



part 1 of 2—

Go! Reach the Children

by Marshall Bruner

The following interviews are with pastors who have been successful in ongoing outreach to their communities' kids and their families.

Rod Baker serves as Christian education director and coordinator of outreach for Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma. At this mega-church, Rod ministers weekly to 2,000 kids through bus ministry alone.

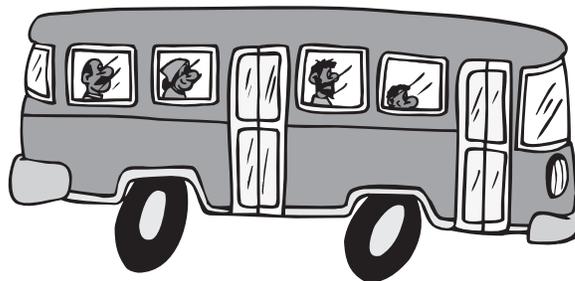
Gilbert Ceballos is children's pastor of Glad Tidings Assembly, Omaha, Nebraska. The church has over 500 children, and Gilbert—who was raised in a major inner city—conducts ongoing outreach in the community and in Native Indian reservations.

Robert Hill is the senior pastor of First Assembly, Spiro, Oklahoma. His church has made great strides in the past eight years in reaching the kids of that small community.

What would you consider to be the most important evangelistic events conducted by your church?

BAKER: We're reaching about 4,000 people a week

through our outreach efforts—75 percent being kids and 25 percent being their parents. We do three primary modes of outreach: We do a bus event every Saturday, and six days a week we conduct Sidewalk Sunday School. The third major outreach is our small-group neighborhood Bible clubs. Each is equally important, but for the average church in America



the best option is the neighborhood Bible clubs. This form of outreach is very economical and efficient and does not require a large labor force. It can be conducted at an apartment complex or at a person's home, in the urban swells or the rural communities. In reaching the children that are nearest you, it becomes one of the best discipleship tools around. The leadership team can consist of a husband and wife or

an adult and older teen.

CEBALLOS: Our primary outreach is to the Native Americans. KidsQuest USA is the number-one evangelism tool we use. Prior to an outreach, we scout the areas to study the needs of that tribal community. We train our young people and form ministry teams to go into the reservations to do KidsQuest outreaches simultaneously as the adults and youth do outreach in that same area. We've ministered in several reservations and neighborhoods of cities populated by Native Indians. Our goal is to conduct outreach in the various tribes every few months and to plant churches in inner-city areas that have a concentration of Native Americans.

HILL: One of our biggest outreaches is our day care, which has brought children and parents into the church. Another is our Wednesday night bus ministry, where we pick up kids in vans. Buses are not as practical in our smaller community. Also, we conduct fall festivals and summer day camps, which are offered free. During Thanksgiving and Christmas, our church

serves a big meal to about 350 kids because most of them have no traditional Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners. We are now preparing to conduct Sidewalk Sunday Schools.

How do you see the bus ministry operating in the church today?

BAKER: It's one of the most successful evangelism tools. But because our bus ministry reaches such a large number of kids—over 1,200 each week—it's not a strong discipleship program. So we do other forms of outreach—such as the neighborhood Bible clubs—to disciple the kids. I'm believing in God for an awakening in bus ministry,

that churches will see the value of it, because the main benefit of bus ministry—different from the Sidewalk Sunday School and the neighborhood Bible club—is that it takes the children out of their environments and places them in a church-structured environment. I believe the Assemblies of God is one of the greatest Pentecostal organizations in the world. However, we need to continue being the pacesetter in doing bus ministry, plus other forms of outreach. The Pentecostal message must be spread. So my prayer is that the Assemblies of God will be passionate about reaching the lost.

HILL: We started our bus ministry about 10 years ago.

We began with just one van and made several trips. Today our church, of about 300 in attendance, runs eight vans and picks up about 100 children on Wednesdays. The bus children represent a variety of ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. For most of them, the only spiritual influence they receive is on Wednesday nights. When the kids go home, their moms and dads aren't concerned about God or the memory verses the kids have learned. So instilling God's truths into the children is an important part of what we do.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Reflect on the evangelistic outreaches your church has been involved in. Which have been the most successful? Which have been the least? What might you list as keys for effective outreach in your community?

2. In what ways can you ignite the passion for evangelism within your congregation?



part 2 of 2—

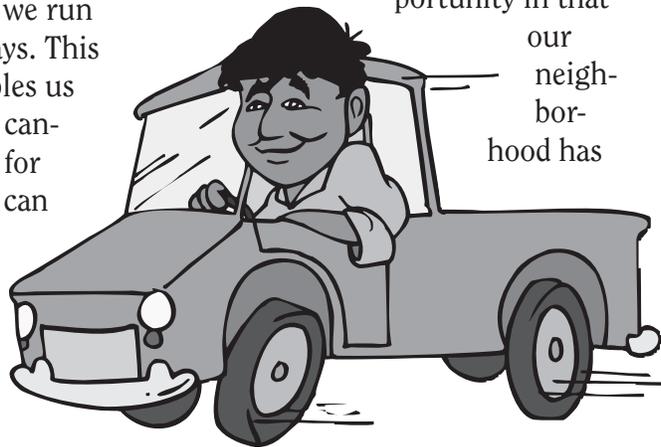
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How effective is Sidewalk Sunday School as compared to other outreach approaches?

BAKER: The Sidewalk Sunday School is a bit more expensive to operate than the neighborhood Bible clubs, but it is a very effective method of evangelism. Plus it doesn't require a large labor force. We have four trucks that run five days a week, and then we run two trucks on Saturdays. This form of outreach enables us to go places where we cannot go with our buses for two reasons: First, we can effectively minister in the smaller communities that have fewer children. Second, we can reach the children in a less costly manner. Buses are expensive to operate. The moms and dads, everyone, will come out and see the puppet show, the gospel illusions, the games, etc. We also give away groceries at every site because so many of the families struggle with hunger. The love of Christ, I believe, must be demonstrated in acts of service.

CEBALLOS: We use the Sidewalk Sunday School approach very effectively, just in another manner. We don't use a vehicle or trailer but accomplish the same results. Ours is held the first of each month, then we do follow-up the next week. We go to a public park or an apartment complex with a high density of children. Our church location provides a unique opportunity in that



our neighborhood has

gov-ernment housing projects and apartment buildings. So follow-up is simple because we just walk from the church to the apartment buildings, and they have a lot of kids. Now, as a result, kids and their parents are coming to church.

How do you follow up and disciple those children being

impacted through your outreaches?

BAKER: This past month alone, we had about 800 kids and parents filled with the Holy Spirit through our outreaches, but we must let them know they are accepted where they're at and then integrate them into the church body. We offer the children and their parents a ride to church on Sundays. Also, we visit every child each week and minister to his or her physical and spiritual needs. In doing so, we see entire families being reached and disciplined. So it's not just a once-a-week thing in reaching the kids. Our goal is to reach the kids and their families at least three times a week. The key here is that you must visit the kids at home if you want to speak into their lives.

CEBALLOS: I think follow-up is the key to effective ministry, because if you don't follow up then everything else you do is a waste of time. One approach we use is to register the children, then invite them to church to win prizes the following Sunday. Also, we use the registration cards in doing follow-up calls to the children

and to do home visitation. Every child deserves a follow-up phone call within 24 hours, followed by a home visit. The other thing we do is send postcards to the kids. On the card we explain how the card can be returned to receive a free gift. That's very important, because the key is to get the kids into church.

How do you recruit, train, and keep volunteers?

BAKER: I've found that the key to effectively recruit and keep workers—I have 500 volunteers working with me—is to instill the passion to reach the lost and to continually encourage them and let them know they are valued in God's kingdom. My goal is to raise each of those workers to become a minister. Regarding training, we train our bus staff and Sidewalk Sunday School staff weekly. We do specialized training each month. And we do a quarterly training event with all the various children's ministry group leaders. Here's the key: You must communicate your vision every 26 days, reminding them of their objective—to rescue the perishing.

CEBALLOS: Most of our recruiting and training is done one-on-one. I don't announce from the pulpit or through the church bulletin that I need helpers. I observe people and see how they act with children, and

then I target those particular people for the children's ministry. We endeavor to train the children's workers each month. I use different curriculum from various church leaders around the nation. Also, we do specialized training—for puppetry, drama, choir, etc. To keep and encourage our workers, I constantly touch base with them by phone—constantly.

HILL: I have learned that new converts want to do something for the Lord, so we funnel them in the right direction as quickly and as wisely as possible. When new converts want to get involved in ministry, we require that they attend and graduate from our new converts training. We also train the young people through hands-on experience. We assign one or two of them to each teacher to serve as their assistants. In doing so, by the time they reach the age of 18, they're ready to serve as leaders.

How would you challenge other children's pastors and leaders to become involved in outreach?

HILL: There's one boy who started coming to our church about four years ago. All he did was give us trouble. He'd get into at least two fistfights every Wednesday night. Continually, I'd have to separate him from the other kids. Finally I took him aside and told him, "You

can't be acting like that!" I called him by his name, and he looked at me and said, "My daddy told me not to take anything from anybody." I responded, "Well, your daddy's not here, and as long as you're at this church, we're your family. And in this family, we don't solve things with fistfights. You know we love you, feed and care for you, and tell you about the love of God. But that's how it is." About three months later this boy developed a skin condition that was highly contagious. So we explained to him that he couldn't come to church until his contagious condition had passed.

This once brute of a boy was now crying with tears running down his cheeks and saying, "Can't I stay? Can't I stay? I do get to come back, don't I?" Now the boy is 14 and gets ready for church by himself each week, and we still pick him up for church. One Sunday he came dressed in a T-shirt that brandished some inappropriate words, but he didn't know because he can't read. He just wanted to be in church. Our church people didn't get offended but just hugged and loved him as if his T-shirt said "Praise the Lord." Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. His heartbeat is to reach the lost, and that's the reason we're here too!