



part 1 of 2—

## What Are Children's Leaders Saying?

by Marshall Bruner

Below are responses from a children's missionary and some children's pastors and leaders who share how they assist parents with the spiritual development of their kids at home.

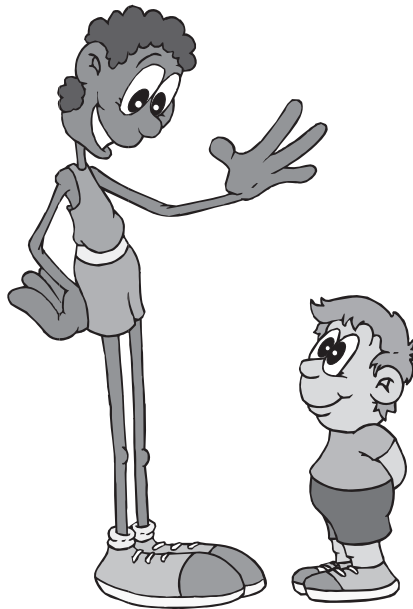
### **Andrew Patton, children's pastor, New Life Christian Fellowship, Trumbull, Connecticut:**

We give the families of newborns a basket filled with all kinds of helps. I normally include a book about raising children, along with a personal note with my phone number and e-mail address on it. For example, if the newborn is a boy, I might give them the Dobson book entitled *Bringing Up Boys*. Another book I hand out is McPherson's book, *The Power of Believing in Your Child*.

As for the unchurched parents who come, we offer them many social outreaches in which their kids can be involved. For example, each winter we run an Upward Basketball in which 70 percent of the kids are unsaved. During the summer we run a Discovery Day Camp, and most of the kids attending are from unchurched families. During

that camp we send home paperwork about follow-up activities in the church and send out personal invitations for them to visit us on Sunday mornings.

Recently, we started an inner-city school outreach with the hope of making an inroad into the after-school program arena using Character Connex and Upward Basketball.



Life in the Northeast is very different from the rest of the country. It seems to take us longer to make headway into some areas to spread the gospel, but

God is bigger and we are following His lead.

### **Henry Zonio, children's pastor, Kings Circle Assembly, Corvillas, Oregon:**

It all starts with our vision statement: "Partnering with parents to develop world changers." Without forging a partnership with parents, I believe our children's ministry, called World Changers, is incapable of effecting lasting life change in the lives of children. Thus, we are continually in the process of going from a child-centered children's ministry to a family-centered or family-based children's ministry. The primary way I partner with parents is to form personal relationships with the parents. I always let the parents know that I am here to support them and not the other way around.

Some other ways we are partnering with parents is to set up parent/pastor conferences in which I sit down with parents and talk about where their children are spiritually and how we can best help each other develop a world changer.

Another way we are striving

ing to equip parents is through a comprehensive discipleship program for the entire family which will help families learn about the different doctrines of the church, how to be involved in ministry as a family, how to do family devotions, and how to evangelize as a family.

As for those children who come from unchurched families, I am encouraging adults in the church to become “spiritual parents” to these children. The Church is meant to be a family, which means that those children who are “spiritual orphans” need strong families in the church

to “adopt” them and to be their adult mentors so they can grow in their faith.

Children’s pastors cannot do the job of discipling children on their own. It takes an entire church to raise up a spiritual champion.

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### **Questions for Further Study—**

1. What ideas have you gleaned from this article that you would like to implement within your children’s ministry?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does your children’s ministries vision statement include parent partnership? If so, in what way? If not, what can you do to include it?



part 2 of 2—

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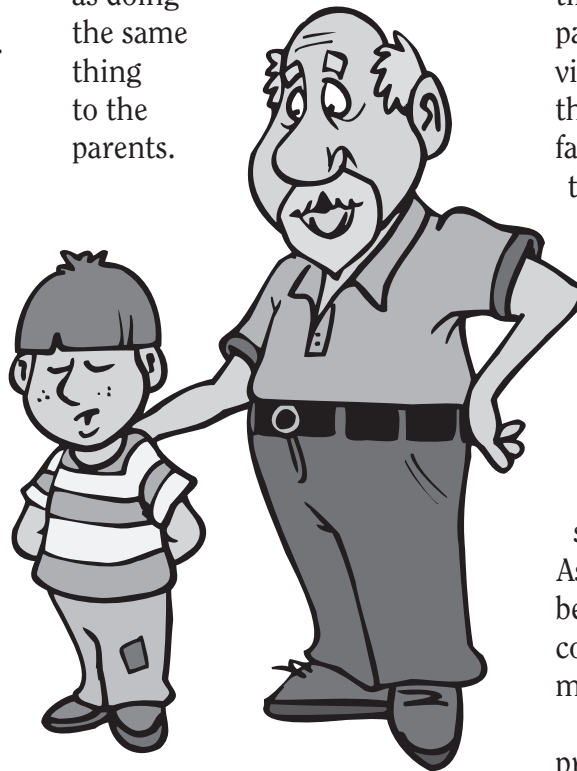
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### Tim Ryder, children's ministries director, First Assembly, Grand Rapids, Michigan:

We've started a couple new things here to reach both the kids and their families. The first is called Rush Hour—which is a 30-minute, fun-filled, fast-paced service where kids bring their parents. It is Christ-centered, family-focused, and kid-friendly. This may sound funny, but we don't let kids in without adults. This isn't another children's service, but rather a fun, interactive time where parents learn what we're teaching their kids that day. This gives parents the ability to immediately follow up and dialogue with the kids instead of handing them papers and hoping they read them.

The second is a class we've just launched which was inspired by Geoge Barna's book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. What we do is help the kids who come with grandparents, neighbors, guardians, etc., by praying with and encouraging them. Also, we offer events like Rush Hour, VBS, Harvest Blast (Halloween alternative), Feb-

ruary Family Fest, etc., where kids can bring their parents. We also invite the community at large and partner with other churches in the area. Children are open doors into their homes. And usually, when you love and encourage a child, those actions are received as doing the same thing to the parents.



### Darrell Blatchley, missionary to Philippines:

**MARSHALL:** Darrell, I understand that your missionary work is designed to evangelize

kids. How are you enabling the new kids in Christ to share their faith with their parents?

**DARRELL:** Our first priority is to develop strong, healthy Christian kids. We live in a country where children are more accessible to the gospel message and have more free time on weekends than their parents. When children have a vibrant relationship with Jesus, they spontaneously share their faith. When children learn something new, they share it with their parents. Since we teach only one theme a week, it is easy for them to take the message home.

Here are some examples: We put the weekly memory verse to music, and the children return home singing the Scripture passage. As a result, adult family members hear the Word and some come to Christ from this element alone.

We also teach children to pray for their food, to pray for the sick, and to give praise to God. These learned responses also impact the family. As children come to know Jesus and understand what His forgiveness has provided for them, they

want the same for the ones they love—their families.

To enhance the outreach to parents, we send home with the kids an average of two pieces of literature which contain short gospel messages. The child who knows Jesus will also reflect the Light. The parent whose child knows the Lord will never lack a witness.

**MARSHALL:** Even though you minister on foreign soil, I realize that many of the conditions you face in evangelizing

kids and adults who know nothing about Christ can be found in parts of the States. So share how you train the adults in your congregation (most of them being new converts themselves) to nurture their children's spiritual development at home.

**DARRELL:** Our congregation consists of only 25 percent adults; 2,000 of our adherents are children. Many of the parents we reach in our community lead dysfunctional lives—with a multitude of addictions to face,

as well as the addictions of their children. So we share the same sermons with the adults that we share with the children by teaching on the same themes with the adults and kids. Doing so allows the parents to interact with their children on questions the kids may have. Also, we found that parents need the spiritual encouragement from their children as much as the children need it from their parents.

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### Questions for Further Study—

1. How have you evangelized parents through the children in your ministry?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What evangelistic events do you hold annually, and how effective have they been? What improvements can be made to give your events more of an impact?