

*A Quick
Start*
GUIDE

CHILDREN'S
CHURCH



A Quick Start Guide for Children's Church

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Available from:
AdventSource
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www.adventsource.org

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Introduction

In order to keep children interested in church and bring in families from the community, it's important to create a child-friendly atmosphere at church. There are many ways to achieve this effect, and no one method fits all churches. Consider the size of your congregation, the number of children, and your audience when planning new programming.

We have long believed that children need to be in church with their parents and that it is the parents' responsibility alone to make church as pleasant as possible for them. Some churches still feel that children should sit in adult-oriented services, take part in adult music, listen to adult sermons and sit still and be reverent for at least an hour. However, think back to your own childhood. When you were four years old, how did you feel about sitting still for an hour while everything going on around you was totally incomprehensible? Did it draw you into a relationship with Jesus? Were you excited and looking forward to your weekly "quiet time" in church?

"...your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." Matthew 18:14 NIV

The purpose of this Quick Start Guide is to open minds to possibilities offered by a children's church program. If your church leadership is already convinced that church needs to be child friendly, this booklet will provide ideas that will help you make the most of every service so children are lead into a vibrant relationship with Jesus.

Realizing the Value of Children

You may assume that all churches wish to become child-friendly. However, this is not always so. The following comments actually have been overheard:

“The children are too noisy. I can't hear the preacher.”

“The children are making a mess in the church and they aren't being reverent.”

“If you use children in the worship service, they might make mistakes.”

“We like our church just the way it is. We don't want to see it change.”

“The children don't come dressed appropriately for church.”

“We're not just a babysitting agency for lazy parents.”

As a supporter of children's ministries, your first step will be to convince your church board and membership that children are very important to Jesus and thus should also be important to us. They must also understand that a church without children is essentially dying. Eventually, it will have to close its doors because there will be no one left to sit in the pews. The presence of young families with children will help the church grow strong and become a light in the community.

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these...’ And He took the children in His arms, and put His hands on them and blessed them.” Mark 10:13-16 NIV

“...if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Matthew 18:6 NIV

If Jesus were here today, how would He relate to the children in your church and community? Would He become indignant with church members if they were not bringing the children to Him?

Questions to Consider

Consider the following questions and work with your children's ministries council to flesh out the details of children's church. Once you have reached some conclusions, take your plans to the church board for approval and support.

- How often will children's church take place?
- How long will the program be?
- Who will be in charge each week?
- What programming will be included?
- How much help will you need?
- How will you train helpers?
- For what period of time will it continue? (Year-round, school year, etc.?)
- How many children do you expect to attend?
- How much space will you need?
- Will you need to move any furniture prior to the program?
- Is the location far enough from the sanctuary that it will not interfere with the adult worship?
- If you are going to use a multi-purpose room or a classroom already in use, will there be furniture and supplies to move and decorations to set up?
- How can you use some or all of the children or youth to help?

Personnel

When looking for help, start with those who may not be otherwise involved in leading Sabbath school or other time-consuming ministries. Don't overlook the youth and older children when looking for helpers.

Prepare a series of guidelines for leaders and helpers so everyone knows what is expected. When you ask people to assist, give them a copy of the guidelines. Discuss it together and answer their questions in order to prevent future misunderstandings.

Churches should perform background checks on all potential volunteers.

The Program

See the list of recommended resources on page 15 for program suggestions. Even though children's church is under adult leadership, remember that kids must be actively involved. When rightly planned, children's church will be entertaining as well as a time for spiritual growth for children.

Learning Styles and Modes of Learning

As you plan your program, remember the four learning styles and modes of learning that must be accommodated in every program.

Learning Styles

Innovative: Needs to have a reason for learning; loves to talk about what he or she learns.

Analytic: Wants concrete facts and information and a well-organized presentation.

Common Sense: Needs to immediately use what is learned; needs to communicate it to others.

Dynamic: Needs to change, expand and be creative with what he or she learns.

Modes of Learning

Visual: Needs to see to understand and remember.

Auditory: Needs to hear to understand and remember.

Kinesthetic: Needs to touch and feel to understand and remember.

Experiential: Needs to experience to understand and remember.

Choosing the Format for Your Church

Once church members are on board, you are ready to move ahead. The next step is to choose your objective or purpose and the best plan for reaching your goal. Below are some different formats to consider:

1. Child-friendly intergenerational church service
2. Split church service – half with parents and half just for kids
3. “Learning to worship” room
4. Full children's church service, separate from the regular service

Idea #1 – Child-Friendly Intergenerational Church Service

This format combines people of all ages, children and adults alike, in one church service. By engaging everyone in the worship service, children and adults alike will grow spiritually and feel a sense of ownership in their church. Involving children gives them recognition and helps them realize they are an important part of the church family.

The intergenerational experience should begin as soon as a family enters the church building, with greeters welcoming children, as well as adults, and calling everyone by their name. If they are guests, someone should be readily available to show them where to go.

Children can also start helping with church duties at a young age. When children are involved, they feel like part of the family and are more likely to stay in church when they are older. Ask children to help as greeters, offering collectors, musicians, and any way you can find to get them involved.

For more information about creating a child-friendly intergenerational church service, check out *The Family Friendly Church* by Noelene Johnsson and Willie Oliver. This resource is available from *AdventSource* at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.

Family-Led Church Services

Once a month, ask a different family or a group of several families to lead the entire church service. Both adults and children can take part in leading the singing, scripture reading, prayer, special music, children's story and sermon. If the family does not feel comfortable sharing the sermon, they can ask the pastor or a guest speaker.

Regular Weekly Features

Every church, regardless of size, can include some features targeted toward children in the weekly worship service. On the following pages you will find ideas for including children in all aspects of the worship hour.

Children's Story

Invite the children to come to the front of the church and sit together, facing the storyteller. Some churches have the children collect a special "lamb's offering" just before the story. Children collect the money from the congregation and place it in a special container.

Always advise the storyteller in advance on the timing and type of story they should share. Encourage them to use the theme of the sermon whenever possible. Most children who go to the front for the children's story are ages 1-9, so the story needs to be interesting for children in that age range. The language should be appropriate to their vocabulary and the storyteller must speak directly to the children – not the congregation. If the storyteller gives a gift at the end of the story, make sure it will remind the children of the point of the story.

Children's Hymn

Incorporate a hymn or song the children know that appeals to them. It does not have to be from the church hymnal. Encourage the congregation to learn a song the children enjoy and sing it with them. Use the children as a part of the praise and worship team that leads music in your church.

Children's Bulletins

Ask a volunteer to prepare a children's bulletin each week. Give it to the children as they enter the church. Incorporate an activity (puzzle, word search, etc.) illustrating the main point of the pastor's sermon and include a picture for non-readers to color.

Quiet Bags

Make small cloth bags containing a hard book, paper and crayons, a soft quiet toy, and a picture with removable vinyl stickers. Keep these bags on hand to loan to parents or caregivers for very young children to use during the service. Collect the bags for refilling and storage until the next Sabbath.

Provide Comfortable Seating

For an eye-opener, squat down in the pew and try viewing church from a child's perspective. How does it make you feel? Try purchasing a few booster seats for little ones so they can see what is going on rather than looking at the back of an adult's head.

Special Music

Invite children to sing or play instruments for special music instead of always asking adults to share. Children can be included in the regular choir, or else you could start a children's choir, inviting community children to join. Children who play musical instruments can also perform for song service, offertory or prelude. This encourages children to practice so they can use their skills in church as they grow more proficient.

Scripture Readings

Older children can read scripture and lead the responsive readings in the back of the hymnal. They can lead out individually or together with their family. Including children on the platform demonstrates that they are part of the church family.

Idea #2 – Split Service

In a split service children start with their parents and join children's church just before the sermon. On the plus side, split services allow children to experience part of the worship service with their caregivers and realize they are part of the larger church family. There are several negatives to split services also, and churches must weigh the pros and cons. The adult service can be interrupted when the children leave, and it takes extra time from the service and disrupts the family unit.

The children's ministries committee should determine the ages targeted by children's church. Children's church can be held every week or only a set number of times each month. The length of the program may range from 30 to 45 minutes and parents pick up their children at the close of the service. Responsible adults must be present with the children at all times.

Sometimes a split service can provide a time for children to prepare a future special church service for everyone. Older children can prepare a talk or a drama to share for the sermon.

Idea #3 – “Learning to Worship” Room for Very Young Children

Many young parents haven't a clue what to do with young children in church and sometimes they quit coming because it can be a hassle. Change this situation by transforming your church's mother's room into a “Learning to Worship” room. The leader can guide parents through preparing their children to join the church family for the worship hour.

This is an opportunity to show parents how to deal with tantrums, what to expect from their children when sitting through the service, and how to get the most from the service while tending their children. You can also introduce parents to quiet bags mentioned in Idea #1. During the actual sermon the leader could show a picture book and read a story.

This room can be very helpful for parents with small children who become restless or begin crying during the adult service. Sometimes another adult can relieve a parent for a short time until the baby quiets down.

An added bonus of having an adult on duty in the mother's room is that it keeps the young people from congregating there and making it unavailable for mothers.

Idea #4 – Full Children's Church Program

There is no one way to conduct children's church. Rather, tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of the children in your church. Choose themes that teach concepts you want the children to remember, and avoid teaching too many concepts in one program.

As another option, you could try asking a different family to lead each week's program. Be sure to give each family a list of the guidelines for preparing the program. Discourage elaborate decorations, programming, etc. Reinforce that children's church is not a competition.

Below is a list of optional program ingredients for your children's church program. Choose ingredients depending on your timeframe and what elements the children are missing in the regular church service. Whenever possible, use the same theme the pastor is using in the sermon.

- Music – Singing and instruments.
- Prayer Time – Speaking and listening to Jesus.
- Offering – Giving and helping others.
- Bible Study – Making the Bible a part of our everyday lives.
- Sermon – The message for the week.
- Crafts and Activities – Hands-on learning time.
- Games – Learning through playing.

Options for Song Service

1. Piano: If children or youth play well, give them an opportunity to share their talents. Make sure they are capable of playing accompaniment or this will not be a good experience for them or the group.

Looking for Help?

Are you looking for new children's church programs or ideas? Check out the North American Division Children's Ministries website at www.childmin.com, the Adventist Children's Ministries Association at www.childmin.com/acma and Kids Ministry Ideas at www.kidsministryideas.com

Determining Your Goals

Your answers to the following questions will determine your goals for children's church:

- Who is your audience?
- What are their interests?
- What is the spiritual background of the children?
- Will children from the community attend?
- What are the children's home situations?
- Do any children have special needs?

2. Electric keyboard: Smaller than a piano and easy to transport.
3. Guitar: If any children or youth play guitar, ask if they would like to help lead songs.
4. CD: Use a multi-track where the kids can either sing with vocal tracks or with just the accompaniment.
5. DVD: Kids can sing with other kids and learn motions to the songs.

Choose active songs to help get the wiggles out and slower songs to calm the children and prepare them for quiet activities. Intersperse hymns, praise songs and children's songs throughout the program. Include children as song leaders, and make sure all song leaders are energetic. Motions and sign language bring the music to life and help the children remember the words. Allow children to play along on their own instruments. You could even let them make their own instruments.

If you are using CDs or DVDs, you could choose a different child to help you run the sound system each week. This will allow them to learn and feel needed.

Prayer Time

Help the children experience prayer through a variety of methods. Begin by asking for requests and praises. Try having the children write their requests and praises on paper strips, and connect the strips to form prayer chains. Put a star on each prayer as it is answered.

Another idea is to make or buy a plain wreath and small flowers. Each time a prayer is answered, put a flower on the wreath. When the wreath is covered, display it, along with an explanation, for church members to see.

Place a large sheet or piece of cardboard on a wall and let the children write their praises or requests with washable marker. As children are willing, invite them to come to the front to pray. Vary this with small group prayer with a prayer leader who teaches them how to pray (for one another, to praise God, to make requests, ask for forgiveness, etc.). Invite the children to have prayer partners to pray with both in and out of church. Encourage them to pray with their families as well.

Offering

Explain the purpose of the offering and discuss the difference between tithe and offerings. Occasionally, plan an activity to illustrate earning and giving. Help the children learn how God wants us to help one another, instead of only thinking about our own wants. Sometimes this is a difficult concept, and the children may need lots of reasons and examples. Of course, the best example is stories adults can share about the different kinds of blessings they get from giving rather

than receiving. Planning an activity where children make and give something to someone provides good reinforcement. This works during the holidays, but we need to remember that people have needs year around.

Very young children will have difficulty with this concept, as they are just learning to share. Mission offerings sent to far-off places the children cannot comprehend will not make as much of an impression as something they can do in their community or together with their family. Once they become convinced of the blessings of sharing in their home and community, their faith will grow and they will develop a more worldwide view of giving tithe and offerings.

The Bible

The Bible should occupy an important place in the service. Read from it and refer to it throughout the program. Try various games to help children memorize Bible verses. Memorization is important, and so is helping them develop a personal time with Jesus. This is the time to instill in children their need for daily Bible study and prayer and sharing our own personal experiences is the most important teaching tool. By telling our own true experiences we can help children to understand that God cares for them individually.

However, never give children the idea that if they pray and read the Bible nothing bad will ever happen. This is untrue as long as Satan is in the world. Knowing and living close to Jesus will help them when sad things happen or bad times come.

Crafts

If you have the time, space and supplies, crafts can be helpful in reinforcing the theme. Choose crafts that can be completed in the allotted time. Depending on the range of ages in your group, you may need a different craft for very young children. Crafts are best accomplished in small groups with a leader. While the children are involved, group leaders can talk quietly with them about what they are learning and how they will use this knowledge.

Games

Games provide an ideal time for involving older children in leadership roles while reinforcing the theme for the week. Choose games that end in a win-win situation for all, as this is not the time for competition. To find books containing Bible games, see the list of recommended resources on page 15.

Sermon Time

Sermon time needs variety. Don't do the same thing all the time and work to involve the children as much as possible. Make sure the sermon follows the same theme as the rest of the program so the main concept is reinforced in different ways.

Three Sermon Suggestions

1. Mini-sermons: object lessons, character-building stories, Bible stories, demonstrations.
2. Puppets: puppet show by the children, the youth or a combination.
3. Skits and drama: written and dramatized by the youth, involving the children; DVD of a Bible story or character-building story.

Encourage the kids to participate in the presentation by asking them questions or giving them an opportunity to tell you how they think the situation should be handled. Leave time at the end of the program to debrief with the children. What did they learn? How will it help them? What might they like to do differently as a result of what they heard or saw?

Do not use any method designed to frighten or bribe children into following Jesus. Rather, encourage them to explore what Christians should do or how they should react in given situations and how it differs from what they see in the world.

Debriefing

If you are unsure if the kids understand what you are attempting to teach, ask them at the end of the program: What did you learn today? What was important in our program today? How will you use what you learned today?

Frequency of Children's Church

A full children's church program each week separates families on a continuous basis. This is not ideal because children would never have the opportunity to experience worship with family. All week long and even on Sabbath the family unit is splintered into different programs, activities, and age groups. Families have less opportunity to interact and the spiritual nurture of children is sometimes left to the church. However, parents are ultimately responsible to direct the formation of their children's spiritual lives. The church is a helper. Families need to worship together so children can experience the spiritual life of their parents as well as observe their role modeling. A weekly children's church program will not afford the opportunity to develop a feeling of belonging to the larger church family.

Monthly or quarterly children's church programs are beneficial to all. Monthly programs provide an opportunity for children to experience worship on their own level while still giving families the opportunity to worship together.

Ask Youth to Lead

Young people are very creative and energetic and can plan wonderful spiritual and entertaining programs. By using young people, you are showing them that they are wanted and needed in the church. They begin to feel a sense of ownership. Additionally, younger children relate to youth in a positive way. If young people nearer their own age say something is wrong, they will more readily accept it. Younger children look to older children as role models, and often base their own behavior and attitudes on what they see.

This does not mean the youth will work alone to lead each children's church program. Rather, the youth are still learning and require the guidance of a patient leader. Help the youth plan and stand by them during the program. When they make mistakes, gently encourage them and make suggestions for improvement.

Some members may argue that youth need to be sitting in church, listening. However, while youth may sit there as long as mom and dad are in control, they can't be made to listen. Too often as soon as parental control is lifted, they're out the back door. If they are loved, accepted and involved in church ministry, they are far more likely to stay and participate until they reach a place in their relationship with Jesus where they are there because of Him.

When training youth, remember the following points:

1. Expect them to succeed!
2. Youth probably understand a child's point of view better than you do.
3. They are perfectly capable of being faithful, on time, and dependable, but they may need a little extra encouragement.
4. Because they are in training, they do not have the same experience or knowledge you have accumulated. They will need guidance, patience and lots of encouragement. They may get discouraged and need your positive comments.
5. Teach them the right way to correct a child, and stress the importance of patience.
6. Many youth have younger siblings and are probably experienced babysitters.
7. Be sure they understand what is expected of them and the importance of the various parts of the program.
8. As an adult, you need to lead by example, not just with words.

Inviting Children from the Community

Children's church targeted for kids from the community is a great evangelistic tool. The top priority is to prepare children from your church to accept and make friends with the kids who attend.

Generally, kids have a close group of friends from church or school. They will sometimes congregate in small groups with their friends and ignore the newcomers. Spend time with the children and teach them to act as gracious hosts and hostesses. Establish some ground rules for your kids and expect them to be followed.

Our Class:

- Greets newcomers with a smile and a hello.
- Asks someone to sit with us and introduces them to our friends.
- Gives them a Bible to use (keep a supply handy) and helps them to find verses.
- Never laughs or makes fun of guests.
- Treats everyone with kindness and respect.

Children from the community may not know how to conduct themselves in a church program. For example, they may not know how to prepare for prayer, the words and actions to Sabbath school songs, or the answers to Bible questions. Community guests may not be familiar with Bible stories. When teaching, remember to start with the basics such as creation, Jesus, and well-known Bible stories. You can demonstrate acceptance and love to all children in your program by speaking in terms they understand and finding ways to make the Gospel accessible to all.

The "sermon," whether shared through drama, a demonstration or a puppet show, should include basic Bible stories. Choose music that corresponds with the sermon and instruct the children from your church to help visitors learn the words and actions. Crafts should also match the sermon or theme for the day.

While some DVDs may work well for sermon time, be sure to preview all scenes and use your discretion to make sure the content is appropriate for children. Adjust the amount you show to the age level and background of the children.

Allow time for debriefing at the end of each children's church program. Ask all children if they have any questions, what they learned, and how they will apply what they learned to their lives.

Conclusion

“He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in His arms, He said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me’” (Mark 9:36, 37 NIV).

Every church can become child friendly if members intentionally plan and prepare to meet children's needs. And a church that nurtures children and families will continually grow and be a vibrant witness in the community.

Ideas for Smaller Churches

In you live in an area with mostly small churches, consider coordinating a special children's church Sabbath for all churches in your area. Many small churches have only a small number of children, and they will enjoy having a chance to worship with others their age. Invite everyone to participate in some way. Once your church has hosted a children's church program for area churches, the next time another church can serve as host.

Resources

AdventSource

The following resources are available from AdventSource. For a complete list, visit www.adventsource.org or call at 800-328-0525.



All Together Now: A Multi-Generational Worship Service Planbook

Edited by Barbara Manspeaker

All Together Now includes material for four complete worship services. Written and compiled by Seventh-day Adventist worship specialists, these services include skits, stories, responsive readings, activities, and sermonettes that actively involve adults and children of all ages.

Catalog #022835

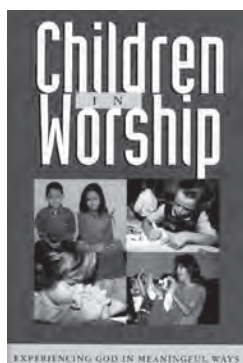


Children's Church – Responding to God's Love

By Jack Calkins

Do you want to offer children's church as part of your children's ministries program? Here are 14 complete children's church events that are grace oriented; emphasize worship, community, and service; and are based for the natural learning cycle.

Catalog #020810

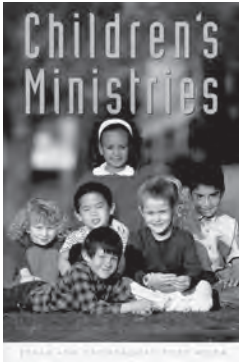


Children In Worship

By Jack and Ann Calkins

Children in Worship is for children's ministries leaders, worship coordinators, pastors, and parents who want to make worship more kid-friendly. Included are guidelines for creative children's worship, how to plan an active lesson to reach kids, and more.

Catalog #020786



Children's Ministries Manual

Edited by Ann Calkins

Discover the ages and stages of childhood learning, simple steps for leading a child to Jesus, preferred learning styles, exciting Bible learning activities, ministering to children with special needs, how to recruit and keep volunteers, and more.

Catalog #021992



Family Friendly Church Seminar

By Noelene Johnsson and Willie Oliver

Discover how you can make your church family friendly. Included in this resource are four complete seminars with PowerPoint slides, questions to ask when evaluating your church, worksheets to help with the change process, and a list of helpful resources.

Leader's Guide *Catalog #022280*

Participant's Guide *Catalog #022285*



Forever Stories Funpak (check spelling on our site)

Created by Review and Herald Publishing

This kit provides everything needed to conduct meetings for kids ages 4-11. Includes the five-volume Forever Stories set, five fun books, a guide book, two videos, two coloring books, and two prints.

Catalog #014699

Adventist Book Center

The following resources are available from the Adventist Book Center at www.adventistbookcenter.com or 800-765-6955.

Come Meet Jesus

Review and Herald Publishing

We Can Keep Them In the Church

by Myrna Tetz with Gary L. Hopkins, Pacific Press

Children's Church

This Quick Start Guide for Children's Church is full of important information to help you start or revitalize a ministry at your local church. This guide contains a job description, instructions for getting started, tips for maintaining a successful ministry, troubleshooting suggestions, recommended resources, and more. Whether you're new to this ministry or a seasoned volunteer, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your local church.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide series include:

- Children's Ministries Coordinator
- Kindergarten Sabbath School
- Primary Sabbath School
- Adventurer Club Director

For a complete listing of Quick Start Guide titles visit www.adventsource.org



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