

Assessing The Local Church And Community Needs

Understanding their implications for the children's ministry

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Whether you are beginning a new children's ministry (CM), or you have served at the same church for dozens of years, you need to continually assess the needs and challenges of the church and the surrounding community.

We live in a "fluid" world. The increased effect of social media and the Internet has accelerated communication in today's world. This communication is both good and challenging. The concepts of "truth," "right," "wrong," and "normal" have all been changed from what we used to call "traditional." To do our best in ministering to the children, their parents, and those who serve on the CM team, we must consistently ask God to help us adjust the CM to reflect the societal changes without compromising the foundational standards expressed in the Bible or in our CM vision.

To stay "current" with the needs and challenges in the local church and community, we must regularly assess what is going on! We must observe and listen to the people and situations around us, while keeping our focus on God and His will! Here are some foundational principles and scriptures upon which we must build our assessment:



Trust God – *"...and my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus."*
Philippians 4: 19

Put God first – *"Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*
Matthew 6: 33

Rely on God's provision – *"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want..."*
Psalm 23: 1

Feel God's feelings – *"...when I heard these things, I sat down and wept..."*
Nehemiah 1: 1-4

Observe the conditions – *"...I went...by night I went..."*
Nehemiah 2: 11-16

Listen To What Others Say – *"...look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*
Philippians 2: 4

Get involved – *"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned down. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we will no longer be a disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me, and what the king had said to me. 'Let us start rebuilding,' they replied, and they set their hands to this good work."*
Nehemiah 2: 17, 18

Trust God

Each time you assess the local church, the surrounding community, and the CM, you must first remember what God has done for you, the ministry, His Church, and the community. Thank Him for His provision. Thank Him for His care for the local church and His love for the community! Thank Him for what He is doing in the CM! Specifically recognize things that have happened in the church, community, or CM that prove that He has provided for the needs of the people. Remind yourself, and reaffirm to God, that He is the one who provides for the people, not you or your fancy techniques or talents!



Put God First

As a CM director or pastor, you desire the CM to grow. You want to be successful. There is nothing wrong with that! But your success and the size of the CM can quickly become an idol! If God blesses you, and your work in the community and the CM expands, you must constantly give God the praise and not your own efforts! For a chilling reminder of the importance of putting God first and giving Him all glory for the growth and success of the ministry, read Deuteronomy 8! God is warning Moses to not forget Who has accomplished the great things that the people of Israel are about to experience in the “promised land”! Here are some excerpts from God’s warning to Moses, and to you:



“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks and fountains and springs that flow through the valleys and hills...When you eat and are satisfied, you are to bless the LORD your God for the good land that He has given you.

***Be careful not to forget the LORD your God** by failing to keep His commandments and ordinances and statutes, which I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses in which to dwell, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...*

You might say in your heart, ‘The power and strength of my hands have made this wealth for me.’ But remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers even to this day.

If you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods to worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish...

God calls Himself “a jealous God” in Exodus 34: 14 and in Exodus 20: 5. This means that He wants our full devotion! He wants us to give Him full credit for everything that we might call a “success.” As you assess the community, the church, and the CM, make sure to remind yourself that the good things that are happening are because of His power and not yours! What you do in the ministry is not to become more “known,” it is to make God more known!

Rely on God’s Provision

As you assess the church, community, and the CM, you might be tempted to apply some fancy techniques to make the CM more successful. God wants us to use the talents and experience He’s given us to grow more ministry “fruit,” but we must not forget Who is actually providing the “fruit.” This concept is clearly identified by Paul in 1Corinthians 3: 5-7



“...What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, as the Lord has assigned to each his role. I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow...”

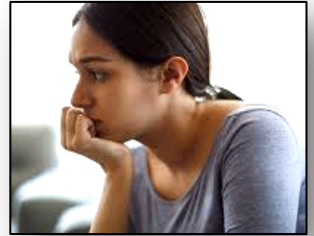
Yes, the CM may be successful. Yes, the church might be growing. Yes, God is using your abilities, plans, and talents. BUT God is the one Who is doing the work and causing the growth through you. Without God’s wisdom and provision, you would be nothing! This critical foundational principle was established by Jesus in John 15: 5

“...I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing...”

So, in your assessment, be very careful to consistently thank God for His provision, and to ask Him to continue to provide you with all you need to be effective in caring for the needs of the children and parents as you point them to God!

Feel God’s Feelings

As you assess the needs and challenges in the church, community, and CM you might be tempted to adjust your views about what is “right,” or “normal.” We are being bombarded with “messages” that redefine “normal” or “right.” People are being told that having intimate relations with people of the same sex is okay, and God approves it! Children are being told that they can choose (“identify with”) whatever gender they desire, and that the physical body into which they were born may be wrong! These are just two examples of the shifts in morality that our society is making. We have pushed God out of our society, and as a result we are watching “normal” being redefined apart from what God has told us in scripture!



This must make God deeply sad! This must cause Him to weep! As we assess the world around us, we must feel God’s feelings as Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 2. When you observe the community around you, ask God to help you feel His feelings. These feelings will help you adjust the CM to counteract what is going on around you. Some churches have “loosened up” their stand on issues in order to attract more people to come to church. This must grieve God deeply! As you assess what is happening around you, do all you can to give the children who attend the CM a biblically based moral “compass”! You must not be worried about “offending” people with God’s standards! Yes, you need to be gentle and kind, but you must never compromise God’s standards for the sake of popularity!

Observe The Conditions

In The Community – Walk or drive around the community and look and listen for indicators of the needs, fears, or hopes of the people in the community. What do they want? How have they tried to get satisfied? Of what are they afraid?

1. What is the local economic “culture”?
2. What is the crime level around the church? (check with areavibes.com, local police, FBI)
3. What are the family statistics in the community? (divorce rate, etc.)
4. What are the neighborhood conditions? (drive or walk around)
5. Do you see children playing? (this may reflect the danger or crime in the area)
6. Conduct a “Wal-Mart walk-through” (to observe, listen, interview).



With all these observations, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.

In The Church – Spend some time in the parking lot as people arrive for a service, and as people leave after a service. Listen to what they talk about, how they act, what they drive, etc. Sit in the church foyer listen and observe. Interview the other pastors or leaders in the church. Ask them to describe the people to whom they minister.

1. Look at the number of children in adult service (too many may indicate a lack of trust or awareness of the CM).

2. What is the population of children's ministry in comparison to the church size? (Does the number or ratio of the children reflect the age of the church body, or the community? Is the church or CM attracting or repelling children?)
3. What is the visible presence of the CM? (Conduct a "first-time visit" experiment – as you arrive in your car before a church service, pretend you are a first-time visitor with children. What do you see, feel, hear, etc. Is it easy to find the CM? Are you greeted by friendly, helpful people? What do you see that makes you feel safe or cautious? What do you hear or smell as you walk to the CM area for your children?)
4. What is the family-focus of the church? (Are families of all kinds welcome? Do single parents feel welcomed and supported? Are there activities offered for whole families?)



With all these observations, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.

In The CM – Spend some time experiencing the CM with open eyes and an open mind. See the CM through the parents', children's, and the CM team's eyes.

1. What do you see on the faces of the parents as they check-in or check-out their children?
2. What do you hear during check-in, during the service, and in the hallways after the service?
3. What do you see and hear in the ministry rooms as you step in and observe them?
4. What do you see and hear from the CM team members as they minister?
5. Is there any confusion present in the parents, children, or CM team members?
6. Is there "happy noise" in the classrooms and hallways, or is there "fearful silence"?
7. During the service, do you sense a safe environment in the CM hallways?
8. Are the CM ministry areas clean and neat, or are they cluttered with unused or unorganized items?
9. As you walk through the CM halls, what do you smell? Can you correct any offensive odors (including the nursery smell)?
10. Does the CM area need updating or painting? Do the walls and carpeting look "fresh"?

With all these observations, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.

Listen To What Others Say

In The Community – Casually ask people in the community questions that indicate needs and conditions in the community around the church.

1. Casual inquiries
 - a. "How do you like living here?"
 - b. "Do you like the schools here?"
 - c. "Is this community safe?"
 - d. "What is the #1 need of the community?"
2. At the post office – as you wait in line or get your mail.
3. At the gas station – as you pump gas or pay inside the store.
4. At the grocery store – as you shop or stand in line to pay.
5. At local fast-food restaurants – if you go inside, talk with those in line.
6. At local "sit down" restaurants – talk with those who serve you.
7. At local schools – if you have a child in the school, talk with other parents.



With all these observations, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.

At Church – Instead of just doing your job in the CM, ask people questions in the parking lot, at the coffee area, in the foyer, even in the CM hallways.

1. “Is this your home church?”
2. “Do you like the programs that are offered here?”
3. “What do you think about the children’s ministry?”

With all these observations, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.



Get Involved With Local Events and Programs

Community Events

While attending these local events, talk with the people you encounter about the needs and challenges of the local community.

1. Volunteer at local elementary schools (recess, etc.).
2. Volunteer at community centers.
3. Serve in community service projects.
4. Attend local parades.
5. Attend street fairs, swap meets, or local yard sales.
6. Attend local soccer games.



With all these involvements, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.

Church Events

While serving, talk with others about the needs and challenges of those who attend the church.

1. Serve in the CM (if you can do so without compromising your CM duties)
2. Serve in parking lot (if you can do so without compromising your CM duties)
3. Serve as usher (if you can do so without compromising your CM duties)
4. Serve in family ministry programs (if you can do so without compromising your CM duties)

With all these involvements, ask God to help you discern what, if any, effects your observations imply for the CM.