Then cut the paper up so that one word or brief phrase will be on a small piece of the strip of paper. Be sure to include the passage reference in one balloon for each team. Next, place each piece in its own balloon; blow up and tie off the balloons. It is easiest to use two separate colors of balloons (one color for each team), so that the leader can keep the complete verse together for each team.

How to Play: Choose participants from the crowd and divide them into two evenly matched teams. Be sure your participants can read. You should have at least two teams for this game, but you may have more than two teams. The referee yells "go." Each team pops the balloons and begins to put the Bible

verse together in correct word order.
The first team to do so wins.

Humor in ministry is a delicate art. Children and youth may respond to forms of humor that are acceptable, but their parents or grandparents may not understand that humor, and may even find it offensive. The key is to know your crowd.

Because music style and humor can be so subjective, these elements need to be considered carefully. Usually, if you're going to err, do so on the side of caution; spend some time educating and exposing parents to the subjective elements of music and humor in ministry.

One thing is certain: using humor and music to illustrate or communicate truth is usually appreciated. People will accept your style of humor and music when they understand your heart and know your motivation. But at the same time, be prepared: if you are going to receive criticism doing ministry, it will come primarily over how you use music and humor.

The relevant children's ministry leader will find synergy and balance in these three elements - Truth, Music and Humor. It is a formula for relevant ministry.

CHAPTER 2

Children's Ministry - The Foundation of Biblical Literacy in the Church

When you go down the steps of our church into the children's ministry you are greeted with a bright yellow banner that reads, "Children's Ministry, The Door to Bible Literacy." If you desire to increase Bible awareness among those at your church, the first step must be to penetrate and saturate the lives of children with it. If you are a children's ministry leader, you stand in a critical place to achieve this goal.

Children's ministry as a vocation has elevated the importance of evangelizing children and providing fun church programming that can capture the attention of children. We have improved in ministry method

"A dusty Bible is often a symptom of a dirty life."

to children, however, we have not come as far in keeping the message of Scripture the main priority. Teaching the Bible clearly and age appropriately to children at church has to be the highest priority for anyone in children's ministry.

Generally speaking, Biblical literacy has not been a priority in recent times in children's ministry at church. As a result we are now faced with some significant problems.

“Americans are notoriously short on knowledge of basic biblical truths. ‘As a book,’” writes Wheaton College professor Gary Burge, “the Bible has been removed from the reading lists of students so that they can barely recognize metaphors from great novels written before 1950.”

It’s not just an issue in the wider culture, Burge notes, but even in churches, the one place where biblical literacy should flourish. He continues: ‘For the last four years, the Bible and theology department at Wheaton College in Illinois has studied the biblical and theological literacy of incoming freshmen. These students are intellectually ambitious and spiritually passionate. They represent almost every Protestant denomination and every state in the country. Most come from strong evangelical churches and possess a long history of personal devotion and Christian involvement. They use the Bible regularly - but curiously few know its stories.

**“Forever, O
Lord, Thy
word is
established in
heaven.”
Psalm 119:89**

These students, Burge says, very likely know that in the Old Testament story David killed Goliath, but they don’t know why he did it. When asked to complete a test in which they were to put in sequence a series of biblical events (Abraham, the Old Testament

prophets, the death of Christ, and Pentecost), a third could not do it. With another list of crucial biblical events, only half could put them in the correct sequence. The students simply had little sense of the millennia-long story of God's dealing with His people.

We do well, then, to help people in our churches, children through adults, to learn the vocabulary of faith and the riches of our tradition. Burge tells a story that suggests why. Once he lived in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Chicago. The city was rebuilding the neighborhood playground. One day workers poured a small concrete retaining wall. 'Later that night,' recounts Burge, 'when the cement was still drying, women on my street walked to the playground and wrote Hebrew sentences with nails in the wet cement all around the perimeter.' They were verses from the Psalms, one mother told him. She said, 'God's Word is powerful. Wonderful, beautiful, and I want my children to be surrounded by it while they play.'" (*The Next American Spirituality, Finding God in the Twenty-First Century*, George Gallup, Jr., Timothy Jones, Cook Communications Ministries, 2000).

Strategies for raising the tide of biblical literacy in church are imminently necessary. The key word is strategies. What are you and I going to do in the

promotion of Biblical literacy among kids and volunteers at church? We have to get specific with action and quit speaking in church growth platitudes. In fact, when discussing biblical literacy, the words, "dreams, intentions, hopes and ideas" have to be off limits in the conversation. Instead, we have to describe and follow through with concrete, simple, accountable plans. You have to be prepared to answer the question: What steps am I taking to make biblical literacy an intentional process under my ministry?

"In polls on biblical literacy, half of those describing themselves as Christians are unable to name who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Many Americans cannot name the reason for celebrating Easter or what the Ten Commandments are. People think the name of Noah's wife was Joan, as in, Joan of Ark. One Nevada politician, who proposed a tax on gambling but realized he faced the state's most powerful industry, told his constituents that he didn't want to kill his Goliath-like opponent, just 'hurt him a little... like King David in the Bible.' Whose Bible was he reading (or in this case, not reading)? (*The Next American Spirituality, Finding God in the Twenty-First Century*, George Gallup, Jr., Timothy Jones, Cook Communications Ministries, 2000).

Jim Sweeney PhD, recently retired Dean of Faculty at Western Baptist Seminary, found in an analysis of 200 sermons preached in evangelical churches between 1981 and 1991:

24.5% - content and organization of the sermon was determined by the text.

22.5% - content explicitly biblical, but the speaker imposed his own organization to it.

39% - Neither content nor organization arose from biblical text, but content was identifiable as Christian.

14% - Neither content nor organization arose from biblical text, and content was not discernibly Christian.

Here are a few strategies that have kept me focused on sustaining biblical literacy in children's ministry.

Communicate Bible Narratives

In most churches you can attend worship celebrations, adult Sunday school classes or youth services and become informed on an array of topics, including political issues, abstract concepts, doctrines, church growth statistics. You might even experience an emotionally moving music performance or hear a spellbinding testimony. The children's ministry may have exciting games, gadgets, active music, and entertainment that draws a crowd. But the one pervasive problem is an absence of presenting a biblical narrative.

What do I mean by a biblical narrative? Simply put, it's the telling of a Bible story. Developmentally, a child is most responsive to learning through storytelling. Until children pass the age of nine, most do not have the capacity to understand some of the

This poem illustrates the excitement of biblical narrative:

**Sea monsters, dragons and warriors and spies!
Riddles and mystery! Intrigue and surprise!
Heroes and villains and giants and midgets,
Palaces, dungeons and madmen and witches!**

**Kings, queens and emperors, wise men and fools;
Miracles, plagues, hidden treasure and jewels!
Angels and demons, rebellion and war,
Deception! Disaster and mayhem and gore!**

**Time travel! Romance! Adventure! Betrayal!
Freedom from slavery! Escaping from jail!
Soldiers and warrior and healers and saints,
And poems of thanksgiving, praise and complaints!**

**Partying prophets and killers who preach,
Fish who eat people! Donkeys that teach!
Shipwrecks and journeys and blessings to give!
And the world's greatest SUPERHERO ever to live!**

**by Steven James, 2000 Children's Ministry Seminar,
International Network of Children's Ministry.**

metaphorical or deeply symbolic, abstract passages of scripture (such as communion or water baptism).

Bible stories frame history in a way that children can understand and mentally digest. Those same Bible stories then become the context or foundation for a child's life experiences and spiritual formation through out life. Bible stories provide a cognitive groundwork for comprehension of the more abstract concepts of scripture.

Here's another observation worth considering. When was the last time you perused a Christian bookstore? During your visit, did you notice how many titles on the shelves were authored by Max Lucado? Seldom, over the past ten years, has Max Lucado not had a title on the top ten Christian book list. The reason for this is more than Max's writing style. It is the content and form of his writing: Max is a story teller. Everyone loves to hear an inspiring story, and there is a shortage of great storytellers in ministry today. The skill of storytelling is incredibly important in reaching people and helping them see the truth and beauty of God's message found in the Bible. Not just in children's ministry, but at every level of the church, communicators need to recover effective storytelling as a technique, and include stories from scripture narratives to illustrate a message or lesson.

"Thoughtful Bible study is less about snapshot and more about timed exposures."

Provide Quality Resources and Curricula

An inept teacher can have excellent resources, but the result will be the same. A great teacher can have inept curricula and resources but the result will be the same, except with greater effort expended on the part of the teacher to make the class a good experience for the students. A great teacher with great resources will have great results and be more focused on building relationships with the students.

The most important decision regarding the direction and quality of your children's ministry rests in your curricula selection. Here are a few important observations:

1. Quality curricula will be age-appropriate and developmentally specific. It will have been field tested and revised based on the critique of a focus group, as well as edited by child development specialists.
2. Quality curricula will teach the leader how to use it as he/she goes along. It will be simple and flexible with a variety of learning activities corresponding with the Bible narrative.
3. Quality curricula will be accompanied by a scope and sequence. The lessons will fit an ordered sequence, with an outline over a period of several years describing themes, key concepts, and memory verses. It will also show how many times a student will be exposed to an overview of the scripture.
4. Quality curricula will include four important components of teaching a lesson: 1) motivating

“Curricula is a primary key in the development strategy of volunteers. “

students and getting them interested in the learning process. 2) learning the facts, and understanding the transforming truth. 3) practice of new learning; discussion of ways to use the truth being

taught. Application of the Bible; specific

applications of the truth to the student's life; include targeting specific life transformational indicators that show the student has connected the content to his own life.

5. Quality curricula keeps the main thing the main thing. I am always suspicious of curricula that claims to have the one and only "real" Bible interpretation. Usually, curricula that fixates on issues or isolated doctrines is not adequately addressing what children need the most, and that is clear, Bible narrative - the Bible story.
6. Quality curricula will have training specialists available in the form of regional or local consultants to provide in-service workshops or seminars to support use and increase skill levels of lay-leaders and Sunday school teachers.

I used to be somewhat eclectic in my curricula selection approach. For those who have an educational background and know how to integrate curricula to make it stronger, it's probably okay to do that, but for the lay Sunday school teacher, attempting to integrate curricula is probably more confusing than beneficial. Always remember: you purchase curricula to help the volunteers communicate transforming truth. Only in a secondary sense is curricula purchased for the student.

Implement Scripture Memory

The problem with most Bible memory programs is that they attempt to teach too much and devote too little time to reviewing previously learned verses. It

**“Thy word I
have
treasured in
my heart, that
I may not sin
against God.”
Psalm 119:11**

is for this reason that we came up with a system that focused on a selected number of Bible verses that we believe to be important for the elementary age child to be exposed to before matriculating into junior high.

Here are a few key principles of the Bible memory system we use:

1. Forty-six verses were selected based on the content being understandable for the age level of the child.
2. Bible verses were not included if they were abstract or complex, long or obscure.
3. Review and relearning of the verses locks them into the child's long-term memory. After all, it isn't the number of verses memorized and forgotten that counts, it is the number of verses memorized and available for recall that is important.

Here is the pattern for Bible memory plan:

1 st Grade:	9 new verses
2 nd Grade:	8 new verses, 9 review verses
3 rd Grade:	8 new verses, 17 review verses
4 th Grade:	10 new verses, 25 review verses
5 th Grade:	11 new verses, 35 review verses

Here is a listing of the forty-six verses selected for this Bible memory system:

1st Grade: Hebrews 13:16
Psalm 100:2-3
Jeremiah 33:3
Romans 3:23
Psalm 145:13
Luke 3:11
Hebrews 13:8
Psalm 109:26

2nd Grade: Romans 10:15
Galatians 5:13
Revelation 3:20
Romans 10:13
Matthew 5:16
1 Thessalonians 5:16
Proverbs 12:22
1 John 1:9

3rd Grade: 1 John 3:16-17
John 14:6
John 3:16
Psalm 119:11
Ephesians 6:7
Romans 6:23
Proverbs 15:1

4th Grade: 1 Chronicles 29:14
Ephesians 6:13
Proverbs 12:26
2 Corinthians 5:20
Galatians 6:10
Proverbs 3:5-6

Matthew 9:37-38
Matthew 9:5
5th Grade Matthew 28:19-20
Malachi 3:8
Romans 12:1
James 4:2-3
2 Corinthians 5:17
2 Timothy 3:16
Romans 12:10
Galatians 5:22-23

If there is any time Bible memory should be emphasized, it is during the elementary years. During that era of one's life, memorization can occur almost effortlessly as opposed to later in life when memorization becomes more difficult.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.”
Psalm 119:105

Identify Key Biblical Concepts

In the same way that the Bible memorization system is designed to help children lock verses into their long-term memory, learning key biblical concepts and memorizing them is also important.

We have selected five core concepts based on:

1. Basic Bible literacy.
2. Awareness of simple, yet important Christian principles.
3. Capability of comprehension that the child has at a given developmental stage corresponding with their grade and age.

The problem with most midweek programs is that although children may be encouraged to memorize scripture verses, some children

“To the Christian, the opposite of ignorance is not knowledge, it is obedience.”

may not attend Sunday school or a systematic Bible education time at church, and so they may not be aware of even the most basic Christian principles of Bible literacy. Therefore, in an attempt to compensate for this shortfall, key Bible concepts are added to extend a child’s awareness of the Bible.

The key concepts prescribed here are very simple. They are designed as an important supplement to the scripture memory mentioned in the previous section.

Here is the pattern for the key concepts to be memorized:

- 1st Grade: The seven days of creation
- 2nd Grade: Ten Commandments
The seven days of creation
- 3rd Grade: Fruit of the Spirit
Ten Commandments
The seven days of creation
- 4th Grade Books of the New Testament
Fruit of the Spirit
Ten Commandments
The seven days of creation
- 5th Grade Books of the Old Testament
Books of the New Testament
Fruit of the Spirit
Ten Commandments
The seven days of creation

Each of the key concepts listed above forms a basis of rudimentary Bible knowledge that can be used as a springboard into many other aspects of scripture.

Some have objected that these key concepts are too simple, and maybe they are. My defense is that we have at least selected concepts which every child can succeed in reaching.

Use Unconventional Educational Approaches

People enjoy a change of pace in learning. Change, however, can be a tricky business at church. Using unconventional approaches in ministry is kind of like cooking with chili peppers. Once in a while and at the right time, they can pleasantly spice up your dish, but used too often, they will get you into trouble.

Only you know to what degree your church can absorb creative, unconventional approaches in teaching the Bible.

Generally speaking, children and youth today require creative approaches to both attract and hold their attention. I have found tremendous success when using the following approaches to teach and review Bible narratives, memory verses, and key concepts.

1. Game shows: We have adapted several popular T.V. game shows to quiz and review Bible information. We have transformed the following popular game shows, retaining most of the rules, except we use Bible questions.

-“Wheel of Fortune” has become “Wheel of Scripture”

-“Who Wants to be a Millionaire” has become “Who Wants to be a Candyaire”

-“Jeopardy” has become “Bible Jopardy”

-“Sixty-four Thousand Dollar Pyramid” has become the “Twinkie Pyramid”

-“Who’s Line is it Anyway” has become

“What Bible Character is it Anyway”

-“Family Feud” has become “Bible Feud”

2. Associative activities: We have used color overhead pictures that depict the theme of a Bible book. *Walk Thru the Bible* publishes pictures for each book of the Bible. These visual effects embed the theme of each book of the Bible into a child’s mind.

“A South Sea islander during WW2 proudly displayed his New Testament to a G.I. ‘ In America we have outgrown such literature,’ the G.I. said. The native replied, ‘It’s a good thing we haven’t, because if it weren’t for this book, you’d have been a meal by now.”
Celebrating the Word - The Word as God’s Unique Dynamic: It’s Spiritual Power, Carl Laney, Multnomah Press, 1987

Recently, we surveyed the children in our Sunday school. It’s always interesting and helpful to find out more about what the kids think. I randomly picked a few of their responses to the survey to share with you. Here are the answers, exactly as they wrote them:

“This book will keep you from sin. Sin will keep you from this book.”

Jarod - 2nd grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? Games

What do you like the least about Sunday school? The Bible

What is your favorite Bible story? Cain and Abul

K.C. - 2nd grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? Seing my friends

What do you like the least about Sunday school? Doing work

What is your favorite Bible story? David and the lions

Kelsey - 2nd grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? Story time

What do you like the least about Sunday school? Sitting down

What is your favorite Bible story? Jacob and Esau

Laura - 3rd grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? Reading the Bible

What do you like the least about Sunday school? Nothing

What is your favorite Bible story? Esther

Chris - 4th grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? The candy

What do you like the least about Sunday school? Leaving

What is your favorite Bible story? Noah

Tony - 4th grade

What do you like most about Sunday school? Stories

What do you like the least about Sunday school? Memory verses

What is your favorite Bible story? Samsen

One thing that should never be equated with biblical literacy is church attendance. I have learned that just because a person attended church over a given period of time does not necessarily mean that she knows much of anything about the Bible or applying its truth. I was reminded of this fact last summer during our elementary age Adventure Camp when substantial amounts of candy turned up missing, stolen from a hidden stash. After a search for the goods, the culprit was revealed to be a boy who attended Christian school and could quote the Bible by the yard. He knew so much about the Bible that he could finish the camp counselors' sentences when they told Bible stories. But what he knew about the Bible had no bearing on his behavior, either over penitence in his thievery of the candy or in controlling the larger problem of his incorrigible behavior.

The second thing that can never be assumed is that an abundance of Bible information equates with spiritual wisdom. Spiritual wisdom comes only when biblical truth is infused by a relationship with Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Recovering the priority of scripture and its place in communicating time-transcending truth must be the obsession of the children's ministry leader at church for this reason: "We cannot know Christ at all if we do not know the scriptures; and we do not know the scriptures if we fail to find Christ. To know Christ is to know God in the biblical

revelation." (*What the Bible Teaches About the Bible*,
H.D. McDonald, Tyndale, 1980).

CHAPTER 3

8 Common Perceptions Held Among Parents that Make Children's Ministry a Tough Job

The greatest thing about children's ministry is working with the kids. The most difficult thing about children's ministry is working with the parents.

The misperceptions that many parents hold contribute a tremendous amount of unnecessary frustration and conflict for children's ministry leaders and volunteers.

These perceptions have paralyzed and even derailed the best in children's ministry. Unless these false ideals are addressed and dealt with properly, they can spread like a disease in a church. If left unchecked, morale in the children's ministry will slip, and the recruiting process can begin hemorrhaging. Below is a listing of the most problematic perceptions held by parents. Remember, it isn't enough to identify these perceptions; you must deal with each one and be prepared to offer solutions to inoculate the deadly virus that potentially can demoralize your children's ministry and its leaders.

The Perception that Childhood Hasn't Changed

Kids are still kids, but childhood today is a different world than when you and I were young. When we were young, we were attracted to events that were primarily activities (emphasis on *active*). Today,

many children still enjoy participating in active events, but it seems that more children have passive interests. Playstation, Nintendo 64 and the internet have created a new era where children play by the

“You know someone is struggling with this perception when the conversation begins with, ‘Back in the day.’”

hour in make-believe computerized landscapes, only taking a break to pound another Twinkie while downloading the next CD.

The media age has made it a challenge to hold a child’s attention for more than a few minutes. Sustained listening skills are not present as they once were in children. Therefore, the demand for variety and creative church programming for children has become a priority. Some parents, however, still believe that Sunday morning children’s ministry should look like Sunday school as it was conducted in 1961. “If it was good enough for me in ‘61 it’s good enough for kids today,” is the perilous idea that believes church ministry should be frozen in time. This perception will drive children, volunteers and leaders away from your ministry.

One thing is guaranteed in children’s ministry - change is inevitable. Those who believe that children’s programming is static need a dose of reality. Nothing in life is static, and children’s ministry and programming will change, evolve, and even be replaced by new programs and methods that are relevant to current learning trends, culture and kids’ interests.

The Perception that Authority Is The Adversary

The bumper sticker that reads, "Question authority," characterizes the prevalent attitude among many parents today. I've learned that important titles, or prominent positions of respect usually enlarge a target for criticism.

"Authority and accountability are two of the most hated words in 21st century vocabulary."

Seldom, a Sunday morning passes, in which myself, one of my directors, paid staff, Sunday school teachers or volunteer assistants does not get yelled at by an angry, critical, opinionated parent. "I have a question..." or "Can you help me understand..." has been replaced by the phrase, "I have a complaint." The cutting disrespect for authority that can be found on T.V. programs like "South Park" has crept into the mainstream of how people interact even with servant leaders in the church. Mostly, I have found that parents have no idea how damaging this accusative tone or critical spirit is to people who have nothing but love and the best interests of their child in mind. It's hard to understand why some parents enjoy being so rudely confrontational. But I have learned this: hurting people hurt other people, and if left unchecked, the behavior will continue and become more abusive.

What should a children's ministry leader do when faced with this problem? Stand up and stare it down. Listen to the full complaint, and then provide a solid,

rational explanation that sticks to the real issue. Then when opportunity arises address the attitude of unwillingness to trust, submit or comply with God-anointed leadership. The perception that godly, servant leaders in the church are the adversary is ludicrous. This perception, is however, the most insidious tool the real enemy has in creating division, suspicion and distrust in churches, and no ministry will flourish when these attitudes are present.

The Perception that Active Learning Equals Chaos

Often parents believe that children laughing, playing a game, talking or working together in a group during a Sunday school class time is chaotic and unbeneficial to a child's learning process. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"What did you do today in Sunday school Jimmy? 'I dunno.'"

Learning time for children must be punctuated with variety and, what at times, may appear to be orchestrated, supervised, chaos in the classroom.

Children maximize their learning experience when interacting, participating and even creating the learning process themselves. In fact, I often repeat this dictum among my own Sunday school teachers and seminar attendees: "If a child is not engaged in some activity connected to the content, he will not *remember* the information or the learning experience." Making the learning process memorable

is of greater value than dispensing the entirety of the content. The key word is process.

“Most attempts at Christian education today concentrate almost exclusively on the content and not the process. Church leaders grumble about biblically illiterate congregations. But who’s to blame? Perhaps all the attention has been directed at the content and none to the process.” (*The Dirt On Learning*, by Shultz & Shultz, 1999).

The Perception that Sports is the Key to Character

Many parents believe that sports creates or teaches character to children. Nothing could be more utterly false. Sports may enhance discipline or perseverance in a child, but it cannot teach or produce character in a child. Character can only be passed to a child by parents, guardians or significant individuals of influence in a child’s life. Character is taught and caught within the perimeters of a relationship. Sports can only bring the character learned in a relationship to the surface of a child’s life. There isn’t a week that goes by that I don’t observe some parent overemphasizing the importance of sports with a child. It has been in just the past three years that I have noticed children coming to church on Sunday mornings in their soccer uniforms, tapping their

“We need to help parents recapture the important role church plays in their child’s spiritual development.”

wrist watches when the clock strikes noon if the church service isn't over. Frequently, parents will complain to me about

There was a martial arts studio in Chicago that opened to sell *tae kwon do* lessons to the neighborhood. The instructor was a lifelong adherent to the philosophy of martial arts. He was tough, exacting, and demanding. Mothers in the neighborhood loved the service he provided. What do you think the mothers were buying?

-self defense training for their children

-after-school babysitting

-self-confidence building for their children

-none of the above

According to the mothers, it wasn't about martial arts training, babysitting, or self-esteem. They all noticed that, after just a few sessions, their children were crisply answering, "Yes sir" and "Yes Ma'am" when asked a question. The kids came home and more diligently addressed their homework. They took out the trash with just one request. They were more disciplined. The mothers weren't buying *tae kwon do* lessons. They were buying discipline. *It's not the Big that eat the Small...it's the Fast that eat the Slow*, Jennings & Haughton, Harper Business, 2000.

the inconvenience of our children's ministry program schedule because it interrupts their child's intramural team sports program. At that point I just have to say, "I'm sorry, sometimes you just have to pick and choose what you're going to be involved in as a family." My heart breaks when the parent selects volleyball over a Bible memory incentive program or elects to send a child to polo camp instead of the church-sponsored Adventure Camp.

About a year ago I stood in front of a large group of parents and told this story, "My son joined a little league baseball team. We are a one sport family, and

baseball is our sport of choice. We love baseball. When the schedule for the team was released we were discouraged to learn that batting practice was slotted for noon on Sunday, when we are still in church, and each Wednesday night a game was slotted to begin at 6:00 p.m., when at 7:00 p.m. our Kidstation Bible Memory program began. My wife and I had some decisions to make. We met with the coach and informed him that Nathan was unavailable to attend batting practice, and he would have to leave after the first four innings of Wednesday games. At the end of the season, on the afternoon team awards were presented, we all celebrated. The team went undefeated and Nathan, my son, had the highest batting average. This year we have made the same decision about the baseball schedule. The season is almost over, and Nathan still maintains the highest batting average, and for a second season, so far, the team is undefeated. More importantly, Nathan finished all his Bible memory for the year.

That will make a bigger difference in his character than his high batting average. The priorities we set in our child's life imprint his character.

The Perception that Customized Learning Should be Provided for Each Child

Of the eight perceptions listed, this one is probably the most unrealistic and the most widely held by parents. Not everyone will like everything about your ministry all the time. Some won't like the children's music, some won't like the Sunday school curriculum, some won't like the volunteer leader of

their child's group, some won't like the games you choose, and some won't like anything, no matter what you try. Even if you try the program or approach they have recommended, they still may refuse to approve of the children's ministry. The problem is that the "Have it your way," mentality has deeply influenced the way parents think in terms of educational experiences for their children. Sometimes, trying to create a personalized, customized experience at church is simply an unrealistic expectation. For instance, even as I began writing about this very perception, I was interrupted by a grandmother who had concerns about her grandson not wishing to attend our children's church time because he didn't like the music. Her solution was we "should listen to God," and consider starting a new children's program on Sunday morning that "doesn't involve any music;" and until we launched an alternative program, she wasn't going to make her grandson attend the children's ministry if he didn't like it. Hello, Grandma! I don't know of any churches that exclude music in their services or ministry. Music is part of the church experience.

The solution isn't to customize a program around the child's whims; the solution is to help the child understand that, even if he doesn't like music, it is something he will have to tolerate, at least to some degree, if he is going to attend church in the future. Churches do music that's the way it is. You see, sometimes learning to live with something you don't

like is the bigger, more important lesson than trying to change everything about the programming to suite a child's preferences.

Two age-old factors stimulate this perception of customized learning:

A Mother Asks a Favor of Jesus - Matthew 20:20-22
Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" they said to Him, "We are able."
(Holy Bible, Children's Ministry Resource Edition, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson & Child Evangelism Fellowship, 1993)

- 1) My child is more intelligent than other children.
- 2) My child deserves to be treated with greater favor because he or she is more special than other children.

We agree, every child is special. But, that does not precipitate individualized, customized programming for each child.

This perception can in many instances be diffused as a children's ministry leader addresses the issue of varied learning styles and different intellectual abilities among students. However, I have come to homeostasis over this perception by identifying specific focus areas of our ministry. We work with people and listen to suggestions. We vary our method and adjust our programming in as much as it relates

to, and advances our focus areas. Sometimes when people come to me with customized learning issues for their child I just have to say, "You know, we just don't have the human or financial resources to do it that way. I wish we did, but we don't. If this situation is untenable for you and your child, I would recommend consulting other church ministries in an effort to locate programming that meets your child's customized learning needs." This option alleviates the burden for the children's ministry leader and rightfully affirms the parents' responsibility in deciding what is best for their child. It also allows the parents to be free to search out the programming needs that most closely fit their child and family, instead of divisively, crusading against a children's ministry leader and programming that by and large satisfies the largest constituency of the church and is supported by the overall leadership of the church body.

The Perception that Isolation is the Best Option to Prevent Worldly Influence

The insulation or isolation of children does not serve as a long-term preventative strategy for preparing them to deal with life and the world around them. It does, however, prolong the denial stage that parents experience when their kids are growing up, and they don't wish to admit that the child isn't little anymore.

Over the past decade parents' attempts to guide their child's education experience through things like home schooling or influencing local public school systems to include abstinence in the health education curriculum has been positive, overall. Parents engaged in the life and learning process of their child is generally a very good thing. But as with any outcome that is good, the potential exists for some to take it to the extreme, and that's when the perception of isolation emerges as a problem.

“What does it mean to be in the world but not of the world?”

Cocooning is a trend that has also emerged as a response in families that feel overloaded by influences such as the media, fast-paced demands that zap family time, or the general feeling of a lack of control over the direction of their family, vis-a-vis, control over the potential destiny of their child.

If parents are not keenly aware of the delicate balance that is required to “be in the world but not of the world,” difficulties can surface over time in the form of expectations that everyone should adopt the same assumptions and filtering standards that a specific family may hold. At this juncture the children's ministry leader is extremely vulnerable to criticism for not being sensitive to all the filters that one family may hold as necessary.

I remember in one church where I served as a children's pastor, a small, vocal, opinionated group of parents expected that I adopt their philosophy of “no media” exposure for their children. For that matter, they believed that none of the children in the

church should view any video, including Christian videos such as “Veggie Tales,” “Quigley’s Village” and animated Bible story videos, because these families had “killed” their televisions. Even after I had acquiesced to their wishes by eliminating T.Vs and VCRs from church classrooms, things got ugly when some Sunday school teachers smuggled in their own copies of “Veggie Tales” and went to the effort of wheeling in a T.V. and video player from the audio supply room on their own. When those parents found out what the teacher in their child’s class had done, they went ballistic, and whose hide were those parents looking to skin? That’s right, mine.

You may have experienced other issues related to a parent’s desire to isolate their child, and in so doing insulate everyone else’s children, too. Often the outcome of a parent’s action to isolate a child leads to a deficit of reasoning skills. Kids have to learn that you just can’t take your marbles and go home every time everything does not go your way.

The second outcome is a proclivity to withdrawal from social responsibility or social service issues because the child doesn’t have the capacity to handle dealing with people who don’t share her own world view.

One Bible character comes to mind in connection with this discussion of isolation. Daniel the prophet found himself in a foreign land, advising kings and dignitaries who were far from sharing his world view or religious convictions. Yet, he viewed his position in their court as an appointment by God to serve even when the kings and dignitaries he

worked for were known as cruel, inhumane, murderous, self-absorbed and godless. Daniel served with integrity and a clear conscience. Could he have retired and gone into hiding and avoided being Nebechnezzar's or Darius' right hand security advisor? Probably. But he didn't because he viewed his social responsibility and service as a strategic appointment by God to influence both of these wicked kings at critical points in the sovereign plan of God.

I have learned that isolation is usually an excuse to avoid social or moral responsibilities. God help the society that produces a Christian culture that abstains from involvement.

The Custodial Perception

Another trendy perception that I have noticed among parents has been the idea that, "Wherever I am, at any time, under any circumstance outside my home, someone other than myself is responsible for my child's behavior."

"OK, so who's responsible for my child while I'm at church?"

I call this the custodial perception. At the core of this perception is the notion that the child can do

whatever he wants regardless of how it may affect others, and "I as the parent am not accountable for my child's actions."

Recently, a parent admitted her four-year-old little boy into a Sunday school class without notifying the volunteers or early childhood director of the boy's severe ADHD disability. During the course of the hour the boy swore at, kicked, pinched and spit in

the face of the volunteer who stuck with him the entire time. Fortunately, that volunteer happened to be a certified special education teacher and knew how to handle the situation. Efforts were made to retrieve the parent, but to no avail. As if the situation were not unnerving enough, when the parent arrived at the check-out counter, her son reported that he had not had a very good time in Sunday school. Immediately, she became upset and sought to blame the volunteers for her son's bad day in the classroom. Eventually, she discovered my location, and in short order gave me a full report of her take on how abusive the volunteers were with her son.

It wasn't long before I diagnosed her severe case of custodial perception. Even though she had neglected to medicate her child properly, or recommend to the volunteers methods of dealing with his severe behaviors, or, even tell us where she could be reached on the church campus, it was clear she was unwilling to accept any responsibility for her son's actions in the classroom. Through her inaction she had set the boy up for certain failure. Somehow, she supposed that we were endowed with magical powers that would enable us to understand his disability and instantly know how to deal with his unique problems. In her mind, we were at fault for her child's less-than-perfect experience at church. I listened for a while, and when she stopped to reload for another verbal salvo, I calmly and gently asked, "Is this your little boy?" She said, "yes" and told me his name. I brought him close to me and in a loose

embrace I began to pray for him. As I prayed I felt the tension around me subside. The words in my prayer were for the little boy, but I wanted to help the parent understand that we loved her son and we wished only the best for him. After the prayer she addressed me in a far more congenial manner.

Parents that hold the custodial perception are possibly the most difficult to help because they find it so hard to accept responsibility for their child's actions and attitudes.

The Entitlement Perception

This perception is closely related to the previously mentioned notion. Parents who hold this perception are convinced that someone other than themselves is responsible for providing childcare whenever they may need it. If a small group meeting is called at church it could be a committee, worship rehearsal, recovery group, discipleship group or children's ministry leaders training, immediately the assumption is made that child care will be provided (even if that person has a spouse, neighbor, or relative close by who could baby-sit the child in a home, instead of at church, during the meeting). Often the meeting is in the evening and may extend for several hours. Is it best for the child to be out late on a school night at church watching video after video until his parent comes to pick him up? No, of course not; it's best for the child to be at home in familiar surroundings he knows.

**“Is there
child-care
at this
church?”**

The underlying thought behind the entitlement perception is that "Whenever I make a commitment outside my home to a volunteer organization such as church, I expect that organization to provide babysitting for my child in exchange for my volunteer time commitment." The problem with this perception is that the parent leverages his primary commitment of "parenting his child" for a secondary commitment of "volunteering at church." This poor decision may benefit the church or parent, but in almost every case the child comes out on the losing end. Why? Because, not only has the child lost time with her parent; she is also not able to be at home playing either. This can result in resentment and bad feelings on the part of the child toward church and her parents' irresponsible decision to abandon her to childcare at church for hours on end.

Many churches have enabled the entitlement perception among parents by providing babysitting and childcare for every meeting that takes place. I have found that this habit has helped to weaken families in leadership by not holding their feet to the fire on their most basic ministry responsibility, providing care for their own children. At any rate, whenever the children's ministry at a church fades into the role of child care and babysitting it loses its punch as a focused, purpose-centered operation. Children's ministry is planned, purposeful, organized programming that has a scope and sequence. Child care is babysitting, and although it may have some elements of planning and organization it is not

characteristically oriented toward a scope and sequence.

Strategies for Dealing with Harmful Perceptions

Confrontation is usually not enjoyable, but sometimes it's necessary. Often the choice involves thinking through which option best resolves the misperception. Sometimes *mono-a-mono* confrontation is the only way to deal with the problem and other times, not reacting or being drawn into conflict is the best solution.

Just remember the old adage, "What does not kill you only makes you stronger."

Here are a few strategies that will help in both assessing and taking action when these or other harmful perceptions arise. Not every situation requires fierce conflict, but some do, and the steps below will help you determine your options.

The Rational Approach

- *Make an appointment*

Take a deep breath, count to ten, allow some distance and schedule an appointment with the parents when you've had some time to digest the grievance related to their misperception. Make a list of all the options that could be solutions to resolve the misperception or complaint.

- *Listen first*

Make sure everyone is comfortably situated in the room. Let the parents begin talking and don't interrupt or interject until they are completely finished. Ask questions to clarify the

complaint so that you have a thorough understanding of their *feelings*.

- *Take notes*

Write down the issues or misunderstandings that have been brought on by the misperception.

- *Don't try to answer all the questions a parent might have*

Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know about that, but I'll check into it and have an answer for you soon."

- *Explain yourself with the fewest possible words*

Don't spend time correcting the misperception; just offer an explanation that describes your ministry philosophy and approach (i.e., this is what we do, and this is the reason why we do it).

- *Conclude your appointment with prayer and follow up*

After the appointment be sure to phone the parents a few days later and ask how their day is going. 95% of the time, the call will indicate that the misperception has been diffused.

The worst time to take on a parent with a crazy perception is Sunday morning when pressure is at its peak. You're not prepared for a rational exchange, and the parents aren't either. Sit down with them at a time when stress is not an influence, and everyone's defenses are lowered.

Containment and Damage Control

- *When the rational approach doesn't work*

If rational discussion, prayer and follow up

does not have a proactive outcome, then an assessment is necessary.

- *Fully disclose the issue surrounding the conflict with your supervisor*

Present any notes, voice mail or written correspondence that may indicate the level of emotion involved in the discussion. Describe the options and solutions that you offered during the dialogue with the parent.

- *Gain advice from your supervisor*

Does your supervisor think that you should make future contact, or does he think that you should forget it and continue going forward? The best advice that I've ever received from a supervisor was, "I'm not worried about this problem, and you shouldn't be either. You personalize and internalize complaints. Shake 'em off and go on. I support you and your direction." That advice set me free not to be worried about winning a popularity contest. It's okay if people have a difference of opinion with you. The way they handle it is up to them. And the way you handle it is up to you.

- *Confront or not to confront*

That decision is up to your supervisor, not you. If you decide to confront the parent before full disclosure of the problem is made with your supervisor, you are on shaky turf and your action may have a high propensity to backfire.

The Buddy System

- *Identify the best conflict resolution person on your church staff, preferably your supervisor*

Sometimes parents can hold a misperception so emotionally that they are unable to sit down and be rational. When this is the case, do not try to address the issue with them alone. Talk with them only when you have a mediator present to record the conversation. It is not necessary that the third person attempt to solve the problem or misunderstanding. It is only necessary that they listen and record. It is important that your third person “buddy,” be a buddy and not someone who can be drawn into the heat and emotion of the parents’ tirade.

- *Debrief after the appointment*

Assess whether a parents emotional outburst needs follow up. Answer questions like these: Was the outburst directly related to the misperception, or are there other issues in the family system that precipitated the blast? Is the person in need of some anger management? Does the person have a history of attacking other church leaders or other ministries? Is the person on a crusade?

- *Does the response need to go to the next level?*

If the person is not willing to let go of his emotionally charged perception, then you must pass the problem up to your supervisor. The truth is, you, the children’s ministry leader, are probably the target of the crusade, and the

sooner you get out of the mix of conflict, the better. Let your supervisor be your defense.

Pray for God's will

- *Don't become consumed with the conflict that a misperception can cause*

It's church work. Some days are conflict and misperception free; other days are riddled with conflict and misperceptions. That's why God gives us prayer - to give us depth and perspective through the conflict and misperceptions that others may project. Prayer also helps you get the focus off the problem and onto the wisdom and patience of God.

- *Consider what God is doing*

Conflict and misperception are both tools for God to achieve something significant in our lives. Admittedly, it is a painful process, but the process is as important as the result, and in some cases, more important.

CHAPTER 4

Interfacing Children's Ministry and Parents

Custodial attitudes toward children run deep in our 21st century American culture, and the church community has been tremendously affected by this cultural attitude as well.

Whenever I have launched into an extensive recruiting focus for children's ministry, I have taken some huge, nearly mortal, hits from parents who are generally so self-absorbed with their own church groups or issues that they can't see the importance of ministering to their own children. Here are a few familiar responses that I have heard repeatedly over the years.

"I bring my kids to Sunday school to get a break from them!"

"I homeschool all week, so I have no energy left to volunteer in my child's group."

"The worship service is 'my time' to recover from a hard week."

"I just can't make it without the Word on Sunday morning."

"I don't have a calling to be in my kid's class."

"God hasn't told me that I should serve in children's ministry."

"Child care on Sunday morning isn't my thing."

"Abraham Lincoln once proclaimed, The strength of a nation lies in the homes of its people."

"That's why our church hired you - to take care of the kids so we could go to church."

Do any of these responses sound familiar to you? These one-liners can quickly deflate the enthusiasm of any children's ministry leader.

Sometimes we can allow defeat to creep in because we are not mentally prepared for some of the ways parents rationalize abdicating responsibility for their kids.

In this chapter we will provide strategies that will help you encourage parents to accept responsibility for the spiritual formation and growth of their own children. Here are a few quick suggestions I would like to recommend as thought conditioners for the children's ministry leader.

The following are reflexes that a children's ministry leader must have to graciously respond to parents.

Never take rejection personally

Parents who have crazy excuses for not being involved with their kids want you to take their remarks or criticisms personally, because subconsciously, they realize that if you quit asking

them to help, they won't have a dissenting conscience to deal with anymore.

Use creative measures to get parents' attention

Remember, whenever you are correcting a recruiting problem in children's ministry at church, you are actually addressing an existing disobedience issue in the church body, specifically among parents. The devil doesn't want those teaching slots filled, and he knows that the best way to keep them unfilled is to discourage you so you will give up. Listen: when you feel beaten down and unsupported, it's time to hit your creativity power-boosters. Change your recruiting strategy, add some humor, and try something you've never done before. Get out of the routine box and surprise yourself.

Finally, be encouraged

The more resistance you meet among parents unwilling to face their responsibilities for the spiritual development of their kids, the closer you are to breakthrough. Your best recruiting of parents comes when you get a second wind. Some parents will notice your commitment and will be inspired by your determination. Eventually something may sink in with a few of them. They will realize that

"Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children.

And their children another generation."

Joel 1:3

“Family is the basic building block of our society; it is the most important set of personal relationships we will experience; it is the core of the Christian community; and it represents the domain in which we are likely to achieve our most significant influence. In the new world of the Church, you and I must think of the family as a major priority.” *The Second Coming of the Church*, George Barna, Word, 1998.

your hard work of recruiting is really meant to benefit their children and families. Just keep telling yourself, “I haven’t met my best children’s ministry *parent* volunteer yet.”

“When we allow parents to avoid responsibility for their children’s behavior, we lose the opportunity to help them become better parents.”

Helping Parents Build Skills Through Children’s Ministry

If you can’t get the parents behind you, you’re not going to make it over the long haul.

Somehow you have to identify the parents who support and contribute both time and resources toward the children’s

ministry vision and programming, and enlist them to help you get the good word out. Parent support provides a unique momentum for children’s ministry that cannot be obtained by any other means.

One of the best ways to get parents on board with your vision and interested in children’s ministry is to clearly communicate that children’s ministry is a viable way to build parenting skills. Parenting isn’t an easy job. It requires focused attention, often at the most inconvenient times.

Where can parents get good input? Where can weary moms and dads find encouragement and examples of virtue, moral fortitude and parenting common sense? Let me first suggest a few places where parents probably won't find good input:

≈Toys 'R Us

≈McDonald's Playland

≈Kay-Bee-Toys

≈Toy Liquidators

≈Chuck-E-Cheese

≈The check-out stand at the supermarket

What is it about these places that brings out the worst in parents and children? Often, I find myself with my family at one of these places, and invariably I see a parent using his best bribery techniques to coax his child into cooperating. Threats, bribery, and yelling don't work. The kid has that look in her eye: "I'll embarrass you beyond your dignity, if you don't give me what I want. NOW!" The parent gives in, to save face, and the showdown is over for now. But the child knows that next time it will be even easier to get her way.

One of the best places for parents to learn solid parenting skills is at church informally serving in children's ministry. Here's why:

Children's ministry provides a natural opportunity for parents to systematically teach God's Word to their children

It's a scheduled, predictable time with a planned format and curriculum. For many parents a daily

family Bible lesson is unrealistic. A weekly small group Sunday school lesson for children, however, is doable. It assures that at least once a week parents have time to focus on the spiritual development of their children.

Most quality Sunday school curricula come with developmental suggestions and tips for parents

This information helps them understand how children at that level think and respond. This is tremendously beneficial for parents because it enables them to comprehend the unique

**A construction crew was building a new road through a rural area, knocking down trees as it went along. A crew chief notice that one tree had a nest of birds who couldn't yet fly, and he marked the tree so that it would not be cut down. Several weeks later the crew chief came back to the tree. He got into the cherry-picker and was lifted up so that he could peer into the nest. The baby birds were gone; they had flown away. The crew chief ordered the tree cut down. As the tree fell, the nest broke open, and the material that the birds had gathered to make the nest was scattered on the ground. Part of the material was a sheet of Sunday school curricula with this Bible memory verse, "Look at the birds of the air. They don't plant or gather crops. They don't put away crops in storerooms. But your Father who is in heaven feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are?" Matthew 6:26 - "God cares for you!"
Source unknown**

aspects of their child's present learning stage and gives them ideas about how they can best communicate with their child.

Most people who are consistently involved in children's ministry have better-than-average skills in dealing with children

These are the kind of people who serve as wonderful examples from whom parents can learn good parenting habits and techniques.

It provides the opportunity for parents to see clearly how their child adjusts and performs in a social setting with other children his age

One of the best ways to get a firsthand, accurate assessment of your child's socialization skills is to see how they pray, play and interact with other children. Parents don't often have the opportunity to observe their child's social skills in a classroom setting, and home school parents don't have that opportunity very often either, because their children are more accustomed to an individualized learning environment. Sunday school or children's church is an ideal place for parents to gain this kind of insight into their child's life and behavior.

It provides an opportunity for parents to observe how their child responds to other adult volunteers

Some children are weak in their manners and respect for adults. Parents usually can't fully understand this problem until they see their child in action among other adult authority figures. In some families, inappropriate behavior toward parents and other adults is accepted, usually because the parents themselves don't know what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior. By being part of the child's classroom environment, the parent can witness the effects of their child's

behavior and see how another adult corrects and redirects unacceptable behavior.

“One of the best places for parents to learn parenting skills is at church serving in children’s ministry.”

Parents’ participation in Sunday school or children’s church is a powerfully positive influence on the child’s spiritual development

It provides the child with the perception, “Hey, what I do and learn at church is important to my parents.” When parents take time to be with their child at church, the influence is invaluable and provides a store of family memories to be fondly treasured later in life.

It provides parents an extension of the parenting process

Parents are so busy today. Work isn’t a forty-hour-a-week process anymore. Other obligations twist, pull and compress focused family time into just a few minutes a week. Sunday school or children’s church offers parents a chance to recover time with their children that has slipped away during the week. Besides, there will always be opportunities later for adults to sit around like statues together in adult classes. Your child will only be in third grade once; if you miss it, it’s gone. I am always amazed by the regret of some empty-nest parents who have only a few memories of their kids’ childhoods because they were too busy with other things to pay attention to their children. Sadly, many parents cannot come up with even one terrific memory for each year of their

kid's childhood. Why? Because they didn't make time for shared memories with their children.

A man once expressed his belief about parenting. He said, "I believe that children should be given a free rein to think and act and thus learn at an early age to make their own decisions. This is the only way they can grow into their full potential." His friend replied, "Come and see my flower garden." He led him outside to a weed-infested plot of ground. The man exclaimed, "This is nothing but a weed patch." The friend answered, "It used to be filled with roses, but I decided this year that I'd let it grow however it willed without tending it, and this is the result."

Source unknown

How Extending the Parenting Process into Church can Affect Children

My parents were committed lay people at church during all of my growing up years. Since church involvement was part of our everyday life, group participation as a family at church seemed very normal to me. I can remember my parents serving as nursery department directors. Recruiting volunteers, ordering supplies and keeping things running smoothly were all part of our experience on Sunday morning. In addition to attending the worship service, it was my job to help by going to the classes to drop off the snacks and pick up the attendance clipboards. After that chore was finished, I went to my own elementary-age Sunday school class.

"Healthy Church = Healthy Families."

During various building projects at the church my dad would volunteer to help clean up, paint and do

odd jobs. He always took me along, and I was expected to help. I was excited to go along because it provided time for me to be with my dad, hang out with his friends and do stuff my mom would never allow me to do at home on my own. I ran machines, commercial vacuums, drills, and other power equipment that other kids my age could only dream of operating. My dad let me do those things under his supervision, and I loved it. My dad used the church environment to extend the parenting process. It taught me more than church attendance; I gained a stronger work ethic, learned how to use power equipment properly and safely, and became invested in the church's vision and growth because I could say I helped (in a meager way) complete the building project!

**“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”
Joshua 24:15**

In addition to all of these advantages I wonder if volunteering at church as a child and teen had any impact on my selection of a career as a children's pastor. You better believe it did.

Families that Serve Together Grow Spiritually Together

Take an inventory of families at your church. The families that rise to the top in the areas of faithfulness and commitment are always those that have a track record of serving together. Parents that decide to serve in their child's group or class exponentially increase the spiritual growth of their family.

One of the problems we face in the 21st century church is the issue of fragmentation of families. We encourage parents to be involved with adult Bible study groups, participate in discipleship, and serve in a variety of ways that separate them from their children.

Instead of acknowledging the life stage of parents and providing creative planning for opportunities to connect them in an active, tangible way to their children at church, we enable the custodial mentality to continue and promote the unhealthy, dysfunctional habit of parents abandoning their children at church.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Instruction For Parents

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The New International Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1984.

Invariably, the children who have had the most serious behavior problems at church under my ministry in the past have not been from families of visitors or new Christians; they have been the children of highly active members, ministry staff or pastors. Often at the root of the misbehavior for the child is bitterness and rebellion against decisions the parent has made to leverage his or her family for some ministry achievement or demand, decisions that have removed the parent from the child's life at significant times. The child feels that the church has robbed him of parental time and attention.

When ministry leaders, whether professional or lay, lose sight of the prescriptive commands that teach us how important it is that we keep our family as the number one ministry in our life, we can get confused and pile drive our most significant relationships into the pavement - the relationships we have with our spouse and children.

The foundation for parental responsibility in the spiritual formation of the child can be found early on in the Old Testament. The "Great Shema" is recognized as the fundamental monotheistic core of the Bible.

First, this passage answers the question, "Who is God?" He is one. He is complete. He is whole. Nothing is missing with God. He is in complete harmony. It also implies that God is the only God and that any other claim to be God by another is false.

Second, the passage answers, "How we are to relate to God?" We are to love God with our heart, soul and strength. This transcends religious knowledge and

makes the relationship with God an expression of love through obedience.

Third, the passage answers the question, "How can we be certain that we are following this great command?" Evidence of our understanding of the passage can be seen in the effort and priority we place on "impressing these things upon our children," as we talk about God's truth when we go for a walk, or before tucking them into bed at night.

"There is no such thing as a typical family - and there is no "typical" way in which to pass on your faith to your children. Since your faith is expressed through the one-of-a-kind life your family leads, your plan for passing on your faith to your children should match who you are as a family. What will work for someone else's family may not work for yours at all. Don't try to fit your family and your children into a one-size-fits-all training program. Use a program that not only considers their differences but uses them and builds on them. Then you will have the joy of seeing them grow in faith as they make Christianity their own and learn to apply God's principles to their own particular situations."

Parent's Guide to Spiritual Growth of Children, John Trent, Rick Osborne, and Kurt Brunner, Tyndale House Publishers, 2000.

And parents invested in passing the torch of the "Great Shema" on to their children will be actively involved in every aspect of their child's life. They will find a way to relate their child's life experiences to a spiritual context for learning. And the church experience will prove to be a key environment for stimulating participation and involvement between parents and kids.

Alternative Approaches to Reaching Parents

Telling parents that they need to make a difference in their child's life is not enough. Often it takes something that can reach deep into the parents' chest and grab their heart. So, what is it that gets parents' attention today?

Sports is the new mega-priority that parents project onto their kids. Over the past several years I have noticed several predominant changes. More and

“Sports does not teach character, it only brings character to the surface.”

more kids come to church on Sunday morning dressed in soccer uniforms and cleats, and they begin tapping their wrist watches when the clock strikes noon. If for some reason the church service extends beyond noon, parents interrupt the classroom instruction or prayer time to remove their children so they can race off to the Sunday afternoon soccer tournament. Many parents subject all other experiences, including prayer, worship and Bible instruction, to guarantee their child's participation in organized sports activities.

One solution is for people of like values and priorities to penetrate the sports league and use their influence to control the league schedule and protect sacred days (Sunday) and times (10 a.m. - noon). This is a good idea but not realistically possible.

Another solution is to begin a new sports league. It's a lot of work but more doable than changing the

scheduling practices of an already-existing league which isn't sensitive to spiritual values.

The other plus to starting your own league is that it can be financially self-sufficient and revenue-producing by its second or third year if administrated properly. Launching a sports league would require a hefty front-end-load investment, but you might be surprised as to who would be willing to contribute in the local business community, especially if they can obtain a tax deduction.

The Parent Report Card

Parent's Name

Date

Child's Name

Evaluation Period to

Circle the grade for each of the following that your parent has earned:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Spends time with me | A B C D F |
| 2. Listens to me | A B C D F |
| 3. Helps me with my homework if I need it | A B C D F |
| 4. Makes the rules clear | A B C D F |
| 5. Is consistent in enforcing the rules | A B C D F |
| 6. Doesn't yell at me when angry | A B C D F |
| 7. Treats all the kids in the family fairly | A B C D F |
| 8. Keeps fun in our family | A B C D F |
| 9. Shows me a good example by completing chores | A B C D F |
| 10. Tries to make holidays special | A B C D F |
| 11. Is building family traditions | A B C D F |
| 12. Shows and tells me he/she loves me | A B C D F |
| 13. Shows respect to me and my friends | A B C D F |
| 14. Lets me make my own decisions | A B C D F |
| 15. Lets me act my age | A B C D F |
| 16. Citizenship (attitude) | A B C D F |

Family Traditions, Otis Ledbetter & Tim Smith, Cook Communications & Focus on the Family Publications, 1998.

Beginning your own sports league is a Herculean task, but it can be done. It is also a good way to reach the community with programming that parents will respond to.

Another way to stimulate Christian education in families is to provide resources that help parents interact directly with their own children. Often, parents who have this interest will already be involved in the spiritual formation process with their kids at church, but for some parents this can be an opportunity to move them toward a personal investment of one-on-one time with their children.

Heritage Builders (Cook Communications) is a resource for parents to use with their children at home. It includes a curricula for weekly meetings that are primarily relational and that teach Bible principles for the whole family to enjoy. *Heritage Builders* will help connect parents and children. It restores the belief that Christian education first begins in the home and that spiritual formation of children rests as a primary responsibility for parents. *Heritage Builders* contains out-of-the-box activities and creative exercises to get families growing together.

Pathologies that Hurt Parents and Children at Church

Every church has signature pathologies. Usually these are reflected through unhealthy habits or attitudes that can be observed in miasmatic form at the senior leadership level of the church. Here are a

few of the most common pathologies that directly affect the parents and children in many churches.

The absence of facility planning and ministry coordination

When churches have a first-come, first-served policy regarding the church calendar and building use, all the ingredients of a nasty church fight are in the brew. Usually, the people hurt most by this pathology are the children and youth because adult ministry needs and wants take precedence over the children's ministry's need for adequate room space. One of the most difficult responsibilities of children's ministry leaders is advocating proper facility use for the children of their church.

One church for which I worked had an overarching value that everyone respected even if some didn't like it. It was, "When it comes to providing room usage during service times, we always make facility space available for children and youth." In fact, of all the things that I respected most about my boss at the church, this value elicited my greatest appreciation.

Denial of resources

The withholding of financial and/or human resources from children's ministry is most often a reflection of ignorance in churches. Those who set budgets usually are not

"Often church resources, facilities and budgets reflect a lopsided value system which diminishes or ignores the tremendous potential children are to the growth of the 21st century church."

exposed to the needs or demands of “cost of goods” on a regular basis, so education, communication and representation are necessary ingredients to help get everyone on the same page. Again, it takes the advocacy of a children’s ministry leader to set a clear agenda for proposed expenses in the budget.

There really aren’t any consistent formulas to plug into the mix, but the best advice is to seek counsel by calling other children’s pastors in your area or by seeking the counsel of a curriculum consultant. Consultants are usually exposed to a variety of churches and can give you up-to-date information about setting budgets and expenses for your children’s ministry based on the size, demands and expectations of your church.

The pathology of denying human resources or financial resources in children’s ministry at a church can usually be identified as the cause for staff turnover or burnout. This pathology will also cause a freeze in recruiting because volunteers will not continue to make self-less sacrifices if they do not sense some degree of appreciation. Appreciation takes time (human resources) and money (financial resources).

**“Truth
and time
go hand
in hand.”**

False Expectations

One pathology many leaders in ministry have is the problem of speaking inflated, overstated, words that set people up for unfulfilled expectations. This pathology is devastating to children and parents. Sometimes this pathology is

passed off as “speaking faith” or “vision” into people’s lives. It’s good to cast vision and dream of what could be, but spilling thoughts out carelessly onto children and parents can easily produce what later might be interpreted as “broken promises,” and at that point, people will feel let down.

I have found that the best way to instill hope in people is to begin by telling them the truth. That’s what people need, and deep down, that’s what they want. I have heard colleagues that I respect in ministry tell a parent who is having problems with a child to just “speak faith into the child’s life and everything will be fine.” That’s nice, wishful thinking, but that’s all it is. Solutions are most often found in helping parents evaluate problems and identify scriptures that provide possible remedies, as well as seek further advice from professional Christ-centered counselors, if necessary. Most important, the parents need to know that the church leaders support and pray for them and are honest with them in the process of parenting.

Never allow empty platitudes to deceive parents or children into thinking that simply speaking trite, happy words is all there is to solving the hard issues of parenting dilemmas.

**“One potato,
two potato,
three potato,
four, we gotta
get these kids
out the door.”**

Segmentation

This pathology has more to do with programming formats and structure that pulls children and parents apart at church.

Have you noticed what happens to families on Sunday morning at your church? It's probably similar to what happens to them in my church. Five minutes before the worship service begins, the doors swing open, and a mad rush of people converge. Those with infants, toddlers and preschoolers dash for the education wing; parents with grade school-age kids wave them on to their rooms as they do the "late for church shuffle" into the auditorium.

This scenario can be replayed in just about every church in every region of the western world. The problem is that unless someone thinks about how to get children and parents together in one room participating in spiritual growth or worship, it never happens. We tend to slice and dice families in a zillion different directions at church.

The real need today is for leaders to make every opportunity for parents and children to be together at church, and to program specific times for that to happen.

I can recall visiting a church in southern California that had posted above each of the entry doors into the auditorium, "Children not admitted during service times." I almost passed out when I read that placard. As a parent, that message communicated to me that my child was not welcome in that church. I doubt if that was the

message intended to be conveyed, but that's what I felt. Like any parent, I made the logical leap - "if my child isn't welcome, then I am not welcome." This is an example of extreme segmentation, but it is a realistic struggle for many churches today.

Cluelessness

This pathology is brought on entirely by ignorance. Our church world is sometimes so small that we do not realize what is happening in the culture around us.

Here are a few interesting changes in the way children spend time from 1981 to 1997 that contribute to the way children and parents look at life.

>Free play and unorganized outdoor activity is down by four hours and thirty minutes a week for kids (4:30).

>TV watching down by two hours a week. This includes videos, cable networks, and broadcast TV (2:00).

>Eating and household conversation is down by one hour and forty minutes a week (1:40).

"It's a constant challenge to remind our kids to play outside."

Here are a few activities that are consuming more of a child's time:

< School attendance is up by eight hours and twenty minutes a week. This is the single most

expanded activity for children over the past 20 years (8:20).

<Household chores are up by three hours and thirty minutes a week (3:30).

<Personal care such as hair care, dressing, and showering, is up by three hours a week (3:00).

<Travel or visiting is up by two hours and thirty minutes a week (2:30).

<Organized sports activities are up by two hours a week (2:00).

<Studying or reading is up one hour a week (1:00).

<Passive leisure is up by two hours and thirty minutes. This includes computer use, visits to museums, local library programs (2:30).

(*Millennials Rising, The Next Generation*, Neil Howe & William Strauss, Vintage, 2000)

Can you answer the following questions about what grade school age kids in general think about these things?

What was this year's favorite movie?

What was this year's favorite music group?

Who was this year's favorite male vocalist?

Who was this year's favorite female vocalist?

What was this year's favorite TV show?

What was this year's favorite video game?

Who was this year's favorite sports figure?

If you can answer these questions, you are ahead of the curve and have a good handle on kid-

culture. If you didn't know any of the answers to these questions then you may qualify as clueless and suffer from this pathology. By the way, you can find the answers to these questions through the MTV/Nickelodeon annual research department.

Authoritarianism

Because authoritarianism carries with it such a bad connotation, 21st century authoritarians have had to change their approach so as not to be labeled as sinister. This pathology is very unpopular, but it is also very much alive

in churches today. Parents and children are damaged by this pathology in a number of ways.

Often authoritarianism requires ultimate compliance to specific criteria imposed by the dictatorial leader.

But the experienced children's pastor understands that not all family issues can be resolved or dealt with in the same manner. In other words, the one-size-fits-all diagnosis of problems that most authoritarians fall into don't really help much. Church leaders who suffer from this pathology are usually the last to know that their approach is viewed as the greatest obstacle in finding solutions for parents or children with difficulties. Authoritarians are like people with bad breath: they don't know they have it until someone tells them.

“Manipulation and control are obsessive tendencies that can be observed in the authoritarian pathology.”

A more subtle and popular form of the authoritarian in the church is often disguised by the statement, "God told me..." Usually, when you hear that statement, the person really means, "God told me to tell you..." Unfortunately, this statement is designed to eliminate any discussion, communication or education that would normally be involved in the process. Instead, the trump card has been played: "God has spoken." How can you refute, discuss, or gain clarification after someone has used this iron-clad phrase?

I have a friend who has the best response to this authoritarian pathology that I've heard. He responds, "Well, if God told you, He certainly is all-powerful enough to tell me, too." I have noticed that those who use this "God told me" control strategy never seem to get a "word" from God that is different from what they want to do.

Truths about life learned by a father from his active kids:

- 1. Legos pass through the digestive tract of a four-year-old; Duplos do not.**
- 2. If you're wondering what that odor is, you don't really want to know.**
- 3. The spin cycle of a washing machine makes cats very dizzy.**
- 4. Cats throw up twice their body weight when dizzy.**
- 5. A king size water bed holds enough water to fill a 2,000 square foot house, two inches deep in water.**
- 6. When you hear the toilet flush and hear the words "uh-oh" it's already too late.**

The authoritarian pathology makes people feel used and discarded, played as a pawn for another's personal benefit or cause. This pathology is also

regarded as abusive control, and the damage is always disastrous.

Parents and children can be led astray and hurt deeply by the authoritarian pathology because it directly abuses trust. If a person has been deceived in this way, it is very difficult to restore the trust that has been broken.

CHAPTER 5

Locating Potential Children's Pastors

Children's ministry is an emerging market in churches today, and often it is the glue that gets young families stuck to a church home.

The single greatest resource to any church is its people. The single greatest indication of a church's desire to impact the future is its ministry to children. The single most important element in

generating vision, strategy, quality programming, standards and practices in children's ministry is the leader. Your children's ministry can only rise to the level of its leadership. Therefore, the capacity of your children's ministry leader is the capacity of your church's ability to minister to children and families.

Frequently, senior pastors ask me, "Can you help our church find a children's pastor?" That question usually sets in motion a long discussion that helps the senior pastor identify what he/she is looking for in a children's pastor, what their church needs and expectations are, and whether someone exists within their church or sphere of influence that could fulfill the criteria.

Many senior pastors that I've talked to have an 'Amazing Kreskin' kind of notion about finding staff. They think that somewhere out there in the great big world exists a person who is the 'perfect' fit, a

"Why are children's pastors so hard to find?"

bull's eye, a children's ministry kenosis with both skills and experience for their church's specific assignment. Sometimes senior pastors are bothered that I would even suggest the possibility that the person they are looking for could be right under their nose, attending their church or already working with the kids in a volunteer role.

So, at the outset of this chapter I will disclose my presuppositions on the subject of locating potential children's pastors and later describe the personnel development process - secrets for challenging the capacity of your children's ministry leader.

Presuppositions

Presuppositions are mental grids our minds use to construct patterns to provide structure for our thoughts. They guide us along and help us think about life and how we interact with the world we live in. Almost all presuppositions are formed from our experiences and environment, so the broader one's exposure and experiences, the more tested and proven the presuppositions will be. The presuppositions below have been formed from both personal experience and study.

"Better the devil you know, than the devil you don't."

The best hire is always someone you know well

I'm talking about more than an expensive background check. This is a person you have some history with and knowledge of his family background. You know the person's spouse and children by name.

You have observed the person's ministry work and admire their contributions to the kingdom.

Timed exposure in a similar role is priceless

Not all great children's pastors are presently children's pastors. Some are currently school teachers, physical education or community recreation directors, day-care directors, diesel parts salesmen, college students, sheriff's deputies, restaurant managers, or retail managers. The key question is, "Does this person work well with children and parents?" and "Can this person both administrate programming and lead people?"

Identify past achievements that match your church mission, vision and values

A skill set which meets your church's needs is an important consideration in the personnel mix. For instance, if teaching and discipleship are high priorities for your church, don't hire someone whose strength is performing shows and putting on frequent large outreach events. If you do, you will set yourself up for unfilled expectations and possibly ruin a children's pastor who has a good heart but doesn't fit the skill set your particular church's mission, vision and values requires.

Familiarity and agreement with your church doctrine is essential

Denominations don't serve many purposes these days, except that they can provide structure and clear

"A popular West Coast bumper sticker reads, 'My Karma ran over my dogma.'"

boundaries between Christian doctrinal positions that seem to be in antinomy toward one another. For example, a Nazarene pastor and an Assemblies of God pastor might share Wesleyan-Arminian theological roots; they may have much to learn from each other through fellowship, friendship and worship. However, the likelihood that they would get along well on a church staff might be stretching beyond the elasticity of Christian love. Why? Because their doctrinal differences are significant: they have opposing beliefs about the process of sanctification, differences in their interpretations of the meaning of "second blessing" and differences over the role, necessity and function of spiritual gifts.

In the same way, to search for a children's pastor outside the boundaries of your church's doctrinal position would be a set-up for disaster. Identify specific, clearly stated doctrinal non-negotiables. Place those in writing as part of your search information package, and be sure to have a discussion covering each of those non-negotiables with prospective candidates. Of course the people who are most familiar with these non-negotiables are probably those from within your own congregation.

Look for familiarity and adaptability to your church culture

People can minister anywhere they set their minds to it; however, the learning and adaptability curve increases when the culture is new, and that takes time. The further you travel from a person's

region of origin, exposure and lifestyle experience, the higher the likelihood of conflicts in culture adaptation.

Another cultural question to be concerned with as you look for a children's pastor is the issue of ministry style. Does your church prefer the conventional approach or the unconventional approach? Formal or informal? Simply put, the candidate and the church need to agree on whether socks and a tie are mandatory apparel on Sunday morning.

Still another cultural question is church accountability structure. Are decisions made by the staff in terms of strategy and implementation or does the church have a board of directors and committee hierarchy that set direction? Will the children's pastor need to set direction for the children's ministry or will she need to follow the mandates of an advisory board?

Finally, if the children's pastor staff candidate lived in the area would he/she choose to attend the church where application is made to work? If there is any uncertainty, scuttle the discussion.

Other hot topics having to do with church culture might include, seeker sensitivity, purpose driven philosophy, equalitarian perspectives, personal preference toward published curricula, family ministry philosophy, worship/music style preference, etc.

Obviously, the presuppositions I've mentioned reveal my bias to hire from within. But if you do

have to search outside your sphere of influence, do so wisely and carefully.

Inside the Process

“Anything is possible if you’ll just show up for work.”

Every person I have hired to work in our children’s ministry has come from our volunteer recruiting pool. All were highly involved, committed volunteers who showed a strong potential, developable skills and faithful servanthood. Today, several of those same people lead large and effective children’s ministries, and that gives me tremendous satisfaction.

Usually, I pinpoint eight specific criteria for moving volunteers into a staff role. Here they are:

Marital cooperation

If the person is married, does the spouse accept and support the demands that active ministry injects into a family?

1 Timothy 3:2-5

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)

Holy Bible, Children’s Ministry Resource Edition, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991.

This is an important criteria because those who try to absorb the demands of ministry into a family that does not share commitment to Christ or approve of the "on-call" nature of ministry quickly find themselves in marital distress.

The blessing of ministry colleagues

Does my boss like the idea of this volunteer matriculating onto staff? Do other pastors and ministry directors have any advice or warning about the person because of previous interaction? Generally, this checkpoint will reveal any important undisclosed or unknown problems.

Leadership

Does he/she take charge in a non-controlling, non-authoritarian way? Do people follow him/her willingly and eagerly? This is a raw skill that can be observed in day-to-day interaction. Does the person make recommendations or take initiative to implement improvements in his sphere of volunteer ministry? Has he accepted ownership and responsibility without becoming "territorial?"

Administration

Is his life under control and in order? Is he personally well kept and neat in appearance? Are his emotions under control, or is there a problem with inappropriate expression of emotion?

This criteria is the bean-counter element, and is important to any children's ministry leader. It involves detail planning (and the ability to have a plan "B" for just about everything, and plan "B"

must be as good as plan "A"). It also involves being able to implement strategy that minimizes labor-intensity. Does the person have the raw, innate ability to help people work smarter instead of harder?

Can the person write strategy proposal and budgets, understand costs of operation and work to reduce costs where unnecessary "fat" exists?

Training

Has the person completed training in a parallel field such as elementary education or early childhood education? Training in these two areas is not mandatory, but it does prove to be an advantage to the prospective staff member, and it could indicate a life-long passion for ministering to children.

Stewardship

Does the person manage his time and financial resources well? If so, the probability is high that he will be faithful and effective with church resources, too.

"Don't leave work until your boss has left. If you do have to leave before him, stop by his office and ask if there is anything else you can do before calling it a day."

Personal Choices

Does the person wish to make vocational ministry his future because of what he can contribute or because of what he thinks he can get out of it?

These criteria must be indisputably in place before proceeding to the next step of considering whether

to move a volunteer onto your children's ministry staff.

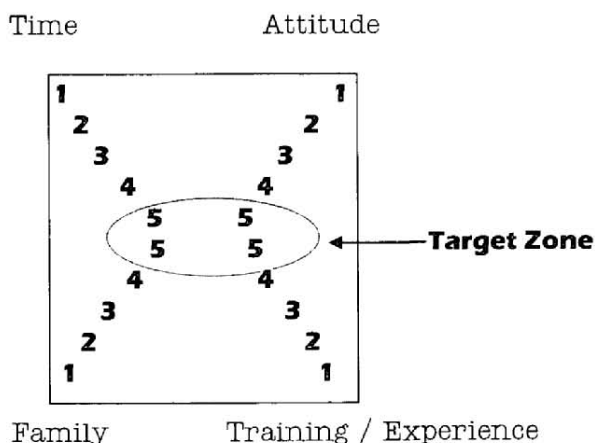
Staff Hiring Appraisal Grid

To further objectively measure the readiness of a prospective children's ministry staffer, I have created a grid which is divided into four quadrants. Each of the quadrants contains a series of five questions. As the questions are answered positively, continue moving toward the "target zone." Any questions answered negatively could point out areas that need to be addressed with the volunteer before he is moved onto a paid staff role.

The four evaluation quadrants are:

- 1. Time* - time is the most valuable, unrenewable resource we have. Is it spent wisely?
- 2. Attitude* - attitude determines altitude. Good attitudes always contribute intangible value to any team.
- 3. Family* - the emotional, social, and spiritual health of one's family is the best indicator of the social, emotional and spiritual health of the prospective staffer.
- 4. Training / Experience* - the best indicator of the initiative, motivation and discipline of a person is his training and experience. It reflects his craving to sharpen skills, learn and grow. This may or may not include formal undergraduate or graduate level training, but a desire for training is an

indication of one's appetite for improvement and personal growth.



Time

1. Does the person show up on time and stay late to clean up?
2. Has the person ever taken vacation time or days off from work to help with ministry tasks (summer camp, vacation Bible school, mission trips, setup for the Halloween alternative)?
3. Does the person keep an organized day-planner?
4. If you're in a ministry crunch, will this person make time to help even at a moment's notice?
5. Does this person help guard your time by not making unnecessary ministry demands or setting unrealistic expectations for you as a ministry leader and friend?

Attitude

1. Does this person have a gracious servant attitude when in stressful ministry situations?
2. Does this person uphold, value, and respect other ministries in the church?
3. Is this person cheerful and pleasant to be around?
4. Does this person promote a “can do” spirit when the going gets tough?
5. Is this person known as an encourager to others?

Family

1. If the person is married, is his or her spouse supportive of this his/her involvement in children's ministry?
2. If this person has children, are the children respectful of their parents' authority and well behaved?
3. Does this person place family needs above ministry demands?
4. If married, does this person have a healthy, happy marriage?
5. Does this person show stability and balance in family relationships?

Training / Experience

1. Can this person function as a leader in familiar situations without being told what to do?
2. Can this person take the pieces of a task and organize them into a ministry program?
3. Can this person communicate with children and adults clearly, concisely, and with enthusiasm?

4. Can this person recruit, train, develop and motivate volunteers?
5. Does this person have a positive track record of experience in ministry with children?

These questions are dependable checkpoints, and they help a supervisor remain objective in thinking

“I don’t own anybody, and I can’t make anybody do anything.”

through hiring a prospective children’s ministry staffer.

Finally, aim high when identifying prospective children’s ministry staffers. The person I am presently working with was recruited out of a pre-med track in college. Other prospects I’ve worked with are far sharper intellectually and relationally than me, but that doesn’t intimidate me. Being around quality personnel raises my level of performance. The goal is that someday they would fill my place. Three of the four children’s pastors that I have trained, now work in far larger, more demanding churches than where they were trained, and I’m glad for that. I just have to remind myself: these are God’s people, and in His time I will be thrilled to release them, to greater kingdom service.

Work Ethic

Full-time ministry is an interesting vocation. On the one hand it is a highly autonomous profession that affords tremendous freedom. On the other hand it can mean non-stop people helping, at even the most inconvenient times. Measuring progress and results in ministry is very difficult since the product

is primarily of a spiritual nature and therefore unquantifiable. This is why, at times, pastors and ministry directors can lose focus and get side-tracked. Work ethic can deteriorate because of an absence of accountability and standards.

Public Agenda Forum undertook a survey of American non-managerial workers. Here are the results:

-Fewer than one out of four jobholders say that they are currently working at full potential.

-One half said that they do not put effort into their job over and above what is required to hold onto it.

-75% said that they could be more effective than they presently are.

-six out of ten Americans on the job believe that they “don’t work as hard as they used to.”

Leaders and Strategies for Taking Charge, Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus, Harper & Row Publishers, 1985.

The strongest advice I can recommend is never, never, nev-er, n-e-v-e-r, ever, hire a person with a poor work ethic. Here’s why: you as a supervisor can teach skills, methods, ministry approaches, systems and efficiency in the work place. But teaching someone *how* to work is a parenting issue. The question you have to ask is, “Can I undertake the job of re-parenting this person over a long and exhaustive period, trying to teach him a life skill that he has avoided learning for decades?”

Laziness is not just a bad habit; it is a social disease spread among all occupations. But it is most painful to see laziness in church ministry. Unfortunately, among white collar professions, the clergy, are regarded as “soft” slackers, marking time with little to show for effort. That’s a painful public perception.

Another reason to value a strong work ethic as a crucial quality in a children's pastor is that, once you hire a lazy person it is hard to get rid of him. Employment laws have made it very difficult for a supervisor to release someone from employment for laziness, even in the church.

It is clear that, beyond loving God, living a morally pure life and having basic vocational skills in place, a children's pastor has to be a hard worker.

Development - Secrets of Challenging the Capacity of Your Children's Pastor

Everyone on a children's ministry staff has room to grow and improve. The following strategies can help supervisors stimulate growth among the children's ministry staff.

Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM Studios during Hollywood's golden era, was known for his tyrannical habits, yet he made MGM into a pivotal cultural force, shaping the movies that shaped America. He knew what today's corporate titans either never knew or can't accept - that the only capital that really counts is human capital.

Mayer once said, "The inventory goes home at night" conceding that without his corps of talented directors, writers and actors, MGM would be nothing.

***Managing People is Like Herding Cats*, Warren Bennis, Executive Publishing House, 1997.**

Strategy 1 - Encouragement

Notice when your children's pastor does a good job. Too often the only things that attract a supervisor's attention are complaints or mistakes. Usually, the children's ministry leadership role in a church retains high expectations and low

appreciation. Kind words go a long way, infusing encouragement and injecting appreciation into the entire children's ministry team. Actively look for ways to encourage and build the esteem of your children's ministry leader. Encourage liberally. Encouragement builds confidence and humility. Churches that fail to encourage their children's pastor, will lose their children's pastor. When that happens, it becomes very easy to detach and begin looking for a new challenge. Bosses, if you like your children's pastor, at least appear to go out of your way to encourage them, otherwise they will feel unappreciated and undervalued, even if that is not what you desire to communicate.

Strategy 2 - Clear Expectations

Most job descriptions are created like a cookie cutter, to conform an employee to certain tasks without regard for chemistry, personality or team fit. The other problem with a job description is that it is seldom used as an ongoing accountability tool. For most organizations, a job description is used as nothing more than a promotional hiring device.

For many churches a job description can become a tremendous inhibitor to ministry growth because it encourages employees to think in terms of the limits of their responsibilities, instead of the opportunities that exist in extending beyond their sphere of responsibilities to stretch and grow.

“We have an acrostic that drives every decision we make, CBA which stands for Current Best Approach.”

My recommendation is to quit wasting time creating laundry lists of tasks in the form of job descriptions. I believe that if a person "needs" a detailed job description, he probably doesn't know what to do, and if that's the problem you don't want to hire that person anyway.

Instead, a more effective accountability device is a Work and Role Expectation Sheet. This is much more useful because it deals with expectations. From time to time, expectations change in the church workplace. An "A" level employee will make shifts and adjustments as need requires. The contents of a Work and Role Expectation Sheet include one large box divided into four smaller squares. In the upper and lower left squares appear these two questions: "What I can expect from my employee" and "What my employee can expect from me." In the right upper and lower squares appear these questions: "What my boss can expect from me," and "What I expect from my boss."

The prospective employee takes the Work and Role Expectation Sheet home one day and fills in answers to the questions that concern his expectations (the right-hand squares). The next day the prospective employee turns the sheet in to the supervisor. The supervisor then completes the two left-hand boxes, answering the questions that concern him. An appointment is then made for them to discuss the expectations they recorded.

Over the past three years I have used the Role and Expectation sheet as the first step for a new hire. It has helped to clarify "up-front" expectations

and diffuse any false or uninformed expectations about the job.

The Work and Role Expectation sheet can be obtained by contacting Darrell Fraley or Tim Harrison (425-702-0303 ext. 223). It is part of a *Personnel Development System* which functions as an Annual Review process for non-profit, Christian organizations.

Art Holst contends that what separates great coaches like Shula, Landry and Lombardi from everybody else is that they have tougher expectations of their players than their players have of themselves. "Shula can look at talent and see what they could do. Whether the players think they can or not, he can sense how great players can be."

Everyone's a Coach, Don Shula & Ken Blanchard, Zondervan Publishing House and Harper Business, 1995.

Strategy 3 - Annual Review

An employee annual review will stimulate accountability and open the communication process. When conducted properly, an annual review will elevate morale, stimulate ownership and pride of workmanship, and create opportunities for expression of appreciation. It will also reduce misunderstanding and false perceptions, identify poor work ethic issues, address misuse of time, dysfunction and unresolved conflict.

An employee must know that an annual review is something that his supervisor does *for* him and not *to* him. When an employee views the review process as a constructive growth and development

Recently, I received this letter from a children's pastor friend of mine:

"I am meeting with my senior pastor today for my annual review, and I plan to ask him, what does he really want for our children's ministry? He may only want an adequate children's ministry. A great children's ministry might not be where he wants to focus money - I don't know.

My biggest challenge is that I inherited the old children's director, who is several years from retiring, a beaver or melancholy personality. Change is very difficult for her, and she continues to hang on to those things she did when we had 190 children - like making little checkmarks on attendance sheets that does nothing other than keep them on the data base or remove them.

Then I have a lion: my new hire who is 10 years younger than me, wants strategy. She has a vision to make our children's ministry great. She loves special events, and I think she sees me as incompetent at times. My strength lies in my ability to care for and build relationships with people. I am a fun loving-otter, and sometimes lions eat otters! I am all too familiar with my shortcomings, lack of organization, etc., and I've gathered team members around me who are stronger in those areas.

I don't know if I appreciate God's humor or not because He's given me an incredibly diverse staff! I am running out of time; I have to figure out how to manage people, and fast! The majority of my time has been spent on crisis; little by little, though, I see we are building a stronger children's ministry, but man alive it has been a struggle.

My first year as director, things were much worse; the ministry was in the pits. It's never an option to close a class for lack of volunteers. Meanwhile we're growing by leaps and bounds. So here I am. I honestly believe that my senior pastors theory is to get the adults, save them, and hope that will trickle down to the children. Keep the children happy, and if they learn about Jesus, that's a bonus. I could be wrong. I'll ask him.

What I need from you Darrell, is advice. I've got to learn new skills about managing people. I need to be a tough cookie, an advocate for children instead of being chicken, afraid to stand up to the boys.

I'm looking forward to lunch this Wednesday - J"

experience, positive things begin to happen in the church workplace.

During the review it is important to celebrate achievements and note growth and jobs well done. Take time to listen to the vision of the children's pastor and become invested as a supervisor in the work and support of the children's ministry leader.

As a side note, every employee at your church should have a personnel file that stores each annual review and other employment agreements. We live in a litigious society, and, unfortunately churches are not exempt. If problems arise with an employee, make thorough notes, complete with dates and times. Keeping up-to-date files on personnel could save you enormous legal headaches at a later date.

"The best confidence and esteem builder known to man is simply telling the truth."

Strategy 4 - Action plan

An action plan is a single sheet of paper, laid out in landscape format, that gives an overview of major responsibilities at a glance. It contains six columns divided in the following way:

Column 1 - work strategies

-a listing of major, annual responsibilities

Column 2 - tactics that animate the strategies

-a listing of how the work strategies will be performed

Column 3 - responsibilities

-a list of who will be involved in completing the task (team members, both paid and volunteer, as well as coordinating departments)

Column 4 - resources needed

-budget needs, human resource needs, facility needs, to complete the task

Column 5 - obstacles

-problems that may be encountered or that may threaten the completion of a project

Column 6 - due dates

-key drop dates for project completion
(an example of an action plan can be obtained by contacting Darrell Fraley and requesting a *Personnel Development System*)

Strategy 5 - Stop, Continue, Start

This exercise is completed by several people at random who observe the ministry conducted by the children's pastor. They may be parents or volunteers who primarily receive benefit from the leadership of the children's pastor. This form is simple, it contains three questions:

Question 1 - what should the children's pastor stop doing to become more effective?

Question 2 - what should the children's pastor continue doing to become more effective?

Question 3 - what should the children's pastor start doing to become more effective?

This form is anonymously completed and returned to the supervisor as part of the annual review process. This provides the supervisor with grassroots feedback and recommendations that can be discussed with the children's pastor to improve efficiency.

Strategy 6 - Factors of Effective Ministry Performance

"Supervision is the best remedy for correcting poor work habits."

Eight specific performance items exist as a guide for employee evaluation in children's ministry. They are as follows:

Priority Setting

- thinks in terms of producing quality and value in ministry.
- understands the needs of those being served.
- deploys necessary resources for key objectives.
- works through obstacles with the end in mind.
- prioritizes work with deadlines in perspective.

Thinking / Problem Solving

- sorts through data and opinions, gathers alternatives.
- integrates intuition and data for conclusions.
- can identify steps toward the goal.

-determines best course of action.

Initiative & Follow-through

- balances risks with outcome.
- handles multiple priorities well.
- self-starts on objectives.
- meets and exceeds objectives.
- finds improved ways of getting results.
- does not hesitate to address pressing issues.

**“Figure out
which direction
people are
going and get
to the front.”**

Leadership

- recognizes opportunities and creates vision.
- motivates others to own and embrace the vision.
- champions and encourages people toward breakthrough.
- uses a variety of resources effectively.

Works Effectively with Others

- demonstrates integrity and high personal standards.
- continues to build, maintain and sustain working relationships even under conflict.
- works between ministries to develop the best approach.

Communication

- seeks first to understand.
- expresses thoughts clearly and concisely both verbally and in writing.
- recognizes differences and communicates to bridge those differences.

-is capable of transmitting messages accurately, with the initial intent intact.

Creativity & Innovation

-uses logic and intuition to define problems and solutions.

-goes outside the lines to find new ideas, methods for improvement.

-translates new ideas into workable situations and formulas.

-encourages co-workers when new ideas are brought forth.

Technical Ministry Mastery

-communicates essentials of technical mastery to co-workers clearly and understandably.

-attempts to be a resource and authority in his/her field of ministry.

Each of the eight factors may be used as quarterly or semiannual checkpoints for helping the children's ministry leader stay focused on the big picture. A simple + for above level performance or an x for on-target performance or a - for below-level performance in each of the eight factors along with some explanation will help the children's pastor work toward improvements

Strategy 7 - Make your children's pastor an integral part of the planning team at your church

In most churches the second largest group in attendance, following the adult worship service attendance, is children's ministry. It would make the most sense, therefore to consult with and

I received this e-mail from a friend -

Here are some comments that have been written on employment evaluations, quotes taken from actual performance reviews:

-“Since my last report this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.”

-“His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of morbid curiosity.”

-“Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap.”

-“When she opens her mouth, it is only to change feet.”

-“This young lady has delusions of adequacy.”

-“He set extremely low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.”

-“This employee should go far. The sooner he starts, the better.”

-“Has a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together.”

-“A gross ignoramus - 144 times worse than an ordinary ignoramus.”

-“He doesn't have ulcers, but he's a carrier.”

-“He would argue with a signpost.”

-“When his IQ reaches 50 he should sell.”

-“A prime candidate for natural deselection.”

-“If he were any dumber, he'd have to be watered twice a week.”

-“Some drink from the fountain of knowledge, he only gargled.”

gain input from the leader of such a large constituency of the total congregation. It is also important to hear firsthand how church programming and vision implementation affects families at your church. The children's ministry leader is the prime gatekeeper for assessing the impact of ministry decisions - how they affect children, youth and parents. Don't ignore or avoid the valuable resource your children's ministry

leader can be to the planning process at your church.

The Best Places to Meet Prospective Children's Pastors

If you are unable to locate and develop prospective children's ministry leaders at your church, there are a few things you can do to network with resources outside your normal sphere of influence. Remember, the more creative you are in your search approach, the greater the likelihood that you will attract the attention of someone on the verge of transition.

**"Children's
pastors are
hard to find
because
churches think
that it is
someone else's
responsibility
to locate and
train people
for the task."**

Most recently, the preteen director at our church had just graduated from college. She had been a children's ministry intern for one year prior to becoming our preteen director. She believed it was time to launch out and become a children's pastor. I agreed. She attended one of the Children's Pastors Conferences that year. During a meal time, a man wearing a sandwich board sign walked from table to table. His sign read, "You could be the children's pastor that our church has been praying for." I greeted him and asked for his card. I told him of the preteen director in search of a children's pastor position, and I immediately had his attention. After she had several interviews and sent out reference forms, the church hired her as their new children's pastor.

This past spring I was speaking at a Christian education conference in the Northwest. The conference was hosted by a church with an impressive facility and quality staff. My workshops had gone well, and the conference environment was fantastic. During one of my workshops someone mentioned that the hosting church had been through a year-long search for a children's pastor without luck and wondered if I would place a resume with them. At that time, it had been more than two months since I had met with my supervisor at the church and I hadn't received any encouragement or appreciation for over six months. How difficult do you think it was for me to submit a resume for that position? Five months later I became the children's pastor at that church.

Here are a few suggestions for getting connected. In

"Children's pastors are odd ducks, one foot is firmly planted in the leadership dimension, the other foot is firmly planted in the administrative dimension."

just about every region of the country, Christian education conferences are hosted. Find the conference closest to you and attend. Identify the workshops led by children's ministry specialists, listen to what they say, and if you like their content, introduce yourself and let them know of your search. Buy them dinner and ask them for a resume. If they are uninterested, ask them for the names of other children's pastors that they think may be a good fit. Follow each of those leads with a phone contact and information packet about your church.

Attend one of the several annual Children's Pastors Conferences around the country. These are top-shelf, professional, educational events that attract several thousand children's ministry specialists. You can reach them by phoning (1-800-324-4543). They also publish a newsletter with classified ad space, as well as a classified web page.

Children's Ministry Magazine also publishes job classified ads for 65 cents per character, including spaces and punctuation. You can mail your ad to Group Publishing - Classified Ads

Box 481

Loveland, CO 80539

Your ad will reach over 150,000 subscribers. The deadline is two months prior to publication.

Publications roll six times a year. Prepayment is required.

Finally, contact your regional Sunday school curricula publishing representative. Among the quality publishers, support and friendship is gladly offered to help you through your search. Your Sunday school curricula representative has prospective leads that you do not know exist. For instance, they know of children's pastors in your region that are currently in transition. Call them: this could be your strongest networking resource.

CHAPTER 6

Acquiring Volunteers

This chapter is about more than recruiting. I believe that one of the biggest mistakes a children's ministry leader can make is thinking that the essence of recruiting is filling needed volunteer positions in ministry and then moving on to the next important task. This is a misperception. The word "recruit" is woefully inadequate in describing the process of assimilating volunteers into children's or youth ministry. The word "recruit" is one-dimensional. It conjures a vision of "qualifying the buyer, and making the sale."

Acquiring volunteers means that you are committed to helping people develop into stronger, healthier Christians through working with kids. Acquiring volunteers in children's and youth ministry is the first step of the process in walking alongside them in discipleship and friendship through a common focus in ministry.

Acquiring volunteers in children's ministry takes time. There are no magic words or instant scratch-and-win tickets to solve a volunteer commitment shortage. There are however, certain qualities that get the momentum rolling in the right direction. The first quality must characterize the thinking and

"People will work hard for money, but they will give their time, energy, money and resources to get meaning."

Christine Yount, editor of *Children's Ministry Magazine*, has written a book that belongs on the shelf of every children's ministry leader. The second chapter is about servant leadership and describes the feelings that can accompany a huge recruiting project. Here's an excerpt:

"Servant leaders finish the job. Jesus didn't stop with distributing the bread and fish. After everyone had eaten, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted' (John 6:12b). And in this final detail - twelve baskets brimming with leftover food - God was glorified yet again.

Isn't it so tempting to lose steam toward the end of a project? I know I do sometimes. There's such a passion at the beginning of a project when God reveals the vision. And then that vision begins to dim as the details of the project are worked out.

I go through a series of stages when I feel called to a big task. First, after feeling called, I have a vision for how God could work in the project. I'm excited about the impact there could be on people, and I'm confident that God will provide everything I need to pull it off.

The next stage hits me when things are getting tough, but I still have enough vision to believe in the project. This is the fearful stage. Can I really do this? What have I gotten myself into? Oh, God help me!

And then I enter the dark stage. Why in the world did I ever agree to such a huge challenge? And I'm angry at anyone who crosses my path. I'm tempted to throw it all together just so I can be done with it. Thankfully, this isn't a very long stage.

The final stage is my 20/20 stage. I return to the place where I remember that God called me to this project, and he will help me complete it. I can point to God's faithfulness along the way as he provided exactly what I needed when I needed it. My faith is bolstered and my commitment to the project returns. Celebration Day - or the due date - finally arrives, and I'm happy that I've given my all to the completion of the task.

Like Jesus, a servant leader is always able to return to the 20/20 stage and continue to co-labor with God to completion. May we keep his example before us as we pass through the bright and dark times in our ministries."

***Recruit and Nurture Awesome Volunteers for Children's Ministry*, Christine Yount, Group Publishing, 1998.**

actions of the leader. He/she must understand that the process of acquiring volunteers is in living a cause, not just filling jobs in the church.

Children's ministry leaders who live a cause are an example to prospective volunteers, because they embody a sense of belonging and purpose. Living a cause inspires commitment and loyalty in volunteers.

Children's ministry is a cause, not a job. Therefore, it can never be characterized by a list of goals or well-constructed five-year plans. It can only be understood as a crusade, a living, bold, aspirational, bigger-than-life, all-inclusive outcome that holds the potential of changing lives for eternity. When articulated this way, people stop, look and listen as the children's ministry or youth leader speaks.

People are bombarded with an average of over 3,000 advertising messages daily. At church, one of the first impressions people receive is the bulletin (a help-wanted ad sheet for people to sign up for volunteer jobs at church). We have all developed filters that screen most of these impersonal ads out of our mind. So what makes people look twice and get their attention? It is the cause that resembles a life-changing crusade. Children's ministry is a cause, and the ministry leader is on a crusade.

“People are attracted to burning objects - are you on fire?”

God is in the Volunteer Acquisition Business

God is all powerful, yet he desires to use humans to fulfill his ultimate plan. This is a humbling thought. God, in his economy, has somehow reserved a place for human contribution in the grand, eternal scheme of things. That means you and I have a responsibility for making the most of our time and resources.

It's easy to get off track and think that our own solutions to problems can be a fix-all, but that's what King Asa thought during his reign of Judah.

2 Chronicles 16:1-10

In the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me." So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. Now it happened,

when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he build Geba and Mizpah.

And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horseman? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.* In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time." *Holy Bible, Children's Ministry Resource Edition*, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, 1991.

"Acquiring volunteers in children's ministry is a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired; you quit when the gorilla is tired."

Our contribution of effort, time or resources to God's plan can never be apart from what his intentions are, and that is for us to be fully reliant on him.

As God is constantly seeking people so that he can "show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to him," we need to be vigilant in our undivided loyalty and reliance on him for the ministry we lead.

Acquiring the kind of volunteers that God is looking for is a 24/7 "open for business" mentality. You never know when or where you are going to spot the person who is right for children's ministry, but when you do, you had better be on the case. After all, if God is on the constant lookout for loyal volunteers, we should be, too. And if the process is time consuming for God, then maybe we shouldn't expect instant results, either. In fact, it could be that volunteer acquisition is difficult because it keeps the leader dependent upon God for the results.

"Without volunteers the children's ministry leader will fail miserably. With unhealthy volunteers the children's ministry leader will fail even more miserably."

The Health of Volunteers

Above all, a safe and secure environment is a priority in children's ministry. Every volunteer must submit a processing form so that a background check may be performed. These steps are precautionary and usually repel those who may have

problem backgrounds. Usually, most church insurance coverage requires that background checks be done on all children's and youth ministry volunteers. Unfortunately, this has to be a reflexive first step when acquiring volunteers in children's and youth ministry.

The biggest headaches you will encounter as a children's ministry leader are those that result from acquiring unhealthy volunteers. I have had more nutty volunteers drive a Sunday school class or a preteen group into oblivion than any other anti-growth element. The dilemma seems that once they are given a group to lead, there is no way to get them out of the situation. By the time it gets to this point the kids have quit coming and the nutty volunteer has driven off all other normal volunteers on the team that may have been able to salvage the situation. Here are a few items that I have included in my profile of identifying nutty, unhealthy volunteers:

Non-stop talkers

These people don't seem to know when it is appropriate to talk and when it is important to listen. They fallaciously believe that students (children) come to the group to hear them talk and pontificate. Eventually, they bore everyone out of their skulls through inane, incessant babbling. If you ever get caught in a long-talker's web of endless verbiage, you will remember this little warning and never make the mistake again of adding one to your volunteer staff.

Obsession with demons

These people believe that the solution to any and every problem is to cast demons out of kids. Undoubtedly, demons can cause problems, but in most situations the primary emphasis belongs in correcting bad habits and sinful behaviors. It's always easy to blame the devil and ignore the human responsibility to obey God's principles. Besides, obsessing on the demonic elicits unnecessary fear among children and morbid curiosity among youth. If you have a nutty volunteer hung up on the devil hiding behind every bush, you will soon know it when your voice mail lights up with parent complaints describing their children repeating all kinds of wacky, National Inquirer - type devil stories they learned from their Sunday school teacher.

On medication

Some anti-depressants make it too difficult for one to stay a step ahead of a group of kids. If a volunteer is convalescing or therapy involves medication, it may be appropriate to take some time off until recovery is complete. Medications can alter one's ability to respond and interact with

"Unhealthy volunteers are a lot like a box of granola - nuts and flakes."

clarity and accuracy. It's best for the kids if the volunteer is free from therapeutic medications when involved in an active group.

Doctrinal oddities

All people have their own unusual views about life, politics

and religion, but the people with doctrinal oddities search out groups to detonate their weird, wild ideas. Generally, volunteers with doctrinal oddities gravitate toward strange, fringe personalities, and it doesn't take long before they reveal their veneration of the crazy personality that has influenced them. Usually, those with doctrinal oddities find a way to lose, misplace, or ditch the approved curriculum and replace it with literature from outer space. After serving in four mega-churches I've seen some wild doctrinal oddities in children's ministry. Recently, I had a youth leader declare that a kid needed to cry for a week to cleanse herself from impurity and satanic influence. Where did he find that in the Bible as a prescription for spiritual health? Another leader told the kids, "God will listen to your prayers more attentively if you pray laying face down on the floor." The Bible does describe a variety of possible prayer postures but none are exclusive to the others, and nowhere does the scripture describe one posture as most worthy of God's attention. Doctrinally "exclusive" oddities are manipulative and misleading. They can easily be traced to man-made, nutty, misguided ideas. Doctrinal oddities can make big problems for any ministry that allows these folks to persist in teaching kids off-base, unscriptural notions.

Legalistic tendencies

These people have mistakenly allowed culture and personal preference to creep into Christianity.

Legalism creates a hollow, relationless feeling in people. Often children and youth who are influenced by legalistic volunteers eventually go through personal crises that result in a jettison of the faith because it is impossible to love a set of rules. Legalistic volunteers hold to a form of godliness, but they deny the power of a relationship with Christ.

Acquire Older Adult Volunteers

I aggressively go after older adults to volunteer with kids. An older adult brings an element of maturity and grace into the group that transmits an aura which can only come from a grandparent.

Older adults who understand the importance of ministering to kids seem to have somehow halted the aging process. By that, I mean their mentality is young, and they can relate well with others from different generations. Often when asking older adults to volunteer I get a response like this: "I've done my time." I think there is somehow a connection between an acceleration in the aging process and a loss of affection for children. For most of us, the only way to maintain a *child-like* faith is to be around kids. I think that's what Jesus may have had in mind as he spoke to his disciples who on more than one occasion demonstrated disdain for children.

Matthew 18:1-3, 10

At about the same time, the disciples came to Jesus asking, 'Who gets the highest rank in God's kingdom?'

For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, "I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again like this child will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me... Watch that you don't treat a single one of these childlike believers arrogantly. You realize, don't you, that their personal angels are constantly in touch with my father in heaven?"

The Message, Eugene Peterson, Navpress, 1993

Whether a person is old or young, a connection to children makes maintaining a childlike faith easier. Here are a few other benefits of connecting older adults with kids:

Older adults preserve the past

If children aren't able to spend time around older adults, they will never come to appreciate their church heritage or have respect for the sacred memories or monuments that older adults hold.

"I can identify with the kids in the nursery: we all have problems with bladder control!"

Older adults fill in gaps

Children who seldom or never see grandparents need older adults to fill that vacuum.

Older adults need kids

The love kids have to share can minister healing and stimulate stronger health in older adults.

Older adults need to be needed

Ministering to children can provide a sense of significance and purpose for older adults.

Older adults need joy

Children can bring an infusion of joy to older adults by helping them recall forgotten memories of their own childhoods or of special times they had raising their own children.

Older adults can provide stability

The focus and format of a child's class led by an older adult takes on a refreshingly different flavor. This is usually a contrast for children who are normally pushed by their parents and their parents peers to hurry, excel, and finish the task. Older adults on the other hand are more relaxed and inclined to give fewer instructions and make fewer demands. Having an older adult as a leader is a welcome break for most kids, and it boils down to this: fewer rules, more stories, bigger laps to sit on, and more hugs.

Older adults have a keener sense of what is important

Children need people in their lives with perspective that can keep them centered. Older

adults offer a more moderate approach to life. They seldom get hung up on the extremes that often side-track younger or middle-age adults.

Older adults generally know more about the Bible

Years of attending church and Bible study can pay off in a big way as older adults realize that most of the information and Bible stories they have taken for granted are new and spellbinding to the kids in a Sunday school class.

The 84 year old, red-haired, firecracker, Dorothy Hayre is one of my all-time most beloved Sunday school teachers. After teaching public school for over 30 years and substituting for another 20, Dorothy taught Sunday school with Phyllis and Carol, and the three of them always had the largest class. Why? Because the kids came every week to see what Dorothy would do next. Sometimes she played the piano, sometimes she brought treats, sometimes she brought surprises, sometimes she told the story. One thing is for sure: the kids loved her. This last year, Dorothy got sick and had a "spell" with her heart. I started praying hard. After a month or so she returned, true to form. I don't know how long God will give Dorothy to teach Sunday school. She is a gift to the church, a part of history that continues to forge the future in children's lives. Dorothy belongs in the Sunday school hall of fame.

Older adults are the "keepers of the memory." As children's ministry leaders, if we don't build bridges between the generations, so much stands to be lost forever.

Acquire Multi-Ethnic Volunteers

Several years ago, after attending a Promise Keeper rally, I left with the question haunting me, "What am I going to do to reach out to people of color?" I really

"Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

didn't know what to do because I worked in a cracker box. The church where I worked was located in a major American city on the Mason-Dixon Line where every year at Christmas the city granted a permit to the Ku Klux Klan for a rally and cross burning downtown.

Only one African-American family attended this, large church. I called them on the phone. They told me they were probably going to change churches and begin attending a church closer to their neighborhood. I begged them to stay. I even offered the wife a job in the children's ministry.

Gary Williams, one of the sharpest volunteers I have ever had the pleasure to work with, had a fantastic connection with the kids. I knew he was a children's pastor in the rough. When I resigned from that church to move east I recommended that they hire Gary as their children's pastor. Instead they launched a search that brought them a "white" children's pastor. A year later Rick Hubbard from Christ Community Church in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida called me in search of an African-American children's pastor. I told him, "I have just the person Gary Williams!" One month later they hired Gary as an elementary children's pastor. With over 2,000 kids on Sunday in a multi-ethnic community, Gary is going strong. Thank God for people like Rick Hubbard who value and understand the importance of multi-ethnic leadership in ministry with kids.

Reluctantly, they stayed at the church, and the wife accepted the job as the nursery leader. We became great friends. Their contribution as a family, working in the nursery and preschool eventually was valued as priceless.

From this experience I learned that the only way to break the old prejudices of the past was to place an African-American leader where her love could be received by the youngest of children and observed by parents. You can't dislike someone that loves your kids for very long. James and Keeshan together deciding to stick with that church caused a breakthrough.

Acquire Men as Volunteers

Men are often the toughest to involve in children's ministry. Here are a few reasons why:

Volunteer roles seem feminized

When women occupy all positions of leadership in service, men will, by nature, distance themselves. Remember, children's ministry is not a branch of the women's ministry. Begin by creating a significant leadership position in your children's ministry, and then leave it open until a man volunteers. Every children's ministry needs both men and women present in leadership to bring balance for the sake of kids.

“Do we really have to wear these dorky aprons to work with the kids?”

Men simply aren't asked

Because men have said "no" to volunteering in the past doesn't mean that they cannot be asked again. I take the posture that "no" means "not today." Tomorrow is a new day, so I'll ask again. Persistent invitations communicate that you really want them on the team. Most men have a deep sense of wanting to be needed. You can appeal to that sense when inquiring for volunteers. Make your inquiry direct and persistent.

Pastor or staff don't encourage men to be involved

If your senior pastor and other staff are childproof, you'll have a hard time convincing men that children's ministry is important.

"My biggest frustration as a volunteer is the lack of organization in this children's ministry."

Organizational weakness

Most men are accustomed to working with clear-cut roles and objectives. When these are not present, men can feel out of place.

Unruly kids

The men you really need in your children's ministry grew up in disciplined, orderly homes. If they recognize that discipline and respect for authority are not taught or expected of the children in your ministry, they will avoid it like the plague.

Too much preparation

If the job requires hours of cutting, pasting and gathering craft supplies, you'll never get men on the team.

No productivity

Many men who work in retail, manufacturing or sales understand productivity. Their lives revolve around it. They evaluate everything through the lens of productivity. If your ministry isn't producing, they won't be motivated to join. When discussing children's ministry with men, take every opportunity to announce growth.

Chances are, the toughest job you have in children's ministry is acquiring volunteers. But if you've got the right attitude, you can reel them in. Recently, my son, a buddy and I took a trip to Northern British Columbia, Canada for a Pike fishing trip. We fished for five days and never saw another person. On one occasion, we found ourselves in a shallow slough off the main river. We could see large Pike under the boat in the weeds, but they had lock jaw. We tried nearly everything in our tackle boxes, but no luck. Finally, I put on a single hook four-inch black, power bait, plastic worm black leader and a black corkie. The last words out of my buddy's mouth before it splashed into the water were, "That'll never work; I've never seen anyone catch a Pike that way." I dropped the goofy rig I had contrived right on the biggest Pike's nose. The fish paused, tilted his head and inhaled the hook. Twenty minutes later we had a 38," 14-pound Pike in the boat.

Invaluable items in the volunteer acquisition process for any children's ministry leader:

- 1. Telephone - this should be permanently attached to the side of your head.**
- 2. Graphic Artist - If you don't have one of these at your church, find one you can hire for special projects and promotions. My graphic person lives in Sacramento. We have maintained a working relationship for over eight years, and he knows how I like things to look. I have used his work in three different churches.**
- 3. Tootsie Rolls - always keep several hundred of these on hand to pass out when you are in a crowd. These goodies cause people to come and meet you. Use tootsie rolls to get people's names and phone numbers for future contacts.**
- 4. Bulletin Deadline - know when this is so you can make submissions on time for general, broad church communication.**
- 5. Favor the Janitors - It's easier to sustain volunteers if they have a clean environment to work in. Janitors are the key to keeping rooms and volunteer work areas tidy and nice.**
- 6. The pen is powerful - get a good editor for your printed communication. A good editor/proof reader can make you appear far more intelligent than you really are.**

Acquiring volunteers can sometimes be like fishing for Pike that won't bite: You have to try something that no one thinks will work. Most often, in my volunteer acquisition efforts, stepping outside the box can really start things popping.

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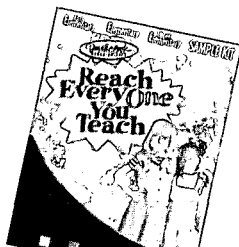
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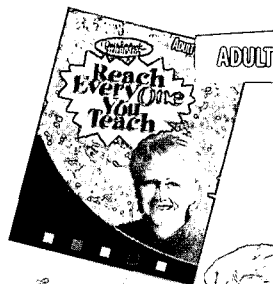
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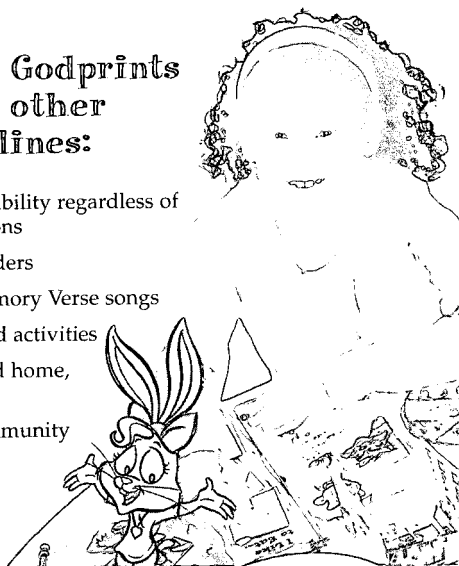
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