

Chapter 5

A BRIEF HISTORY of CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES



WORK IN THE 1800'S

While it is true that Children's Ministries did not become a full fledged department of the General Conference until 1995, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had long recognized the importance of ministering to children even back in the 1800's. Work for children began in 1863 when Adelia Patten wrote a two-year series of lessons for children. From 1864 through 1888 children's lessons were published in the *Youth's Instructor*, most of which centered around biblical history and narrative Bible stories. In 1869 G. H. Bell wrote a series of lessons for children.

WORK IN THE EARLY 1900'S

In 1890 *Our Little Friend* began carrying the Sabbath School lessons for primary and kindergarten children which lasted for sixty seven years. In 1957 *Our Little Friend* began to have Sabbath School lessons for the Cradle Roll children together with the kindergarten children. Sabbath School lessons for primary children appeared in a new publication, *Primary Treasure* in 1957. Sabbath School quarterlies for primary and junior ages started in Australia in 1911-1913, and soon more quarterlies were produced for children for the rest of the English-speaking world. From 1933 to 1936 a series of five volumes called *Bible Stories for the Cradle Roll* appeared. Other curriculum materials for children appeared periodically, both from the General Conference Sabbath School Department and from active and enthusiastic teachers and personnel in local Sabbath Schools around the world.

In the 1960's several men took an active part in the children's ministries department: Curtis Barger, Tom Ashlock, and Ben Leibelt. Tom Ashlock was responsible for developing a new Vacation Bible School

program, with pencil activities being placed in the *Little Friend* and *Primary Treasure*.

At the same time, several women in North America who had a passion for children also developed materials for them. They were Maureen Luxton, Helen Craig, Louise Myers, and Alice Lowe. Louise Myers wrote a series of program books for the Cradle Roll and Kindergarten levels.

CHILDREN'S WORK UNDER CHURCH MINISTRIES

Although there was no organized departmental work for children, but at the 1985 General Conference session in New Orleans, the Church Ministries Department was created, which was formed from a merger of four departments: Sabbath School/Lay Activities, Stewardship and Development, Youth, and Home and Family Service. This department includes services and support for children's ministries work, but it was not until the 1987 world advisory that children's ministries emerged as a new ministry within the Church Ministries Department.

This department, in cooperation with the Review and Herald and Pacific Press publishing associations produced Sabbath school quarterlies for children. These included the *Kindergarten Sabbath School Lessons*, *Primary Sabbath School Lessons*, *Junior Sabbath School Lessons*, *Earliteen Sabbath School Lessons*, and *Mission* (children's edition). The department also produced program helps for cradle roll, primary, and junior/earliteen Sabbath school leaders.

From 1985-1990, children's ministries received its impetus from the vision and prompting of Helen Craig, former Sabbath School associate director for children's Sabbath School, Vacation Bible School, and children evangelism. From 1990-1995, Virginia Smith led out in the work for children's ministries as one of the various support ministries of the Church Ministries Department.

EMERGENCE OF THE DEPARTMENT

The 1995 General Conference session at Utrecht marks a watershed for children's ministries. On July 4, 1995, A. H. Tolhurst proposed a motion from the floor that the Children's Ministries Department be

established as a separate ministry, a separate department of the church. It was seconded and voted, and Children's Ministries became the newest department of the church, the only department in history to be suggested from the floor at a session.

In the year 2000 a new children's curriculum was written for the world church. This was a product of creative thinking and evaluation by many people from all the world divisions. Known as GraceLink, this new curriculum stresses four core aspects of the Christian faith:

- 1.) **Grace**, God's part in the plan of salvation;
- 2.) **Worship**, our response to God's saving initiative;
- 3.) **Community**, how God's grace compels us to live together in harmony as the family of God; and
- 4.) **Service**, our response to God's love as we reach out in soul winning and service to others.

Today, Children's Ministries has become a worldwide ministry with every division in the world field having a director to oversee the work of spiritual nurturing and training for children.