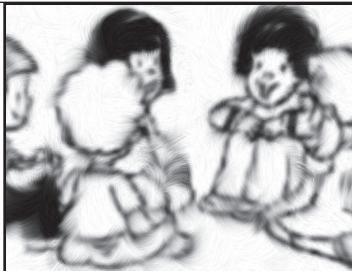


Chapter 11

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES PROGRAMS

for the LOCAL CHURCH



IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL CHURCH CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Every local church, no matter how few children attend, should have a children's ministries program. Such a program can provide nurture and involvement of children in the church's faith community, so as to lead them to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ. Pastors, elders and nominating committees should make it a priority to find leaders who have a passion for working with children, whether as a paid staff member or a volunteer.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES PROGRAM

The larger churches that have many children may employ a children's pastor or leader to run the children's ministries program. In smaller churches where there are fewer children, a children's ministries coordinator may be nominated to shoulder this responsibility. Sometimes a Sabbath School leader is chosen to plan programs for the children of the church.

The *Church Manual* recommends that the Children's Ministries coordinator be nominated to serve on the Church Board or Council. This is helpful so that the coordinator can work together with the pastor and the church in planning an overall program for children that will complement rather than compete with one another.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

It is essential that we plan effective programs for children. However, we need to remember that programs are tools for building the body of Christ. We must never lose sight of our mission in Children's Ministries: to nurture children into a loving, serving relationship with Jesus. Every program we offer needs to lead children along on the journey of faith.

Do not over plan! Start out slowly and meaningfully instead of beginning with many mediocre ones. It is better to strengthen existing programs and add new ones as the need arises, keeping in mind the availability of funds and volunteer help.

We do not necessarily need *all* of the programs other churches have. Choose only those programs that you can resource, remembering that the more Children's Ministries programs a church provides and advertises, the more the church attracts families, and the congregation will grow. This chapter examines some programs that reach kids. It provides ideas and encouragement for specific ministries. But, pick and choose carefully.

PROGRAMS THAT REACH CHILDREN WITHIN THE CHURCH

CHILDREN'S SABBATH SCHOOL

Purpose: To provide religious education for children that helps them build a relationship with Jesus. This is the time when children study the Scriptures, fellowship together, and are involved in service to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

Description: A total hour Sabbath School program based on a weekly Bible lesson. Children are involved in active learning and participate in a variety of activities that meet their learning styles.

Unique features: This is the only ministry that reaches all Adventist children. It provides a great opportunity to study the Bible with the children and help them relate these truths to everyday life. Children's

Ministries Directors need to make sure that in all churches where there are children Sabbath Schools should be provided for the children according to their appropriate ages.

Resources: *Children's Ministries; Ideas and Techniques that Work* (AdventSource); *GraceLink Curriculum Resource for Teachers* (Review and Herald).

CHILDREN'S CHURCH

Purpose: To provide children with the opportunity to worship in an age-appropriate setting, learning at their level of understanding, and participating in worship.

Description: Children's church is a church service just for children. It begins when the adult church begins. Children's church is scheduled according to the needs of each church, varying from once a month to twice a month. It is most needed by children ages 2-8, who find it difficult to sit for any length of time.

Junior-age children need their own junior church, or they can attend the regular service. Children's church incorporate all the elements of regular worship such as praise, prayer, sharing or testimony, studying the Word, a children's sermon, and drama or skits that apply the Word to everyday life.

Unique features: Children are given opportunities to participate in worship and to understand the elements of worship.

Resources: *101 Ideas for Children's Church* by Jolene Roehlkepartain (AdventSource); *Children's Church: Responding to God's Love* (AdventSource); *Children's Sermons: Using the 5 Senses to Tell God's Story*, by Philip D. Schroeder (Abingdon Press).

CHILDREN'S PRAYER MEETING

Purpose: To involve children in a meaningful prayer experience.

Description: It involves a short talk based on scripture to strengthen the children's belief in and understanding of prayer. It includes songs, prayers, and an activity or craft. Children can also meet in a home instead of the church.

Unique features: It offers children a special opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship with other peers.

Resources: *Forever Stories Funpack* (Review and Herald); *52 Ways to Teach Children to Pray* (Rainbow Books); *100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids* by Karen Holford (Pacific Press); children's devotional books; Week of Prayer children's devotionals (Adventist Review).

CHILDREN'S BAPTISMAL CLASS

Purpose: To prepare children who have expressed a desire to be baptized.

Description: The children study the fundamental beliefs of Christianity and the Seventh-day Adventist Church to understand their relationship and responsibilities to God and to the community of believers.

Unique features: Children's baptismal lessons are presented on a child's level of understanding. They can take as long as they need in preparation for baptism.

Resources: *"It's My Choice" Baptismal Guide* by Steve Case (Review and Herald); *ChristWise: Discipleship Guide for Juniors* by Troy Fitzgerald (Review and Herald); *ChristWise: Discipleship for Teens* by Troy Fitzgerald (Review and Herald).

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Purpose: To give children an experience of worship through music and to train them in singing and in understanding music as a ministry outreach.

Description: A musical group for kids that performs mainly in church as well as in the community. It can be a long-term or a short-term project in preparation for Easter, Christmas, or Children's Sabbath. Community children can be invited to join the choir and their parents invited to the performance. Choir devotionals, the music itself, the performance, and the relationships formed can all be a great witness.

Unique features: This ministry brings together church school, public school, and community children. It provides a great opportunity to teach children good music and influence their musical tastes.

CHILDREN'S SABBATH

Purpose: To provide children with the opportunity to use their gifts and talents by participating in the worship service.

Description: This is a special yearly program on the third Sabbath in October, to promote awareness of children's needs and our responsibility to meeting their needs as a church. Children participate in the worship service, taking on functions such as praying, Scripture reading, leading song service, preaching, collecting offering, and special music.

Unique features: This special program provides a great opportunity to train children as leaders in the church. Children feel included as members of the church by being involved.

Resources: *Open Heart, Open Hands, 2003* (North American Division Children's Ministries); *Stand Up! Stand Out! 2004* (NAD Children's Ministries).

CHILDREN'S RETREAT

Purpose: To provide spiritual evangelism and nurture for children in a camp setting.

Description: Children get together for 2-3 days on a campsite or a retreat center for interactive activities that encourage spiritual, physical, social, and mental growth. A specific theme is chosen and the program is then planned around this theme. Programs can include stewardship, Adventist heritage, Bible-time-experiences, and Bible heroes.

Unique features: Offers weekday programming as well as Sabbath programs. Children are also given opportunities to develop their leadership as well as their spiritual, physical, and social skills.

Resources: *My Place in Space* (GC Children's Ministries Department); *Jesus, Then and Now* (AdventSource).

CHILDREN'S EVANGELISTIC MEETING

Purpose: To help children make a commitment to Jesus, and to understand the plan of salvation and the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

Description: A series of meetings for children that present age-appropriate truths while the parents are attending the adult evangelistic meeting. The programs include Bible stories and doctrine, memory verses, songs, prayers, activities, and crafts.

Unique features: Presents a concentrated study of the plan of salvation and the distinctive beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists on the level of the children.

Resources: *Bible Treasures* by Aileen Sox (Pacific Press); *Forever Stories Fun-pack*—ages 4-11 (Review and Herald); *Come Meet Jesus*—ages 8-11 (Review and Herald); *The Underground Adventure* (South Pacific Division).

YOUNG PREACHERS' CLUB

Purpose: To train children who have the gift of preaching to preach God's Word.

Description: Children, who have an interest in preaching, join this club, which meets 1-2 times a week. They receive training in sermon preparation, delivery, and other public speaking skills. After several months of training, the child preachers get to practice these skills in real settings such as worship service, evangelistic meetings, children's church, and others.

Unique features: Children get to be trained as young preachers when they have an interest and the gifts of preaching. There is also the opportunity to fellowship and work with their peers in a great spiritual experience.

Resources: *Young Preacher's Club* by Children's Ministries Department, Inter-American Division.

CHILDREN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL

Purpose: To give children the opportunity to use their musical talents in areas of singing, playing instruments, musical mimes, etc.

Description: Children gather for a day of music extravaganza. Programs include exhibitions and short demonstrations of musical instruments, mimes, choral works, etc. followed by musical performances of the children. Community children can be invited to join the festival.

Unique features: This ministry brings together children with various musical talents and abilities as they use these gifts for praise and appreciation. It provides a great opportunity for children to learn good music and how they can reach out through music ministry.

CHILDREN'S NATURE CAMP

Purpose: To inspire and lead children into energized, enjoyable appreciation of the natural world.

Description: A get-away to a camp or place out in nature for a couple of days where children participate in nature activities that will uplift, motivate and inspire them to appreciate the Creator God.

Unique features: Children get the opportunity to explore the natural world through fun activities, games, video presentations, and nature study. This is a great time for group dynamics and bonding.

Resources: *Sharing Nature with Children I and II* by Joseph Cornell (Dawn Publications); *A Family Guide to Sabbath Nature Activities* by Eileen Lantry (Pacific Press); *Four Seasons...Five Senses; 52 Weeks with Nature* by Thais Randall Baer (Pacific Press).

OTHER PROGRAMS

Children's health fair; stewardship camp; children's Bible camp; weekly Bible classes for children not attending Adventist schools; week of prayer; children's story at worship; children's small groups.

PROGRAMS THAT REACH NEW CHILDREN

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Purpose: To reach out to children in the community and lead them to Jesus.

Description: Vacation Bible School (VBS) is the most popular community outreach program. It is generally held during the vacation time, lasting 5-10 days. It can start in the morning from 9:00 to 12:00 or any other time suitable to the needs of the community. The program involves a general session, Bible stories, crafts, and games. Teens can be great helpers here.

Unique features: Children in the church are given the opportunity to meet with children in the community, and they learn how to be friends to these visitors.

Resources: *Friends Forever* (AdventSource); *Jesus' Kids in the Kitchen* (AdventSource); *Creation Station* (Review and Herald); *Lava Lava Island* (Group Publishers)

NEIGHBORHOOD BIBLE CLUB

Purpose: To continue as a follow-up from Vacation Bible School.

Description: This is a 1-2 hour program of Bible stories, songs, crafts, and games that could be conducted in a home, car porch, or backyard. A family of the church can volunteer to host the Bible club and invite the children who have attended the Vacation Bible School as well those who have not.

Unique features: It's a wonderful family outreach project for children who have attended Vacation Bible School. Invite them to that home for the club and encourage them to invite their friends in the community to join too.

Resources: *Forever Stories* Funpack (Review and Herald); *My Bible Friends* by Donna Williams (Florida Conference).

PLAY GROUPS

Purpose: To reach out to young mothers in the community and introduce them to God.

Description: Mothers with small children are invited to bring their children to the church for fun and play and socialization. They will get to meet with other young mothers of the church, thus giving them an opportunity to form friendships and network with each other. This program can be conducted twice a week in a large room where there is space for toy cars, jungle gym, and other activities. Provide refreshments for mothers and children. After some time, these mothers can be invited to parenting classes, small groups, etc.

Unique features: It offers young mothers some time to get away from the house to meet other mothers in the community. There is time to chat over food as they share parenting tips and issues.

Resources: *Mothers of Preschoolers* (MOPS) (Group Publishers).

CRAFT WEEKEND

Purpose: To involve kids in fun activities by learning and making a variety of crafts.

Description: Children in the community are invited to participate in a fun-pack activity of creative craft making. This program can be conducted on a Sunday morning from 9:00 to 12:00 or at a time most convenient for parents to bring their children. Getting acquainted with the children and their parents is essential for building better relationships.

Unique features: Children are given opportunities to learn new crafts and make new friends. It is another opportunity to know parents in the community.

Resources: *Encyclopedia of Bible Crafts for Children* (Group Publishing); *Bible Story Crafts and Projects Children Love* (Group Publishing); *Creative Can-do Crafts* by Lois Keffer (Group Publishing).

WELCOME BABY

Purpose: To get acquainted with new mothers in the neighborhood and to support them in their early months of motherhood.

Description: Women of the church get together to visit mothers who have just delivered their babies. They could be friends, relatives, or neighbors of the church women. They bring food, gifts for the baby, and materials on childcare for the new mother to read.

Unique features: This is an excellent outreach program for new mothers who need encouragement and support in the early months. Good friendships established can lead to further witnessing opportunities.

Resources: *Welcome Baby Program* by Kay Kuzma (AdventSource).

MOBILE LIBRARY MINISTRY

Purpose: To reach out to the children in the rural community and introduce them to Jesus through books and stories.

Description: Each week the mobile van library travels to specific rural towns to provide the children there with books and other Bible stories materials. Each child can borrow one or two books for a week and will return them for other books when the van returns the following week. The mobile library also offers a puppet show, a Bible story and songs for children for about 45 minutes.

Unique features: This is an appealing outreach program for children in the outlying towns and villages where they have little access to books and materials. It opens up avenues of meeting the children's needs as well as giving them an opportunity to learn about the Bible and the gospel. In many cases, parents are also attracted to this mobile library.

Resources: Children's stories published by Pacific Press and Review and Herald.

SUMMER BIBLE STUDIES

PURPOSE: To provide an opportunity for children for specific Bible lessons.

Description: The focus is on active learning in special locations according to the Bible topics. Bible stories come to life in real life experiences as the Bible lesson unfolds.

Unique features: Children experience the Bible lessons in real life situations. They sit at the beach and review the Red Sea experience; tour a courtroom and study God's justice; walk in a wheat field and explore the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Children create project-oriented Bible study programs, such as developing a Creation museum after a study of Genesis. The museum featured fossils, bones, and dinosaur replicas.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Puppet ministry; community story hour; radio programs.