



Making a Difference, part 1 of 2—

Shaping Up Like Jesus

by Sharon Ellard

Early Childhood Consultant in the Sunday School Field Ministries Department

Who will the babies and toddlers in your church become like as they grow up? Will they be like Mike (Jordan?) Will they be like Tiger (Woods)? Will they be like Jesus (Christ)?

During the first 3 years of life, patterns for a lifetime begin to take shape. Influential people from Washington, D.C., to Hollywood, California, are focusing attention on the first years of life. Both the church and the world want to shape young lives. (See sidebar.) Who will succeed?

We can make a difference in how the lives of babies and toddlers will shape up. The choice is ours. Will we stand by and watch as others shape their lives? Or will we join together and invest our time and abilities to "Shape up young lives like Jesus"?

Young lives are like pliable clay. God has created a norm that each generation shape the next generation during the early years of life. That has been God's plan from the beginning. We need everyone's help to make that plan take shape in our church.

Below are some ideas for a "Shape Up Like Jesus" campaign for your church.

Announcement

Make the campaign as visible as possible. Announce the campaign several weeks in advance. Ask permission to bring a baby

with you as you make the initial announcement. Choose a baby who is animated and enjoys attention. A smiling chuckling baby can help gain adult interest and enthusiasm for a project. Use some of the information from the introduction to inform the church of the interest Washington, D.C., and Hollywood, California, are taking in early childhood development. Remind your church that God wants us all to join together to help each little one become like Jesus.

Describe some of the events you have planned for Nursery Ministries 2001. Tell the congregation you have mailed invitations to the young church families. You would like their help to invite young families who don't already attend the church. Ask those who want invitations to raise their hands. Ushers can help distribute the invitations.

By involving the church in the event, you will raise the significance of ministry to babies and toddlers in their minds and hearts.

Preparation

The following ideas will help you begin to plan for the event. Feel free to modify and add to them in any way you want. Pray for guidance. Recruit the most creative people to help. Have fun.

Sunday School Brunch

During Sunday School, sponsor

"Early experiences are so powerful they can completely change the way a person turns out."

—Dr. Harry Chugani

"Children are a gift, not just to parents but to all of us. We all are responsible for what happens to children.... We need to build more children, not more prisons."

—General Colin Powell

"Bruce Willis gets excited by all the action and adventure of being with kids. He knows how important it is to interact with them by talking, singing, reading, or simply hugging—especially during the crucial first 3 years, when their brains grow to 90 percent of their adult size."

—ad for "I am Your Child" website, initiated by Rob Reiner

"O God, you have taught me from my earliest childhood, and I have constantly told others about the wonderful things you do."

—King David

"Let the children come to me, and don't try to stop them! People who are like these children belong to God's kingdom."

—Jesus

a mentoring brunch for young parents. Recruit parents of grown children to prepare the food and to serve the young parents. Choose a menu that will be popular in your community—anything from breakfast casserole to scrambled eggs to fresh fruits. Whatever the main course, also serve biscuits that have been cut into geometric shapes such as triangles, circles,

squares, and hearts.

Reserve seats at each table where the experienced parents can sit and talk with the young parents. The assignment for the experienced parents is to sit and listen to younger parents sharing about their little ones and to begin to befriend the younger parents. The goal is for younger parents to feel comfortable calling

on experienced parents for advice in shaping their little ones' personal relationships with Jesus.

In addition, ask two or three of the experienced parents to prepare a 5-minute talk about a Bible passage or principle that guided their parenting when their children were young. Use the last 15 to 20 minutes to present these talks.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What influences must you compete with when trying to reach the minds of the children in your church?

2. What potential does your church have for organizing a mentoring relationship between young parents and more experienced ones? Brainstorm ways this can be accomplished in your church.



Making a Difference, part 2 of 2—

Shaping Up Like Jesus

by Sharon Ellard






Early Childhood Consultant in the Sunday School Field Ministries Department


(Part 1 of this article introduced a "Shape Up Young Lives for Jesus" campaign. More ideas for this campaign continue below.)

Teacher Affirmation

In many churches, a host of men, women, and teens minister in the church nursery. Depending on the size of church, that number can range from zero to hundreds. If your church includes nursery ministers, this is a wonderful time to affirm their faithful ministry publicly. Consider creating a rebus that correlates with the awareness theme. The rebus can be incorporated into thank-you cards for the teacher. It can be used in a platform presentation of children holding poster board cutouts of the shapes as the presenter reads the statement and points to the corresponding shape. It can be made into a media presentation or displayed on a bulletin board along with photos of the nursery staff.

Seeing their service as ministry can transform how nursery helpers spend their time with babies and toddlers. When nursery ministers not only care for but also play with babies and toddlers in ways that introduce them to Jesus, teachers truly do help shape the lives of little ones. When the church as a whole understands that ministry begins in the nursery, they will become more supportive of that ministry.

Within the  of our
church, nursery teachers
are   who
 with the  of
our ministry to little ones.

Thank  for your ministry.
You make a difference in
the lives of God's little 1's.

Presentation

In some ways ministry to babies and toddlers is an "invisible ministry" of the church. In churches where babies spend all their time in the nursery, they may never be seen by many members of the congregation. Jesus ministered to little ones in front of adults. He lifted them into his arms and blessed them. Not only did that ministry affect the children, it affected the adults who watched. If Jesus considered ministry to little ones important, then it would become important to other grown-ups as well.

Plan a way to introduce the young parents and little ones to all of your church congregation. This presentation could range from a parade of young families

to a media presentation. Whichever approach is feasible for your church, try to include some specific glimpses of parent's spiritual aspirations for their little ones. In a media presentation, this could take the form of a slide of each baby that includes his or her name, age, and a quote from the parents about a Jesus trait they want their little one to learn at church. In a parade of families, a host might read information as each family is introduced.

Gift or Memento

You may want to give each family a small gift. This could range from a Bible picture board-book to a laminated picture of Jesus to a rattle shaped like a barbell or geometric shapes. Invite creative shoppers in your congregation to brainstorm a gift that young parents would enjoy for their child.

You could also give a small memento of this event. For example, create refrigerator magnets that show a picture of Jesus mounted on a shape. Several weeks before the presentation, buy small pictures of Jesus. (You may need to purchase inexpensive certificates or bookmarks that show Jesus and then cut out this picture. You could also recycle flannel board pictures of Jesus.)

Mount the pictures on plastic place mats.

Draw a shape around each picture. Use a variety of circles, triangles, squares, stars, and hearts.

Completely cover each place mat with clear ConTact paper.

Attach a piece of flexible magnetic tape to the back of each cutout.

Invite parents to choose a

magnet as a memento of their goal to shape their child to be like Jesus.

available for church members to distribute to friends and family. You can create your own message or use the sample below.

Invitations

Ask a member of your church to desktop publish invitations to mail to young families in your church. Also make the invitations

God wants every child's life to take the same shape as His child's—Jesus. With His help, we can begin that shaping process in the church nursery.

**SAMPLE
INVITATION**

Jesus loves your little one, and we do too.
Please join us for a free Sunday brunch
& worship service.

On _____, 2001 at _____ a.m.

At _____.

We are located at _____.

We will discuss how the first 3 years
shape every child's future.

Questions For Further Study—

1. When should the shaping process begin in order for a child to become “shaped like Jesus”?
2. What activities could your children's ministry team initiate to create more adult awareness of the need to begin the Christian discipleship process early?
3. How would you rate the effectiveness of your early childhood ministry in comparison to ministry to school age children?