



part 1 of 4—

Impacting Inner-City Kids for Christ

Interview with Rod Baker, David Boyd, and Gilbert Ceballos

Many churches are impacting their cities by reaching the children in the inner city with the gospel. *Enrichment* magazine interviewed three children's pastors who shared their burden for inner-city ministry to children. Rod Baker is children's pastor at Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Under his ministry, the church has created 16 departments focusing on reaching the children of their city.

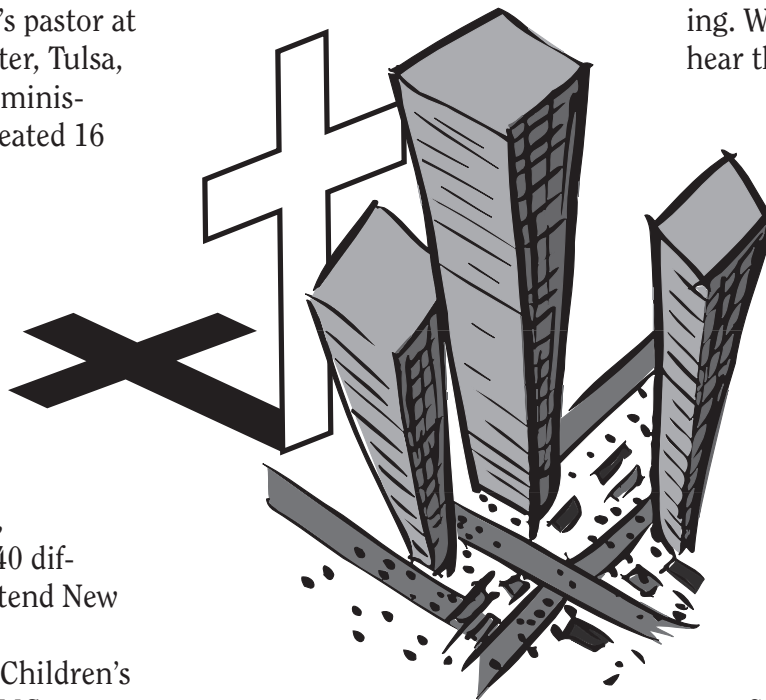
Gilbert Ceballos and his wife, Maritza, are children's pastors at New Life Assembly of God, Pembroke Pines, Florida. People from 40 different nationalities attend New Life Assembly.

David Boyd is the Children's Ministries Agency/BGMC coordinator, Springfield, Missouri. Prior to coming to Springfield, David was children's pastor at First Assembly of God, Fort Myers, Florida.

These men provide practical suggestions that all churches,

both large and small, can use to reach their inner cities for Christ.

In what ways have Sidewalk Sunday Schools been effective in reaching your commu-



nity with the gospel?

BAKER: Sidewalk Sunday Schools are a great concept because any church can conduct them. A Sidewalk Sunday School will bring new life to a church because it brings in new fami-

lies. Initially, a church does not need to make a large investment in capital or personnel.

Our sidewalk teams share the gospel using music and puppets along with Bible stories. We have sidewalk teams that visit families the day before the meeting. We tell mothers, "Come and hear the gospel with the boys

and girls. After our program we will give you a box of groceries."

Through our Sidewalk Sunday Schools we saw the need to start parenting cell groups. Most of the adults we are trying to reach don't know how to be good parents.

CEBALLOS: Jesus spent much of His time in the streets and in people's homes, not in synagogues. Sidewalk

Sunday Schools take us out of the four walls of the church and into places where people need to hear the gospel.

Through our Sidewalk Sunday Schools, we are also able to minister to physical needs. Many single mothers who are



part 2 of 4—

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How can churches develop Sidewalk Sunday Schools?

BAKER: Pastors must share their vision with the leadership and the congregation. We took pictures of the government complexes. We then placed an announcement in our bulletin: "There is a man who wants to pay for a mission trip for you. Will you go? More information will be available next week." People were excited and ready to go overseas for a short-term mission trip. The next Sunday we showed slides of the housing complexes. We said, "Our mission field is right here, and Jesus is the One who paid the price for us to go."

The materials to accomplish a Sidewalk Sunday School are available. If pastors will start with a Bible club, back-to-school bash, a three-day VBS, or backyard VBS, it births what God has for the future.

Many pastors are looking for revival. Revival is here, and it is with the children in their communities. Jesus said, "If you receive a little child in My name, you receive Me." God will

supply the resources for your outreaches. Some businesses that use panel trucks will donate them when they buy new trucks. People who see what you are doing to reach the community with the gospel will donate money and materials.

If pastors want their churches to explode, they need to go after the greatest resource in their community—the children.



BOYD: Pastors who want to start an outreach may not know where to start. Tell your board that you would like to plan a day to give food and clothing to the community. Have one board member contact businesses and ask them to donate food. Assign another

board member to contact clothing stores to see if they will donate clothing.

On the day of the event, have a children's evangelist minister to the children; a youth pastor to do a youth revival; and the senior pastor can preach to the adults. Pastors may want the children's evangelist to stay several extra days.

Pastors can also train the people in their churches to minister. So many people will be saved, they will be busy with follow-up for months. The pastor and congregation will catch the burden.

To start a Sidewalk Sunday School, pastors do not need a children's pastor or somebody who is exceptional in children's ministry—children appreciate whatever you have. Set up a cardboard box as a puppet stage, tell stories using Sunday School material, and give away freezer pops. This shows the community you care about their kids. You might pull in only kindergartners and first, second, and third graders. But they'll get saved, and their mothers will come.

The next step might be to get a flatbed trailer to use as a stage. The stage and a sound system help you become more mobile. Eventually, you can get a box trailer and cut the side out.

CEBALLOS: An outreach starts with a vision and passion to reach the kids in your community. Jesus said in Mark 10:14, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” We

should try to bless every child we meet.

You don’t need a lot of equipment to start a Sidewalk Sunday School. Jesus sat on a hill or in a boat and told stories, and everyone sat down to listen. If you tell stories and have illustrations, color posters, and puppets, you will draw a crowd. We started with nothing—just a cardboard box with some curtains taped on it and a bunch of blow-up puppets. If you’re faithful with the

little you have, the Lord will give you more. As our ministry grew, the Lord blessed us with a truck. When people outside the church heard what we were doing, they donated money and equipment.

Simply tell children about Jesus and love them. Each child is important in God’s eyes. That’s what the kids need; they need love, and they need to hear the truth.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Take time to dream. Where could you begin an outreach? (Backyards, parks, VBS, etc.)
2. Use what you have. What materials or resources do you currently have to begin an inner-city ministry with?
3. Focus on the goal. Whom do you want to reach?
4. How could you communicate your excitement or vision with the senior pastor, board, and church body?



part 3 of 4—

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Why is follow-up after a Sidewalk Sunday School important?

CEBALLOS: Follow-up and visitation are important parts of our ministry. We can conduct several Sidewalk Sunday Schools, but unless we go to the homes to see how families are doing and meet their needs for food and clothing, we're not doing all that we should. Besides taking a flyer telling them what's coming on Saturday, we ask if they need prayer. This is the reason families are coming to church and to Christ; they know we care.

BAKER: A few years ago, I was overseeing the third largest bus ministry in America. I felt something was amiss. I picked up children once a week, loved them, and then sent them back home. But I wouldn't see them again for a week. I determined that I needed to have contact with these children more than once a week. We decided to disciple them. In addition to our bus ministry (we bus in about 1,500 kids a week) and Sidewalk Sunday Schools, we started kids clubs. Our kids clubs are cell groups in government-

subsidized apartment complexes where kids are disciplined throughout the week.

In the immediate Tulsa area, there are 50 government-subsidized apartment complexes. We are in 46 of them. Through the outreach programs of our church, someone is visiting



children three times a week. We bring food, counsel parents, and win families to the Lord.

Describe how your cell-group ministry works.

BAKER: We call our cell groups *Victory Kids Clubs*. These kids clubs are like a Cub

Scout den meeting. We provide a cassette tape of worship music and an agenda for a mini-children's church in homes.

Kids clubs can go anywhere—to the government complex or the suburban neighborhood, to homes or apartment complexes. Kids clubs become a mobile-children's church. Every week about 160 clubs meet throughout the immediate Tulsa area. We are reaching thousands of children with the gospel through our Victory Kids Clubs.

The kids clubs also provide opportunities for trained laypeople to minister. For instance, there may be a grandmother who loves children, has taught them in the past, and may believe she is no longer useful. By giving her a packet and letting her use her home to share the gospel with the children in her neighborhood, the church is not only utilizing a valuable ministry resource, but it is also discipling children in the process.

I write the Sunday School lessons. We also have a theme for the month, and each lesson revolves around that theme. Once a month we have a two- to three-hour mandatory meet-

ing for our teachers where we review the lessons. We provide props and visuals and share with teachers the theme for the month. During this meeting, we also discuss certain situations in the neighborhood.

We want to do more than just win boys and girls; we want to win families. We put signs in the yards—"Victory Kids Club Meets Here." We give door flyers to each host teacher that identify him or her as a cell leader and list his or her phone number and address.

We also have back-to-school campaigns where our church members open their homes for an hour and bring in neighborhood kids. We provide resources for them. These are inexpensive

ways to reach unchurched children with the gospel.

How do you acquire resources such as food and clothing to give to these families?

CEBALLOS: Many businesses and organizations are looking for places where they can donate food and clothing, but most churches don't ask for donations. I ask, and I mail letters to businesses. This year we prepared book bags for students. The schools gave us information concerning what children needed for school supplies. We then asked Wal-Mart and other places for discounts or to help us supply the needs of the kids. One of our hospitals was planning an immunization clinic. They asked

us to provide a Sidewalk Sunday School. We told them we would be preaching the gospel, and they said that was fine. We pray, and the Lord opens the doors.

BAKER: Last year, I received \$3 million worth of goods. Proverbs 14:22 says, "A sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous." But the righteous are not going after it. Billions of dollars of goods are being thrown away. I received 30,000 pounds of groceries today. It's there for the asking. If people know you are aggressively fulfilling the Great Commission, it doesn't matter what size church you have or what size community you're in; they will donate. You have not because you ask not.

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways can follow-up provide a greater harvest in your ministry?
2. What role do small groups (in homes) play in city outreaches?
3. What resources are in your area that have not been utilized at this point?



part 4 of 4—

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How do you discipline inner-city children?

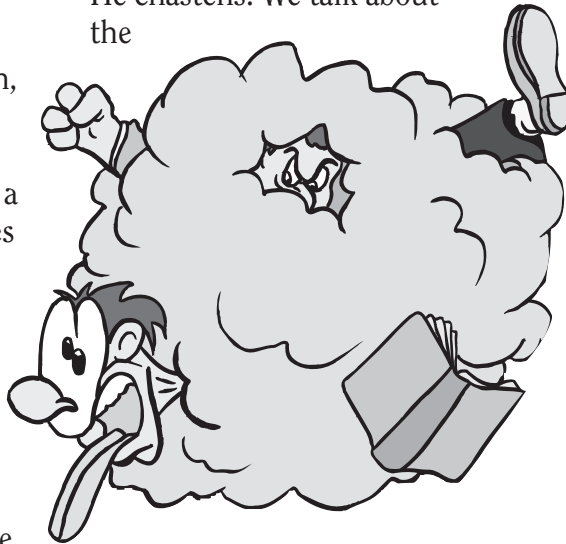
BOYD: When children register, give them a membership card to ride the bus. This means you have to meet with the parents before the child can attend. This limits the number of visitors being brought because you first meet the parents and get their permission for their children to ride your bus. Then, if children fight on the bus, you pull their card. He or she must earn the card again after a certain length of time. It makes them members of something, and they realize that membership has its privileges and its responsibilities.

CEBALLOS: If children want to come to our Sidewalk Sunday Schools, they must obey our rules. If they continue to misbehave after a warning, they can't come to church. We teach that coming to church is a privilege.

Once you develop meaningful relationships with the children, they will listen to you. Most of our bus kids are better behaved than many of the church kids because of the discipline, rapport, and respect we

have built with the kids and with their parents.

BAKER: It's best to start by bringing the bus children in on a Saturday because these boys and girls are from a world we can't comprehend. Bus children want to be disciplined and loved. The Bible says whom God loves, He chastens. We talk about the



rules. I tell kids who fight, "Nobody's going to hurt you here. If they hurt you, they're going to have to hurt me." We bring the love of God to them.

Certain people need to handle discipline. If an ex-marine sergeant starts jerking the children around, you're going to end up with a lawsuit. You need someone who has the heart and

compassion of God and who can say to the child, "Look me in the eye." We need to realize that most of our bus children have been beaten and abused.

What impact are gangs having on the children in your community?

CEBALLOS: Most of the gangs we see are in schools and are made up of kids. Most of these kids are starved for attention. That's why they join gangs. Also, there's no male presence in the home. The only male they see is the gang leader, so they want to be like him. Until we show what a real father or man looks like and what God expects a man to be, they're going to follow that example.

BAKER: We've dealt with gangs a lot. I had one of the largest inner-city youth groups in America in the last church where I served. We bussed in 900 teenagers and children every week. These children are looking for identity, so we started soul-cell clubs because Proverbs 18:1 says a man that isolates himself seeks his own desire. We presently have 20 cell clubs.

We need to give inner-city

kids a reason to be faithful to the gospel. Recently we started a junior leadership core group. Once a month I take 14-year-olds and older and put them through a training and discipleship series. They become leaders on the bus and in the ministry. My goal is to develop a group of people who

will reach their community. I take them bowling, roller-skating, or to dinner.

Most children's pastors need help. Pastor Tommy Barnett says, "Help is in the house." The very ones to whom they are ministering can minister to others. We must give the children

ownership and responsibility, or we'll lose them. Giving without accountability leads to trouble. Instead of saying we're going to simply rescue them, I'm giving them a desire, a passion, and a purpose.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What are some creative ways you can handle discipline with inner-city children?
2. What would be the reason for a Saturday service for inner-city children?
3. What influence can a strong, loving male have on inner-city children?
4. What does a sense of ownership give to an inner-city child?