

Recruit and mentor teachers who care for kids. **PAGE 11**

Gospel Light's



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

SMART PAGES

GRADES 1-6

Make time to get support from your pastor and your church. **PAGE 26**



Focus on your ministry goals and vision. **PAGE 9**



Meet the learning styles of today's kids. **PAGE 187**



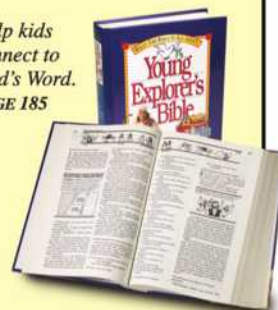
Equip parents to partner with you in spiritual teaching. **PAGE 23**



Keep your kids safe. **PAGE 101**



Help kids connect to God's Word. **PAGE 185**



Provide the supplies teachers and kids need. **PAGE 92**



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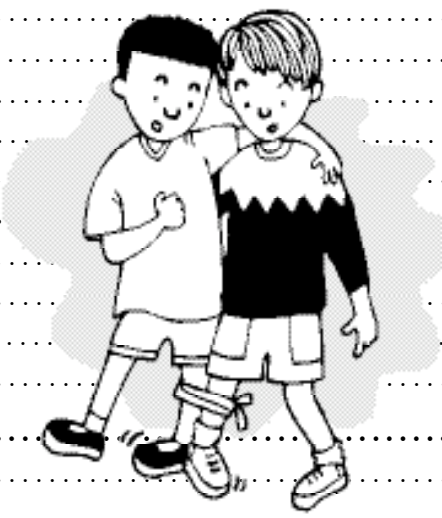
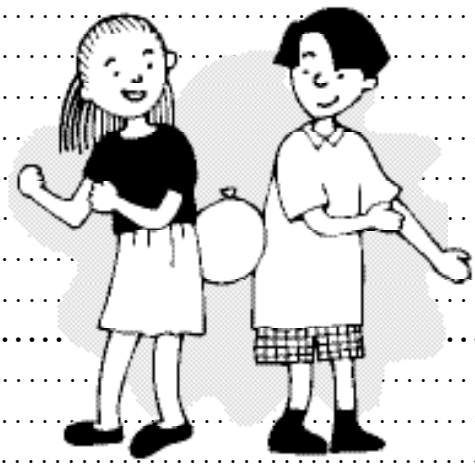
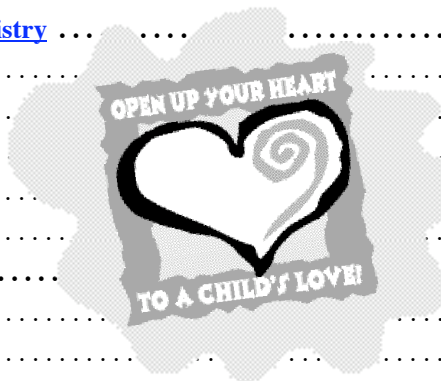
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[Return to Main Menu](#)

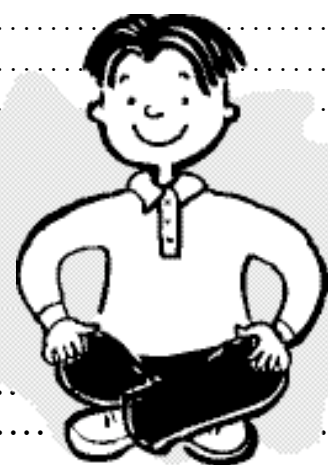
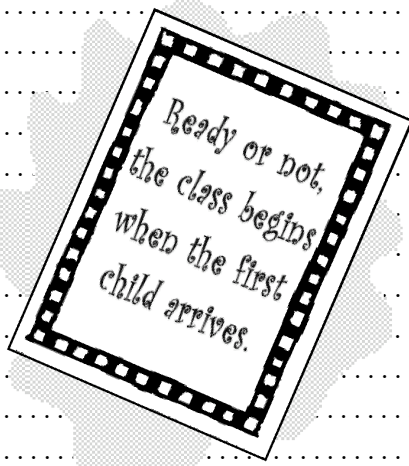
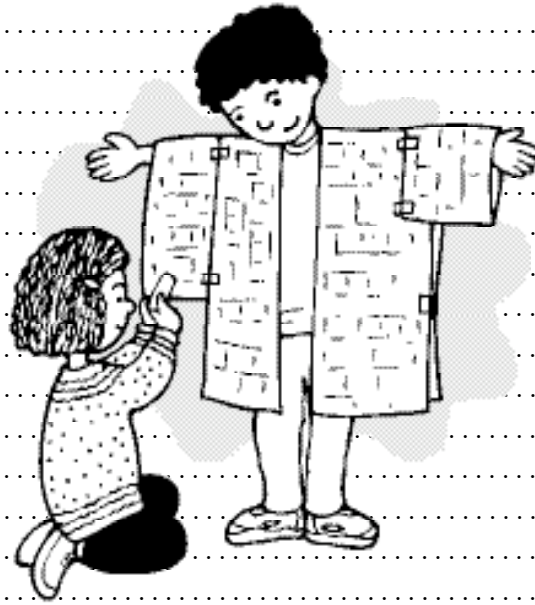
Contents

Director's Articles

<u>A Place Where God Is at Work: Organizing Your Children's Ministry</u>	5
<u>Ground Rules: Developing a Philosophy of Children's Ministry</u>	7
<u>Mission Statement: Ideas for Your Ministry</u>	9
<u>Raising Awareness: Recruiting and Publicity</u>	11
<u>Assessment: Reasons and Recognition</u>	16
<u>Questions and Answers for the Director</u>	26
<u>A Place Where Truth Is Taught: Programs and Curriculum</u>	31
<u>Curriculum: Choosing What's Best</u>	33
<u>Programs: Deciding What to Offer</u>	36
<u>Children: Grouping for Growing</u>	40
<u>A Place Where People Are Primary: Staff</u>	43
<u>Ratios: Teacher to Children</u>	45
<u>Job Descriptions: Positions That Perform</u>	47
<u>Volunteers: Terms of Service</u>	56
<u>Volunteers: Application and Screening</u>	58
<u>Orientation: Guiding New Teachers</u>	61
<u>Training: Planning and Guidelines</u>	64
<u>Volunteers: Creative Appreciation Ideas</u>	71
<u>Teaching: Tough Questions, Real Answers</u>	73
<u>A Place for Kids: Facilities and Supplies</u>	77
<u>A Welcoming Place: Just for Kids</u>	79
<u>Facilities: Equipment</u>	81
<u>Facilities: Decorating Ideas</u>	88
<u>Facilities: Guidelines for Sharing</u>	90
<u>Supplies: The Resource Room</u>	92
<u>Facilities: Time Outdoors</u>	97
<u>A Safe and Healthy Place: Policies and Procedures</u>	99
<u>Health: Policies and Procedures</u>	101
<u>Safety: Check-In Procedures</u>	109
<u>Safety: Emotional and Spiritual Safety</u>	115
<u>Safety: Keeping Children Safe from Abuse</u>	117
<u>Health and Safety: Questions and Answers</u>	122
<u>A Home That Enriches: Parents and Families</u>	123
<u>Families: Support and Ministry</u>	125
<u>Families: Communicate the Basics</u>	131
<u>Families: Children and Families at Risk</u>	133
<u>Families: Questions and Answers</u>	135
Teacher Training Articles	137
<u>Art: Using Art to Teach the Bible</u>	139
<u>Attendance: Get the Support of Parents</u>	141



Attention Deficit: Teaching the Child with ADD/ADHD	143
Bible Games: Play to Learn	145
Bible Learning Activities: Hands-On Discovery Learning	147
Bible Study: Spiritual Preparation for Teaching	149
Bilingual Teaching: ¿Se Habla Español?	151
Capturing Children’s Attention: Hey There!	153
Characteristics: Children at Every Age and Stage	155
Children’s Needs: Meeting the Needs of Children	161
Choices: Teaching About Decision Making	163
Christmas: Keep Your Eyes on Jesus	165
Classroom Conversation: Talk to Me	167
Creative Writing: Teaching the “Write” Way	169
Death: When Children Ask About Death	171
Discipline: Keeping Order Among Young Disciples	173
Discussion: Keep the Kids Talking!	175
Drama: All the Classroom Is a Stage	177
Easter: Teaching Children Jesus Is Alive!	179
Facility: Making the Most of Your Classroom	181
Guidelines: Ten Commandments for Teachers	183
Learning Process: The Building Blocks of Learning	185
Learning Styles: How Do We Learn?	187
Memorization: Hide God’s Word in Your Heart	189
Mixed Ages: All Together Now	191
Music: Make a Joyful Noise!	193
Parents: Get in Touch with Parents	195
Prayer: Hello, God, It’s Me!	197
Questions: Helping Children Respond	199
Relationships: Building Trust in the Classroom	201
Salvation: Leading a Child to Christ	203
Schedule: Goals and Methods That Work	205
Service Projects: Look What We Can Do!	209
Special Needs: Children with Disabilities	211
Storytelling: Tell Me a Story!	220
Teacher’s Role: What Do I Do?	223
Teacher’s Vision: Why We Teach Kids	225
Theology: Teaching Abstract Concepts to Children	227
Today’s World: A Child’s View	229
Transition: Shifting Gears in the Classroom	231
Visitors: Welcoming the New Child	233
Visual Aids: I See What You Mean	235
Miniposters	237
Using the CD-ROM	250
Index	252



A Place Where God Is at Work

Organizing Your Children's Ministry

Whether you are ready to frame a new ministry or reframe and refurbish an existing one, here are ideas to get you excited and help you get off the ground! This is your opportunity to dream, pray and plan for a ministry in which things are so well organized that time and energy are still available for you to focus on the work God wants to do in young lives!

This practical information includes considering the reasons you minister to children, the reasons to write a mission statement and ways to reach your stated goals, how to assess what your children are learning, how to recruit and publicize your ministry and how to best understand the people you recruit so that they can be trained to fill the place God has planned for each one.

Organization may not seem like the most enjoyable part of ministry! But to face it with zeal, remember the benefits of the process: Good organization encourages efficient administration. Efficient administration provides you and your teachers with more time and energy to give to the most important parts of children's ministry! Every moment you gain can be spent praying for, learning, loving, teaching, encouraging, helping and mentoring individual children. These moments are what God uses to build a ministry that is effective in leading children to become wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ!

[Return to Main Menu](#)

Ground Rules

Developing a Philosophy of Children's

WHY DO WE NEED CHILDREN'S MINISTRY?

If you are reading these words, it is probably because you are involved in children's ministry at your church, either as a paid staff member or as a volunteer. That probably means you care about children, about their families, about your church and about God's purposes here on Earth. Hurray! We're off to a great start. Even if you don't fit the above profile, keep reading anyway: You may discover that you, too, were meant for children's ministry!

We need children's ministry because children matter to God.

Jesus made it quite clear that children—even little children who are not yet articulate—matter to God. He values them not only for what they will become in the future but also for who they are today! Jesus even recommended to His grown-up, self-important disciples that to understand God's kingdom, they needed to observe, learn from and imitate young children! (For further study, read Mark 10:13-16.)

We need children's ministry because children need to learn about God.

We all agree that children need to learn about God: That's the stated purpose of children's ministry! However, for children to learn about God effectively, they may not necessarily need more information or newer programs. The most effective way for any child to learn about God is through the attitudes and actions of a person who is willing to live out the Christian life before him or her. For every child—from an infant to the oldest child in your ministry—a relationship with a living, breathing Christian who cares about him or her is the cornerstone of learning about God.

Even in the best children's ministries, there may be an unspoken agreement that the main purpose of a children's program is to keep children happy, quiet and far

from the adults so that adults can do the truly important things like worship and Bible study. But this view of both children and of ministry to them yields a manager's mind-set rather than a minister's mind-set. As managers, we see a group to be managed through entertainment ("As long as they're having fun!") or pacification ("At least they're quiet!"). With a manager's mind-set, a session is considered successful if no one got hurt, if all the adults were left undistracted and if the children went away reasonably happy. This is child care, not children's ministry. While good child care is a fine thing, it is only a small part of ministry to children!

When we (and those who teach) choose a minister's mind-set, we ask God to help us see each child as an individual with whom to build a relationship. As we take time to build loving relationships, children (and their parents) come to see, hear and experience how the love of God through Jesus Christ looks, sounds and behaves! A minister's mind-set causes us to truly hear,



Developing a Philosophy of Children's Ministry

see and love each child with the purpose of building a relationship that shows that child who Jesus is.

We need children's ministry because it's biblical.

Consider these words from Psalms: "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Psalm 78:4). The very foundation for our ministry to children is girded with declarations such as these from God's Word. Best of all, Psalm 78 goes on to describe the amazing result we can expect from teaching children about the Lord: "Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Psalm 78:7). When we give our utmost attention and best effort to children's ministry, we are fulfilling the vision set forth in the Bible for teaching the faith.

We need children's ministry because it provides for the future.

Imagine your church's future if for the next 10 years, a group of adults would commit themselves to fostering the *spiritual* growth and well-being of the children in your congregation? What would your church be like if reaching children in your community became one of its major priorities? The future is as bright as God's power and as sure as His promises. To most effectively reshape society, children are the ones with whom to begin.

We need children's ministry because it's the best investment we can make.

Between the ages of 5 and 12, there is a 32 percent probability that a person will embrace Jesus as his or her Savior—and the percentage drops off dramatically thereafter. Researcher George Barna remarks, "In other words, if people do not embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior before they reach their teenage years, the chance of their doing so at all is slim."¹ Thus, in terms of financial and time investment, children's ministry creates the highest spiritual yield of any age group! The lifetime impact of children's ministry is immeasurable. A strong children's ministry not only gives a great return today, fueling and strengthening the entire church body but also yields a brighter future for every area of a church's ministry.

A strong children's program also grows a church from the outside, bringing in new families who did not previously attend church. The majority of families who become part of the church from outside it say they connected mainly because of the way their children were loved and cared for by the leaders and teachers in children's ministry. Beyond that, children who are growing and learning are the most effective means of inviting other children who then come to know Christ and take the good news back to their own families!

Note

1. George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), p. 34.

Mission Statement

Ideas for Your Ministry

HOW CAN WE CONCISELY COMMUNICATE OUR IDENTITY AND GOALS?

WHY WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT?

In the every-week flurry of any children's ministry, there are needs to be met, supplies to be bought, problems to be solved and children to be loved. It may not seem as if there is any time to actually *think* about the big picture of the purpose for which your children's ministry exists! However, creating a mission statement can help to build and keep a ministry in top form.

A mission statement provides direction. This old adage is a wise one: "If you aim at nothing, you're likely to hit it." Without a destination, we don't know where we are going; without a goal, we won't even be able to tell if we have lost our way! To help a ministry understand its goals and think about ways to become more intentional, a mission statement is a valuable tool.

A mission statement is a survival tool. A mission statement can help with individual survival for the children's leader who may feel overwhelmed and overworked. To increase hope and mental health during tough times, a stated mission can be a lifesaver!

HOW TO WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT?

Set aside a time first for yourself and then for key members of your team to consider the big picture of your children's ministry. The process requires time and a willingness to focus. Begin with prayer. Invite God to direct your thoughts as you brainstorm answers to the following:

- ★ What are the reasons we want to minister to children?
- ★ What could God do through this ministry?
- ★ What is our overall goal?
- ★ What steps do we need to take to reach this goal?

- ★ What priorities will help us stay focused on reaching our goal?

Write down any and all ideas. After a time of prayer, refine the ideas into words that clearly and concisely convey what you mean. If your church has its own mission statement, craft your ministry's statement to line up under the mission of the church. The development of your statement should be an outgrowth in support of the overall direction of your church body.

Write your statement in a few clearly-stated sentences. They (like road signs) will help you stay informed and focused as you keep moving down the path toward the goal. (Avoid Christian jargon. Express your mission statement in words any unchurched person can understand!)

When you ask God for a view of what He could do in the future with your ministry, you get a sense of His destination for you. As you formulate a mission statement, you gain clearer understanding of what it will take to press on toward that future.



WHAT WILL A MISSION STATEMENT DO FOR US?

The exercise of formulating a mission statement will produce far more than a nicely worded catchphrase or even a well-constructed theological document: These words will become tools by which to evaluate your motives, your programs, and even your disasters, so that you don't lose focus on what is most important! This process will also help you discover the characteristics that make your children's ministry unique. Incorporate those characteristics into your thinking to consider unusual ways God could use your ministry. As each person contributes to the process, you'll find team unity increasing. This statement is a clear expression of what your children's ministry is, made unique by the gifts of each member of your team!

Here are samples of mission statements from a variety of children's ministries:

- ★ To be a Bible-based, functioning community of believers who actively teach and model for children how to become committed followers of Christ.
- ★ To partner with families as they lead children to know God personally through Jesus Christ, to mature in the character and likeness of Christ and to put their faith into practice for all of their lives.
- ★ To lead children into knowing Christ and then to help them mature in following Christ.
- ★ To reach and teach children and their families in ways that will give them the greatest possible opportunity to become wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ.
- ★ To change the lives of children by connecting them to Christ through worship, fellowship, discipleship and outreach.
- ★ To express Christ's compassion for children and families by loving them and nurturing them in their

journey to follow Him.

★ To help families and children to KNOW Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to GROW in their faith as followers of Jesus and to GO out into the world to represent Him.

Use your mission statement when meeting with your church board and your pastor to help clarify your purpose and the plans to accomplish it. Post the mission statement where you and your staff see it often, so that it may be used as a tool to evaluate what goes on. Help everyone recognize that the mission statement is designed to clarify God's mandate for your children's ministry. (For more on uses of mission statements, see the article on recruiting and publicity on p. 11.)

HOW DOES THE MISSION GET ACCOMPLISHED?

Once your mission statement is in place, help your staff begin to list measurable ways to know if the mission is being fulfilled. (To help teachers think about how to determine if your mission is being accomplished, encourage them to notice the way in which the purpose of a lesson in curriculum is accomplished through measurable goals.)

For instance, your mission statement may refer to equipping families to lead their children to Christ. Teachers might then measure their accomplishment of the mission by evaluating themselves by the following standards: knowing every child's family, having family contact information at hand, sending home family growth ideas once a month and helping with two informal parenting classes yearly.

When teachers and helpers catch the vision of what God can do and then take responsibility for accomplishing some part of that mission in a way unique to the skills God has given each person, the mission of your children's ministry will skyrocket toward accomplishment!

Raising Awareness

Recruiting and Publicity

HOW DO YOU GET THEM? HOW DO YOU KEEP THEM?

Keeping a positive attitude about recruiting and publicity can be a challenge! Children's ministry may not seem to be a top priority in the congregation. Adults may feel that they are too busy or have already done their time in teaching children. Potential recruits can seem scarce. However, it is essential to think of recruiting and publicity not as the incessant beating of the drum of desperation but rather as a chance to trumpet the great accomplishments of God in your community! (After all, when our attitudes change, so change the attitudes of others!)

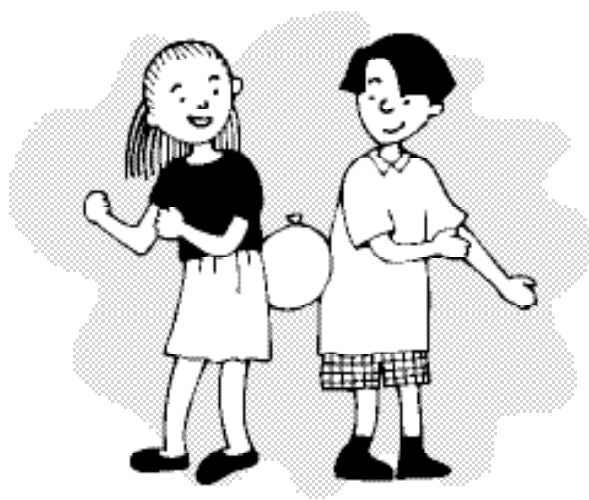
Here are seven suggested strategies:

Strategy 1: Formulate an identity. Create a simple mission statement for your children's ministry (see pp. 9-10). Give your children's ministry a name (Kids' Connection, The Ark, etc.). Make a logo. (If you are not the creative type, assign logo creation to an able volunteer—or have a contest!) A logo need not be fancy or expensive. The art may come from the kids themselves. But it needs to be something you are eager to use. Put the name, logo and mission statement of your ministry on every pillar and post, on the walls of the building, on every piece of paper you send out, on T-shirts . . . you get the idea. Creating an identity and stating a mission tells the children they are important and tells the adults that you are serious about what you are doing, which in turn creates awareness and excitement! When your church members are aware of and excited about what God is doing through your church's children's ministry, their eagerness to join ranks will increase as you sound the trumpet for volunteers who want to be part of God's great accomplishments. (It works far better in the long run than being dragged in by the pounding drums of desperation!)

Strategy 2: Keep publicity ongoing. Publicize the accomplishments and joys of your church's children's ministry throughout the year. On a regular basis, enthusiastically present to your congregation information about the goals and benefits of and opportunities for ministry with children. This keeps familiarity high; people rarely commit to work in a program with which they are not familiar. Consider scheduling one of these publicity ideas every month or two throughout the year:

★ Display photos of children and teachers from a recent event in newsletters or on bulletin boards. (Use close-ups so that people can actually see the children's faces without coming nose to nose with the bulletin board!)

★ Solicit short articles from teachers or parents about their recent experiences in a children's program. (Funny, to-the-point articles stick in people's memories!) Publish the articles in church newsletters or on the church website.



★ Invite a teacher from a children's ministry program to be interviewed in adult Bible study groups or Sunday School classes. If possible, look for ways to connect this teacher's experience to the current topic of study in the class (i.e., talk about the importance of children to a class that is focusing on the Body of Christ).

★ Attractively display children's art in well-traveled areas of your facility. Enlist children to help create bulletin board displays about their learning.

★ Interview several children about aspects of their experience in children's ministry programs. Ask open-ended questions such as, "What would you tell people is best about (name of children's program)?" or "Who do you look forward to seeing when you come to (program name)?" Place children's quotations in a newsletter article or display them on a bulletin board.

★ Put brief articles in newsletters about the value of one aspect of Christian education. Add several specific prayer requests for the children's ministry and an invitation to pray.

The major benefit of these publicity ideas comes when you use them all year long—not just during times when you are actively recruiting people to serve.

Strategy 3: Keep the potential staff list updated. Continually work to identify potential staff for your programs with the major goal being to help people find fulfilling places of ministry. Avoid the trap of recruiting volunteers only when you face a vacancy! Consistently seeking to discover people with the potential for ministry gives you the chance to focus on finding the position that fits the person and his or her gifts, rather than desperately grabbing any live body that might be willing to fill a vacant spot. The ultimate goal is to recruit people to the position to which God has called them.

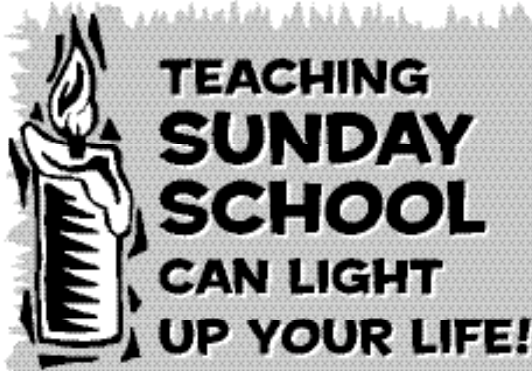
Consider everyone in your congregation as potential participants in children's ministry. Don't look only to

the parents of children in your programs. Use the church membership list, new members' classes, adult class lists, suggestions from adult teachers or leaders, lists of previous teachers and survey forms. Consider men, singles, seniors and collegians. Get recommendations from present teachers. Look for people whom you have observed interacting in positive ways with children. Work with your church's youth leadership to plan ways to involve teens in ministry without isolating them from youth programs and leaders. (You may want to limit your use of teens to class times when teen groups are not meeting.)

Consider also how you might involve what might seem like unlikely groups in children's ministry. The men's sports ministry group or the senior's sewing group can be challenged to do some short-term missions to your church's own children or to children in the neighborhood! The men might sponsor and staff a one-day sports camp while the senior's sewing group might help an elementary choir program by teaching and helping children sew simple costumes for productions. Short-term assignments like these help people know the children as individuals, grow their excitement about children's ministry and use their unique gifts and skills.



Strategy 4: Keep others involved in recruiting. Ask others to help you in your recruiting effort. The total church staff needs to share the concern for recruitment. The pastor, Christian education board, children's ministry coordinators, teachers and helpers must support, encourage and, above all, pray for potential teachers. If recruiting is the responsibility of only two or three people, those people will become overworked and discouraged—and recruitment prospects become limited to the friends and acquaintances of these few people. (Often, the friends and acquaintances of these few then try to avoid them as well!)



Involving many people in recruiting does not mean everyone is trying to sign up new teachers. Rather, everyone on the staff must be informed of recruiting needs and praying regularly that the needs will be met. The goal for involvement in recruiting is to be intentional about mentioning children's ministry opportunities, to be aware of others' potential and to be willing to help where appropriate in the recruiting process. Also ask several people to join you on a prayer team that specifically prays for your recruiting efforts and potential volunteers.

In a large church, it is often helpful to have a committee that is responsible for the various steps in effective

recruiting. Form a new committee at least once a year. Invite to the committee people who know a wide variety of members in the congregation and who also have skills in different areas: teacher appreciation, new teacher orientation, personal contact, etc.

Strategy 5: Keep contacting potential staff. After your list is made, prayerfully prioritize it. Of all the people who could possibly be contacted, who should be approached first? Determine any requirements a person must meet in order to be considered. Involve responsible leaders in your church when evaluating or approving those to be contacted. Your church may have established guidelines for volunteers (length of church attendance or membership, etc.).

Then personally contact each prospective teacher or helper by phone or by mail. People who are recruited in the halls or parking lots of a church may feel as though desperation was the motivation. Both they and the job will seem to be of less-than-crucial importance. If you choose to send a form letter to prospects, add a personal note to the letter. Do not depend on recruiting announcements in church bulletins or newsletters—they are often the least effective means of recruiting! It's best to personally recruit from a pool of people who have been recommended to you or who have demonstrated the characteristics you're looking for in teachers and helpers.

Next schedule a personal meeting that allows an unhurried period of time in which you and the prospect can get better acquainted, answer each other's questions and clarify information as needed. If the initial contact is by mail, follow up the letter with a phone call. Never underestimate the importance of personal contact or expect that people will join your staff simply because they received a letter in the mail. Make a job description available to each prospect for the position you are asking that person to fill (see sample job descriptions on pp. 47-55).

When a large number of teaching positions need to be filled, consider setting up a recruiting station! Place in a well-traveled area of your church a display with a large, attractive poster, a video, a PowerPoint presentation or photographic display that will bring attention to the program for which you are recruiting. If you want to display a list of jobs to be filled, be sure to show that some positions are already filled. (No one wants to be the first to sign up!)

Strategy 6: Keep potential volunteers on your side.

When you have talked with a prospective teacher or helper and answered questions, offer a time of observation in the appropriate program. Then encourage him or her to prayerfully consider this opportunity. Agree on a date by which the decision will be made, usually about a week. If the answer is yes, be ready to offer orientation and training to help the new staff member make a good beginning. If the answer is no, thank the prospect for taking the time to consider the ministry. Invite that person

to please pray for the children's ministry since he or she is now more familiar with its programs. Don't pressure; avoid guilt and that person will likely become an enthusiastic volunteer when the time is right!

Strategy 7: Place a high value on commitment. When a volunteer has applied and been screened, be sure he or she receives both a job description (see pp. 47-55 for job descriptions) and a commitment form (see p. 63). This will help each volunteer know what is expected and will invest each one with a sense of the importance and value of the commitment he or she is making. Communicate with volunteers how the church will support them in their ministry to children (resources, facilities, curriculum, etc.). Consider inviting new teachers to stand during a worship service so that the pastor may pray and commission them in their new ministry. As your church family shows they value children's ministry, volunteers will increase and flourish!



Recruiting and Publicity

Many church websites highlight the ministries and activities of the congregation. Often, there is a page available for the children's ministry. This page can be one of your biggest allies in publicity, recruiting and community outreach! Whether your web designer is a 15-year-old or a paid professional, consider the following before you get started:

- The people you want to reach (church family, prospective families, potential volunteers, grandparents, current volunteers, families of the church's preschool, etc.).
- The mission statement and goals of your ministry. (Include the logo!)
- The programs you offer. Include every weekend, midweek and weekday programs that new families might not realize are available. Include programs such as sign language classes or classes especially designed for children with disabilities as well. Regularly update information about availability and openings for camps or special events, registration deadlines, application forms, etc.
- The curriculum you use. For every age level, link a page containing the scope and sequence for the course. (If you use several curricula for one age level, be sure to list which curriculum is used during which service time.)
- A volunteer link to a page that provides application forms for prospective volunteers and that outlines general requirements, the process for volunteer application and current job descriptions (include recruiter contact information for each program or job description). To increase volunteer interest, invite potential volunteers to subscribe to a free children's ministry e-newsletter.
- A new child enrollment link that provides class times, program schedules, enrollment procedures and downloadable forms to enroll a child in a program (include family information forms, medical alert forms, activity permissions forms, etc.).

Include a link and encourage new families to sign up for the ministry e-newsletter.

- A map of the site and the church campus.
- The policies and procedures (both for new parents and for volunteers); some churches may make the volunteer handbook available online.
- The staff (current paid staff with photos, interns, volunteers, updated contact information, etc.).
- A timely news feature on the site that changes weekly. Keep this news in a regular spot on the website. Incorporate this information, along with other items of interest, in a weekly e-newsletter.
- Links for parents (women's ministry, men's ministry, child care provided by church members, family support groups, childbirth or parenting classes, etc.).
- Links for children (Christian children's magazines or curriculum suppliers may have child-friendly activities on their websites).
- Consistent navigation symbols and working links.
- Ways to interact with the site and ways to encourage revisits.
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ) page.
- Uncluttered appearance, easy to navigate and easy to read.
- Children's artwork gallery or photo gallery (be sure parental permission is secured before posting photos of children).
- Downloadable forms (permission and medical forms for upcoming events), desktop pictures, games for children, etc.

A truly functional website will not only advertise your ministry and its programs, but also it can reduce telephone calls, provide materials and create interaction with new families that will make them want to come to church for the live experience!