



part 1 of 3—

Discipling Children Through Children's and Family Ministries

by Darren Daugherty

Imagine that you are a new Christian. As you grow spiritually, you attend an exciting church that uses a variety of visuals to teach you the truths of the Bible. After you've attended for about seven years, you are forced to leave your congregation to go to another one. If you don't want to go, then you are welcome to go nowhere. In your new congregation, you grow in new ways for the next six years. After six years, you are forced to leave that congregation. At that point, there is another congregation for you to attend, but you are not sure where you fit, so you stop going to church.

This conventional practice of church is seen throughout America as the way to do church. We keep the children in their place and the teens in theirs, but churches continue to lose individuals (particularly children growing into adulthood) during movement from one congregation to another. Our answers to the problem usually don't include blurring the lines between age groups or bridging the gaps but keeping clearly separated categories.

There is another challenge

in our age-segregated system. It can promote parental irresponsibility in spiritual training. Families walk in the doors of our churches, and we split them up so we can minister to them "effectively." We then welcome parents to support what we are doing with their children. In order to



help ourselves feel better about this, we often re-label our ministry as "Family Ministry," but most of our ministry remains "Family-member Ministry" to children.

I have been misunderstood

on this issue more than once, so please read my words aloud at this point, "This is not about doing one thing or another. It is about doing both."

Are you saying that children's pastors aren't needed?

No. You may feel the urge to defend the conventional structure of church, especially if you are in a large church. I understand. I remember the moment in which I first heard about a book that was promoting a step back from age-segregated ministry. I had been a children's pastor for three years, and I immediately thought, *My ministry is not irrelevant!* That was over 12 years ago, and it was during that time in my life that I decided I had to change my ministry instead of denying the need for change. If I wanted to be true to what was best for children and the generations to come, I had to introduce the concept of family ministry in a church that was very age-segregated.

Children's pastors, relax. I am not proposing the abandonment of age-specific ministries. They are needed. Neither am I saying, "Tone down your

children's ministry." On the contrary, I am saying, "Bring on the child-centered, high-energy, visually-stimulating ministries for children." The key to it all is BALANCE. I am afraid we have such a slanted view that prevents us from seeing a need for balance.

Say it out loud this time so I know you understand me, "This is not about either/or. It is about both/and."

Church Ministry that is Multigenerational

What if churches operated in a way that fostered involvement of all ages, not always as separate departments, but one church body? Would kids, teens, and college students easily depart from a community in which they are invested, known, and involved? Dynamic children's ministry is needed. We must also realize that our younger generations are missing out on vital

aspects of church if they never interact with other parts of the body. Children have so much to offer the church, and the church has so much to offer them.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What are the benefits of providing ministry that crosses generational lines?
2. What can your church do to operate in a way that fosters involvement of all ages as one church body?
3. As a children's pastor, what can you do to keep parents involved in their children's spiritual growth?



part 2 of 3—

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Church Ministry that Focuses on Families and Parent-Child Togetherness

Describing the needed changes and available possibilities is impossible to do in a few pages, but I must mention a few of the most valuable, unconventional ways we have implemented this type of ministry:

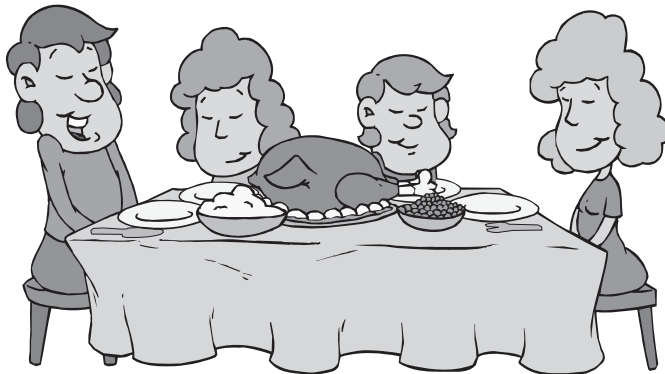
Parenting Classes and Small Groups

Many couples want to break the dysfunctional cycles of their own families, but they don't know where to start. You can help them, and you can help your ministry to children. I believe that equipping parents makes a dramatic, long-lasting difference in how children treat others and demonstrate their faith because their parents are disciplined to be disciplers.

Summer Sunday School Class for Families

The teacher operates as a facilitator who helps the parents lead their families in spiritual

growth. This leadership then carries over into everyday life and family devotions. Other parent-child events include our father-daughter, father-son, mother-daughter, and mother-son events.



Multigenerational Home Small Groups

As part of our home small-group ministry, we deliberately create groups that involve entire families, including kids and teens.

Family Worship

We involve all ages, once a month, in a combined Sunday morning service. Such an effort involves addressing the kids, using visuals during the sermon,

giving all ages opportunities to serve, and developing creative ways to help the children pay attention.

Intergenerational Sunday Nights

We have an intergenerational service on one Sunday evening per month into which the pastoral staff puts much effort. It is our best attended evening, as we involve a plethora of teaching methods, surprises, and discussion groups that include a range from preschoolers to great-grandparents.

Family Missions Trips

We started a new way of doing missions trips—all ages, families, and singles. The connections established between people who previously may have never spoken to each other in our large church were beautiful. Teens said, "Can we do it this way again, instead of just us going on a trip?"

Church Ministry that Disciples Children Through Parents, not Around Them

If you want to get started fos-



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Yeah, But What About the Kids Who...?

What about the children who come to church with one parent, no parents, or dysfunctional parents? First of all, we all have to admit that family ministry and multigenerational ministry is going to take a great acceptance of change and responsibility from everyone in the congregation. People will have to reach out to others, especially those with no spiritual parents. Families will have to see themselves as evangelistic units, inviting spiritually-orphaned kids and teens to join them in the pew and out of the church building. I know that if such a change is done methodically and with scriptural explanation, people will catch the vision.

Secondly, we have to ask ourselves a few questions: Where will these children, teens, and young adults learn about being Christian men and women, husbands and wives, moms and dads? By constantly being grouped with their peers? It is by involving them in what the church body is supposed to

be—the family of God.

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. A dynamic children's ministry is important to reach such children. This is about adding a new dimension to your exciting children's min-



istry in order to more effectively disciple children and effect many generations for Christ.

Now let's say it together so

I really know I am not being misunderstood:

“This is not about either kids' church or combined church. It is about finding a way to do both. This is not about either exciting ministry just for children or multigenerational ministry that includes children. It is about finding a way to do both. This is not about either ministry to children or ministry to parents. It is about finding a way to do both. This is not about either directly discipling children or discipling parents to disciple their children. It is about finding a way to do both.”

Will you impart a passion for living out Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78 to every adult in your church? Will you create ways in which younger generations are impacted by older? Will you help parents be the best disciplers they can be? If so, I pray that the children in your ministry grow up to have such a passion for their own families and break any dysfunctional cycles that they've experienced.

Church ministry is like a boat that has leaks through which we lose kids, teens, and

