Guidelines For Developing A Children's Church
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In today's "visual" world, children expect to be "dazzled" by dramatic lights, sounds, or special effects. Those in children's ministry know that the Gospel is best "told" through personal contact and strong relationships. The "drama" of a presentation may attract a child's attention, but it is only the first step in a healthy program of evangelism or discipleship. The "adult" approach in children's ministry programming may appear to be "boring" by the child. If a child views "church" as boring, then he or she may also view God as boring. This presentation challenge is on the "back burner" of each children's pastor as he or she designs ministry programs. A large group "children's church" setting lends itself to more "drama" potential, but it may also reduce the "personal" connection between children and children's ministry team members.

Coupled with the growing demand for "high tech" ministry, is the decreasing numbers of adult volunteers. This world is becoming more and more self-centered, and the pace of life is increasing. Both factors create a real challenge for staffing the children's ministry programs. To adjust to this decreasing number of adult volunteers, while keeping pace with the growing number of children, many large churches are returning to the "children's church" format.

A "children's church" gathering is usually a large group of children representing mixed age groups. Churches have found that they can minister to a large group of children with fewer adult volunteers than a typical Sunday School setting. In Sunday School, the groups of age-specific children need at least two adults in every room. For an entire "school age" ministry, you would need up to 14 adults to operate a Sunday School. Of course, you can combine age groups into one room to consolidate children and reduce the number of adult team members needed, but Sunday School still demands many trained adult team members. With a children's church program, you can minister to 200 children with less than 10 adults!

The choice to create a children's church program may not be based purely on the need for more adult team members. A children's church offers an environment that can't be created in a Sunday school setting. There is a "corporate energy" that exists in a children's church that doesn't exist in a small group, Sunday School program. This energy produces a powerful foundation for stirring worship and times of prayer. Yes, children can pray and worship in a Sunday School class, but there is a "punch" to the impact of those times in a large group, children's church setting.

A children's church program should be a blend between large and small group experiences. The large group time can include worship, "the lesson" (drama presentation, object lesson, etc.), then a small group experience during which the children discuss, discover, or interact with the learning. The small group time should also include a prayer time which may compliment the large group prayer time as well.

Children's church is a valuable part of a "balanced" ministry program. Children's church offers children, whose parents serve on the CM team, and who attend multiple services, an additional option apart from repeating Sunday school. Children's church can also be the best environment for dramatic productions and unusual guests. Here are some guidelines to make children's church a life-changing experience.

Recruit And Build Your Team

1. Recruit "child-focused," extroverted adults who want to interact with children.
2. Train your adult team members in "guerilla ministry" (sitting among the children and interacting with them) techniques.
3. Train your adult team members in "guided conversation" techniques (lesson-focused "small-talk" with the children) to be used in small groups.
4. Train your adult team members in discipline control.

Rotate Your Team

1. Rotate team members through a **"duty roster"** monthly.
2. Rotate team members through a schedule of "on" and "off" times based on the curriculum. This prevents ministry "burn out."
3. Rotate team members who specialize in various aspects of the program. Use them as "specialty team members" as their function comes up through the calendar.

Build Your Program

1. **Begin with worship** music as the children are entering to create a spiritual environment as well as a structure of control.
2. **Greet every child** (touched, "high 5") as they enter.
3. Use worship that are more **"adult"** than "childlike" this attracts the older age-group.
4. Don't display the **song's words** past the initial learning phase. This takes the focus off of the visual and puts it onto the meaning of the words, or spiritual.
5. Let the children see the **adults worshipping**.
6. Use **children as worship-leaders**, not adults.
7. The "lesson" is a presentation that **actively involves** the children.
8. Break up into **small groups** for adult / child lesson interaction.
9. **Prayer times** can be included in the small groups.
10. Return to worship during **check-out**, rather than "free time," to show the parents that the program is spiritually-based.
11. Provide a **Parent Guide**, which summarizes the day's lesson.
12. Plan **service projects, field trips**, etc. throughout the year.
13. **Rotate** your program options to provide variety for the children as well as a potential variety for team members. You can recruit and staff your children's church based on the program rotations. A team member of the "Bible Character Encounter" team would only serve on those weeks.
    a. **Elective Centers "Round Robin"** - The children rotate through centers of crafts, games, Bible stories, or worship singing.
    b. **Sunday School "General Session"** - Children gather together in a larger room for worship singing, prayer times, and a brief skit or puppet show, then go to Sunday school classes.
    c. **Bible Character Encounter** - Children "interview" a Bible character who is actually a church leader (elder/deacon, etc.) in full costume and make-up. The children must guess who the character is prior to the interview.
    d. **"Special Forces" Worship** - Children come to church dressed in their work clothes. An organized service project would be carried out during the children's church hour.
    e. **"Worship-On-The-Road"** - Children would ride the church bus to a nearby "Biblical location" for a time of worship and a lesson. (i.e., a river for a baptism study.)