Focus on Children's Ministry

S. Joseph Kidder

Andrews University, kiddersj@andrews.edu

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Effective ministry to today’s children goes beyond a basic understanding of developmental issues or simple babysitting.

Children in fourth through sixth grades often demonstrate a strange mixture of sophistication and childlike qualities. These “little adults” are more like the junior high kids of 20 years ago than the elementary students most of us recall. Exposure to adult pressures has resulted in children who might be characterized best as “elementary teenagers.” The good news? They respond to teaching about Christ and can be reached through appropriate ministry.

As you seek to develop your children’s ministry to reach the new generation coming into your church, consider the following:

1. Survey other churches
When visiting other churches, notice how they advertise their children’s ministry to the church body. Concentrate on the curriculum they have chosen and discover if or why they have found it so effective. Tour the classrooms, nursery, and offices, jotting down ideas to use later.

2. Train those who work with children
Try the “fifth Sabbath training” approach. On the fifth Sabbath of a month (four each year), schedule a one-to two-day event to include testimonies of significant accomplishments in the children’s ministry, a time for prayer, and skill-development training in some area of children’s ministry.

3. Target preadolescents
Times are changing and so is the level of sophistication of fifth-and sixth-grade children. This age group is quickly experiencing dropouts in the church because most churches

What is your church doing to have the best children’s ministry you can?
Effective ministry to today’s children goes beyond a basic understanding of developmental issues or simple babysitting. Effective ministry requires taking risks to walk alongside children weighed down with burdens of divorce; physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; substance abuse; overcommitted parents; and stress-related disorders.

In researching growing Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America we discovered that the common denominator among these churches is their focus on children’s ministries. In the past, parents brought their children to the church and the Lord. Today, children bring their parents and friends to the church if they enjoy their experience there.
have not incorporated new ideas for reaching the preadolescent. Select and begin a curriculum aimed at this age group.

4. Appoint a children’s director or hire a children’s pastor

Children’s ministry is one of the most overlooked, despite the continual pleas for recruitment of leadership. Appointing a children’s director or hiring a children’s ministry pastor will signal a new commitment to caring for children even if it begins as a part-time position. This will be a vital ingredient to a holistic ministry to the entire family. Barry Gain, an Adventist researcher in the area of youth ministry, once told me that his study confirmed the strong correlation between having a children’s director or pastor and a higher percentage of youth who stay in the church.

5. Establish a prayer base

Tremendous amounts of pressure on children and their families exist today. Our families certainly need a prayer covering, and so do the children’s workers who are trying to reach them. Begin by establishing a small prayer group to consistently pray for your children and workers. Some of the growing Adventist churches take time during the worship service or during the week to pray for the children.

6. Highlight children’s ministry

Have the pastor interview children in front of the congregation. Give monthly updates in the services to help the congregation know how they should be praying for the children’s ministry and participating in it. Create a yearly video presentation highlighting some of the major accomplishments that have taken place during the year. Show how lives have been changed due to the focus and energy of this ministry. Provide a quality brochure that describes the children’s ministry for all newcomers to the church.

7. Build ownership of the children’s ministry throughout the entire church

One of the best ways to help the congregation take ownership of children’s ministry is to have each child prayed for by an adult. On 3 x 5 cards put down relevant information about every child connected to your ministry. Then give the cards to trusted people from the congregation who would be willing for a month (or quarter) to pray weekly for the child. Such a ministry helps build bridges between the generations and automatically increases adult interest and support. This also may increase your base of volunteers as adults develop more of a burden for the children.

8. Guarantee that all people who work with the children are properly screened and are beyond reproach as it relates to dealing with minors

This has to be done not only to avoid legal issues but because our children are precious and need to be protected and thrive in a safe and healthy environment. Today most conferences provide screening of individuals who interact with children (e.g., teachers, Pathfinder leaders, administrative school positions, and Sabbath school leaders). This involves a background check and sometimes even fingerprinting. Many of them provide this service for free or at a minimal charge. If, for some reason, your conference does not provide this information, check with your local police department for help with background checks.


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**Prison ministry**

I just wanted to make a comment on Delbert Baker’s interview with Antônio Monteiro in the April 2014 Ministry (“Reflections on a Ministry in Prison”) that reminded me of men and women in prison.

Several years ago, we started a prison ministry in Milan, Michigan. Out of that ministry 11 men were baptized. To be baptized, they had to watch three video series, C. D. Brooks, Dwight Nelson, and Doug Batchelor. One of the rules we made with them was that after they were released from prison, they had to find a local church within six months and apply for a transfer to that church or have their names dropped. This was very effective and only two were dropped. While they were in prison, they worked very hard to share their faith. They met many obstacles, but stayed with it, and we don’t know the final results. I am thankful to see prison ministry getting attention and people responding.

“I was in prison, and you visited me” [Matt. 25:36, NLT]. Baptizing them in February was a challenge, but it was very fulfilling to see lives being changed and going against the odds of ending up back in prison.

—Pastor Don Hall, email

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2. Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 47.