

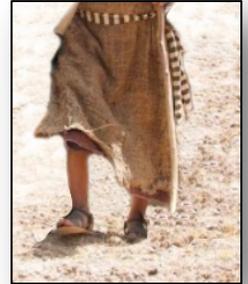
The First Thing To Do In A New CM Ministry

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Beginning a new children's ministry (CM) can be both exciting and a bit terrifying. You feel honored to be entrusted with this significant responsibility! You feel God's blessing on your life and yet you understand the immensity of the calling!

Whether God has called you to build a new CM from "scratch," or to step into a CM that was built by someone else before you, a wise first step is to understand and emulate the styles of Nehemiah and Paul in your first few weeks or months. Both these men of God observed people and situations related to their calling **BEFORE** acting.

- Nehemiah observed the broken wall by night (Nehemiah 2: 13-16)
- Paul observed the "religious needs" and idols of Athens (Acts 17: 16-23)



Your work at this new ministry isn't too different from the challenges that Nehemiah and Paul faced. They both dealt with people and conditions that God had called them to "fix" or improve. They both faced opposition from those who were happy with the "status quo." They both were challenged to understand, and influence people.

Spend your first few weeks (months?) observing and listening only. If there are "emergency" needs that need to be addressed right away, you'll have to deal with them. If there aren't any "emergency" needs, then spend some valuable time meeting with people and observing the condition of the CM. Here are some things to consider:

1. **Why do they need to hire you?** – Are you the first CM Pastor? If not, who served in that capacity before? Did he/she leave well? Did he/she leave you a "mess" to clean up?
2. **Take a walk around the church "cemetery."** – This is done through casual conversations and listening to stories people tell you. Don't ask, "Tell me why people leave this church." You can learn much about the leadership style of the church administration by learning about who has "died" in the ministry. If people "come and go" within a few months or years, that may indicate a problem with the administration. If the "cemetery" is empty, and people stay employed at the church for years and years, that's a good indicator that the leadership is good to those who serve under them. If the "cemetery" is filled with only certain types of people (only CM leaders), that tells you much about the church administration's view of children.
3. **Observe the CM** – If you can observe the CM "covertly" before you are officially announced, that is best. If those who serve in the CM already know you, your "cover is blown." Either way, spend much time walking around and observing. Look and listen for indicators of needs, health, or "sickness." Are those who serve in the CM happy? What do their faces tell you? Are the conditions of the rooms or hallways positive? Are there piles of unused things on the counters in the rooms? Are there CM team members who are alone with children? Is the CM area secure and safe? Are the children happy? When you close your eyes in the hallways, what do you hear? Are the children sitting quietly in their chairs, or are they up and moving? Are there joyful sounds of active, happy children and adults? Ask God to let you hear and see clearly.



4. **Ask questions to the CM team and to the parents** – These critical conversations can happen casually in the hallways, or "formally" at Starbucks. Use simple, "probing" questions like, "Tell me what's good about the children's ministry," and "Tell me what could be done to make the children's ministry even better." In these conversations with parents and CM team members, picture yourself with big ears and a teeny, tiny mouth. Listen, process, and don't say much. Ask God to help you hear a picture of what needs to be done, and what is already good. Invite significant CM team members (loyal, faithful veterans or leaders) to join you at Starbucks for some coffee or tea (you pay!). Compliment them for their amazing service, and then listen to their responses. Be careful not to get sucked into negative conversations about people or conditions. Be positive and thank them for their comments.



5. **Casual conversations with the church secretary** – She will give you much "Intel." Be careful not to appear to put her on the spot but ask her the same questions as you use in #4 above. She sees all, hears all, and has many valuable opinions.

6. **Let your observations “simmer” like a good spaghetti sauce** – Ask God to help you process the information He has given you through your observations and conversations. Consider the CM vision and how all of this information either “fits” the vision or complicates the vision. Ask God to help you see what needs to be done first. The critical first step should always be supporting and encouraging the current CM team. What do they need right away? What can you do to make their service more rewarding? How do the parents view the CM? Are they happy with what is going on, or do they want something more? Let the Lord open your eyes to what needs to be done first.



Let your first few weeks (months?) be about listening, observing, and learning. God will show you what to do with all of this information at the right time.