



How Children's Ministry Can Grow a Church

by Dan Betzer

In the past six years, First Assembly of God in Fort Myers, Florida, has enjoyed an attendance increase of over 1,000 persons on Sunday mornings. There are many reasons for this increase. There is most certainly a revival spirit in the congregation. Our ministry philosophy of *reach, teach, and send* keeps us on target in evangelism and discipleship. The emphasis on our far-reaching missions philosophy has played a pivotal role in the growth, both numerically and financially.

But this church also puts a premium on reaching children. In 1998–99, the children's ministry increased an average of 183 youngsters. Each Sunday morning, the church ministers to more than 450 children. Shortly, we will begin constructing a Children's Center connecting directly to the main sanctuary building.

How Has This Happened?

A church simply reflects the vision and burden of its senior pastor. If the pastor does not have a zeal for reaching chil-

dren, the church will not have zeal either. Do you have an organized plan to reach the next generation? In merely accommodating the existing generation, we fail to prepare for the one to come.



Pastoring affords many joys to a minister. One of the prime blessings to me is dedicating babies. Flanked by the parents, and often today it is a single parent, I thrill to hold that precious child in my arms and lift him or her to the Lord in the act of dedication. My sincere reaction to that ministry affects the congregation and increases their interest in touching the lives of our little ones.

Through years of evangelis-

tic ministry and traveling during my days on Revivaltime, I have spoken in nearly 1,500 of our churches. Many times I observed that children's ministry was near the bottom of the totem pole in importance and finances. A growing congregation urgently needs a strong, Spirit-led children's pastor. This is no place to scrimp.

I urge pastors to find the very finest leadership for children available. As a church reflects the philosophies and heart of its senior pastor, so its children's ministry reflects that of its children's pastor. Put this ministry firmly in your budget. You are making a vital investment.

Our children's ministries are a subsidized part of our annual budget. Our children's pastor knows that each month there will be money in his account. Pastors truly tie their children's workers' hands for effective ministry when they do not give them the funds they need.

When you start this subsidy, it is often inconvenient. But stay with it. Over the long run, your investment in children will bear incredible dividends. For exam-

ple, a man who was part of our children's ministry years ago is now a successful businessman. He recently came to us and said, "Let's improve the children's play area." He gave the church a check for \$50,000 to do the work. Investing in children is truly casting your bread upon the waters.

Give the Children's Ministry *Visibility* in Your Church

We frequently feature the children in our Sunday services. We bring all the children into the sanctuary, and the adults see for themselves the hundreds of children who attend our church.

It does not come as a shock to them when we announce we must do something major (such as the new Children's Center) on their behalf.

We are currently raising the needed \$3 million up front to build our Children's Center. To do this, our people need to be constantly reminded that there are tens of thousands of unreached kids in our county. As the pastor, I keep this information front and center.

One final note: Pastor, take a hard and honest look at your church. Be as objective as you possibly can. Then ask yourself: Is this church a place where young parents would want to bring their children? Would the

children themselves enjoy being here? Would it remind them of a dentist's reception area or some other unpleasantness? Does my church really reach out to the young generation?

Jesus loved children. "Of such is the kingdom of God," He taught. First Assembly is literally exploding with growth in every area. Our church's ministry to children plays a vital role in our growth and development. But far more important than this, we are influencing the generation to come by perpetuating the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dan Betzer is senior pastor at First Assembly of God, Fort Myers, Florida.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What is the key to giving a church the zeal to reach children?

2. Why do you think children's ministry is often at the "bottom of the totem pole" in importance and finances? Where does children's ministry rank in your church? What can be done to improve this, if necessary?