



Children's Ministries Today, part 1 of 5—

Building Tomorrow's Church

Interview with David Boyd, Dick Gruber, and Jim Wideman

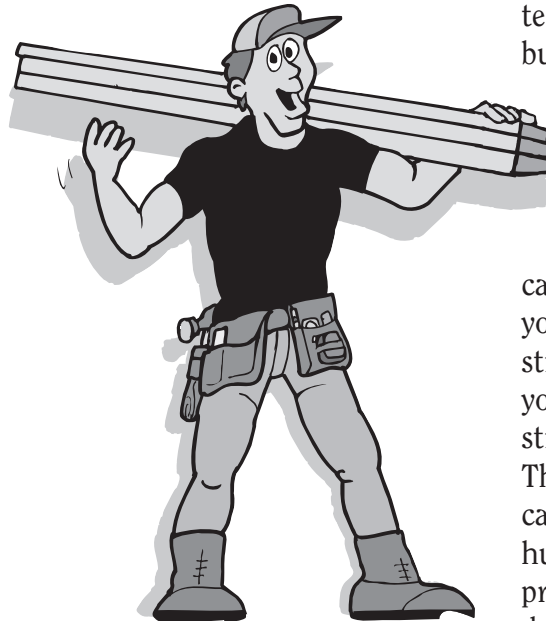
A radical shift in America's moral landscape over the past few decades has fostered a cosmopolitan culture that now suffers from a multiplicity of societal ills—not the least of which is the breakup of the family. Our children have become the innocent victims of broken marriages, physical and sexual abuse, as well as many other ills of society. Is it any wonder the Lord blesses the church that places a high priority on children's ministries?

How can children's ministries grow a church?

GRUBER: A church that reaches children will grow. Statistics show that 80 to 85 percent of those who believe in Christ came to know the Lord between the ages of 4 and 14. If you have a quality ministry to children, you will assimilate more new, young families. When people see that your church cares about children and is leading them to Christ, they will be more likely to stay at your church.

I talked with three home missions pastors at a family camp in one of our districts a few years ago. Of the three, two

had self-supporting churches that grew within the first two years. The third one did not grow; it was still supported by the district. What was the difference? The two that were self-supporting had emphasized children's ministries and missions giving from their first Sunday.



WIDEMAN: It is God's will for every person to grow in Christian maturity. But for years we only focused on helping adults mature in Christ. A balanced church teaches the Word to every age and trains members in Christian living. It's impor-

tant, then, to have a strong commitment to raising children for a lifetime of service.

In building houses, new construction is cheaper than renovation. Some churches haven't spent much money on new construction (children's ministry); instead they try renovation by putting their money into the teen and adult ministries. If we build strong people from children on up, our churches will be stronger.

We've built our church on three principles. First, if you minister to people who can't pay you back, God will pay you back. That's why we have strong missions, children, and youth programs. Second, we strive for excellence in all we do. Third, God gives you what you can handle. If you want to have hundreds of children, have a program that can handle hundreds of them.

BOYD: In some churches that emphasize children's ministries, the senior pastor conducts children's church during Sunday School hour or has someone else teach the adult Sunday School class while he or she teaches a children's class.

Ministering to children

seems to be a key to attracting young families and getting them involved in ministry. Quite often small churches stay small because they don't attract young families, and new people do not stay.

What are some common denominators young families are looking for in a church's ministry to children?

WIDEMAN: The appearance of the children's area is important. We started by looking at our nurseries and asking what

parents would like. This caused us to change the way we staff the nursery and how we organize our children's areas.

Certain places in the mall where attract children because they are designed with children in mind. Most churches design a multipurpose area, but it is just another term for "designed for adults." The church needs to start decorating for those it's trying to reach.

We live in a day where organizations stand out when they give good service. The church

needs easy-to-find classrooms and other things that will cause it to stand out. This shows people we care about them.

GRUBER: Parents are looking for excited, happy people who love the Lord Jesus and love kids. Even in a smaller church, if a young family sees that the nursery and Sunday School classes are well equipped and clean, they will be more confident leaving their children.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What impact is your children's ministry making in your local church?
2. What steps can you be taking today to be prepared for the children of tomorrow?
3. Looking at your church through a parent's or visitor's eyes, what areas of your ministry would you change?
4. What kind of kid-friendly atmosphere outside the church could serve as a creative outlet for new ideas?



Children's Ministries Today, part 2 of 5—

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How is your success in ministry to children related to the senior pastor's vision and support of children's ministry?

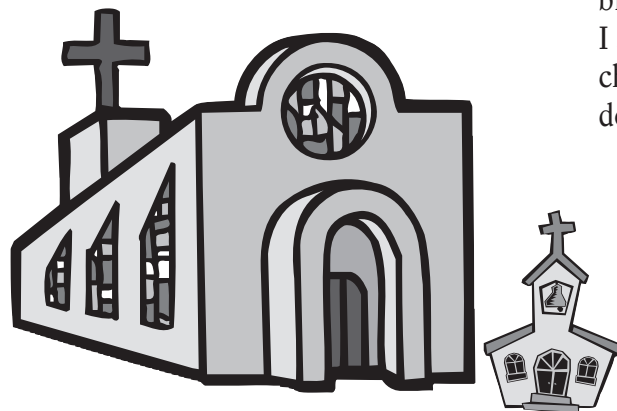
GRUBER: If the senior pastor does not have a vision for the children's ministry and does not proclaim that vision from the pulpit through his or her lifestyle and by funneling finances toward the children's department, the children's ministry perishes.

Children's church leaders and children's pastors need the senior pastor to recognize them as God's anointed people to minister to children. Sometimes children's workers are given a second-class rating by the senior pastor. Many children's workers are hurting, wondering if their pastor loves them.

I love my pastor, and he loves me and the children. He talks about it from the pulpit, and he sends money our way. A couple of years ago our church was planning to recarpet the sanctuary platform. I asked the pastor, "Have you seen the carpets in the nurseries?" The money that

was supposed to go for the platform went to our nurseries.

WIDEMAN: Everything rises and falls with leadership. The pastor is the leader of the children's ministry because he is the leader of the congregation. The children are just as much a part of the congregation as any other member.



I'm the pastor's representative to children. If he doesn't give me his vision, I can't carry it out. Many pastors hire someone to have the vision for his or her area. But senior pastors are the ones responsible for having a heart and vision for that area and conveying it to their staff. It's our job to serve the senior pastor and lift up his or her

hands. My pastor is very vocal in letting me know the kind of program and the things he wants. He lets me work out the details.

Does the larger church have an advantage over the smaller church when it comes to children's ministries?

WIDEMAN: We sometimes let the word *small* become the biggest word in our vocabulary. I started with seven kids in my children's church. If you will do when you're small what you are forced to do when you are bigger, you will get bigger.

If we are faithful in small things, God will make us ruler over much. In the smaller church, the biggest problem is recruiting volunteers. But this is also true in the

big church. When I was in a smaller church, I had to be more creative in my worker base. I used teenagers as well as adults as leaders.

In any size church, modeling, mentoring, and duplicating your heart into somebody else is the key. If you are by yourself in a small church and can take just one other leader and duplicate yourself in that person, you have

doubled the effectiveness of your ministry.

GRUBER: A big church has no advantage over a small church when it comes to ministry to children. A small church may only have five children, but it can still have a kids' crusade, a VBS, or a neighborhood out-

reach week. There may only be twelve kids in children's church Sunday morning, but the small church can still minister effectively and with quality to these children.

When people wanted to push children away, Jesus said to let them come to Him. He wanted

to bless the children. If a small church will follow the "Jesus way" and let kids come to Jesus, then it won't be a small church for long.

Questions for Further Study—

1. How can you communicate the value of children's ministry with your senior pastor?
2. What is your senior pastor's vision for your church?
3. In what ways can you model, mentor, and duplicate your heart into the lives of volunteers?
4. List five things you could do to grow your church through children's ministry.



Children's Ministries Today, part 3 of 5—

Building Tomorrow's Church

Interview with David Boyd, Dick Gruber, and Jim Wideman

Why should multiple staffing be an important consideration in children's ministries?

BOYD: In churches today, there seems to be a rule of 200. If a church grows to 200, the senior pastor hires a youth pastor and maybe a music pastor. If the youth group grows to 200, the church hires a junior-high pastor. In children's ministries, there needs to be something similar. When the children's ministry grows to 200, the pastor should hire a second children's pastor. If not, the children's pastor cannot effectively relate to the kids, children's workers, or parents.

WIDEMAN: Many churches may have both a senior-high and junior-high pastor, but only one children's pastor. The children's pastor may be ministering to more children than the two youth pastors combined. Multiple staff in children's ministry can help a children's pastor be more effective in ministry to children.

At Church on the Move, I am over the nursery, preschool, elementary, and bus ministry. I'm like the senior children's pastor.

I have a full-time assistant or a pastor who works with me. I also have a nursery and preschool pastor, an elementary pastor, and a bus pastor. I communicate my pastor's vision to those who work with me.

Having a person in charge also provides consistency in policies and procedures for all workers. If a church does not have one person in charge, the workers will have different policies and procedures. I am more valu-



able to my pastor as a problem solver and a leader of leaders than as a teacher of children. I still teach children every week, but I'm not the only pastor in the children's area.

GRUBER: A children's pastor must represent the vision of the senior pastor to

the children's department and oversee the various areas within the children's department. That system can work even in a smaller church with a volunteer children's leader. The children's leader can have people who are leaders over 6, 12, and 24 children. As the church grows, the number of children's leaders grows with it.

The average children's pastor who has 200 children is ministering to those 200 children plus the parents and family members of those children. This is one reason why multiple staffing is an important issue for the church.

What lessons have you learned in children's ministries about working with laypeople?

WIDEMAN: Some children's workers say they want help, but they really don't. They guard what they're doing.

The first thing Jesus did when He started His ministry was recruit help. If the Son of God needed help, we in children's ministries need help.

It was a big step for me when I chose to share coloring

pages and leg hugs with another leader. People sometimes say, “They can’t do it as well as I can.” There was a time when I couldn’t do it well either, but someone let me have a group of children, and I learned how to do it.

GRUBER: Pastors can help the layperson leading a children’s ministry to recognize the need to trust other people with ministry and allow them to grow in their ministries. People come to visit my children’s church and walk away disappointed

because I was up front for only three minutes. I have a group of trusted laypeople and children doing the work of the ministry. That’s the big difference between me now and 20 years ago. God has grown me beyond the need to be the man up front.

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways could additional staff, paid or volunteer, benefit your ministry?
2. In what ways can you communicate your senior pastor’s vision to your volunteers and ministry team?
3. What areas of your ministry could you train a layleader to do?
4. How might multiplying yourself in layleaders affect your ministry?



Children's Ministries Today, part 4 of 5—

Building Tomorrow's Church

Interview with David Boyd, Dick Gruber, and Jim Wideman

Why is it important to involve children in ministry? How do you involve them?

GRUBER: Scripture says to train children in the way they should go and when they are old they won't depart from it. For many years we told children in Sunday School to sit down and be quiet, and they learned how to sit down and be quiet. Now that they are grown, they are not teaching, helping, or doing anything in the church. We need to train children to serve one another in love. Children are today's church and tomorrow's Sunday School teachers, pastors, and missionaries. Eighty-five percent of today's Assemblies of God missionaries were called to the mission field between the ages of 9 and 13.

We can train children in Sunday School, children's church, or any ministry that involves children. We need to let children have a part in ministering to others. We have children lead in worship, do human videos, run the sound, usher, and run the computer and PowerPoint. We have children who pray around the altar for other children and anoint them with oil.

Integrity and honesty are qualities I expect of my senior pastor. These are the same qualities I look for in the children I'm training. When they pray, they have two ears listening to God. When they see a need, they fill it. We are working to develop in our children attitudes of servanthood and love.



Many Bible college students preparing for youth ministry were called to youth ministry at youth camp. If we present the call of God to ministry to children and let them minister to others, they may desire to be children's pastors when they grow up.

A wise senior pastor will want those who work with children to train them to minister.

The nine-year-old child sitting in children's church could be a future board member voting on the pastor's salary. The wise pastor will think of the long-term effect of the children's program and say, "I'm building a church for the future. If I invest in children now and allow them to minister, in 10 to 15 years I will have a strong body of believers that love me and love Jesus."

WIDEMAN: My children's pastor was a boy in my children's church in Birmingham, Alabama. He was on my puppet team when he was eight years old. God called him as a child while he was helping me.

My dream is that a pastor will never need to ask for volunteers or workers.

I want children to start ushering when they're in children's church and youth group. When they are in the adult service, they will be experienced ushers.

I have more than 80 Timothys—children who have answered the call to ministry—from my children's church over the years. This is because we have emphasized children ministering to others.

Allow children to learn by doing because that's the best teacher. I use my adult leaders as mentors to teach the children to minister by showing them how and by letting the children have part in ministering to others.

The altar workers in my children's church are some of my biggest soul winners. They bring friends to church whom they have won to the Lord at school.

I tell people to make a list of everything they want children to be when they are grown. If they want them to be saved and filled with the Holy Ghost, write that down. A children's pastor can take the youth pastor to lunch and ask, "What do you want a young person that comes into your youth group to become?" Then write it down.

The next thing you need to do is become a model leader. Put others before your children who model the things you want your children to become. Then teach the children what the Word teaches about Christian living and serving. As you teach and model, the children will become what you want them to be.

Why is it valuable to teach kids about missions?

WIDEMAN: I recently received a newsletter from a missionary to India. He was in my children's church in Jackson, Mississippi. He thanked me for teaching him the importance of missions. If we do not teach and emphasize missions, our children may not be sensitive to God's call on their lives.

Teaching about the importance of missions has done great things for our church. We are taking 700 puppet stages, 2,100 puppets, and a year's worth of curriculum to 700 churches in Peru. It has been a wonderful thing for the children and the adults to be involved in building the puppet stages and raising money for the mission outreaches. The Great Commission is not just for part of the Body; it is for all believers.

GRUBER: One problem with American teenagers is their feelings of hopelessness. And they are self-centered. They wonder, *How are people going to serve me?* And when people don't serve them, they experience a

hopelessness. When you instill missions in children, you instill Christ-centeredness and others-centeredness. They understand they can reach somebody else with the gospel. They realize it's not all about me; it's about others. When children share the gospel through missions and missions giving, they share the gospel more readily with their friends.

BOYD: Two things happen when children become involved in missions. One, a poor family in your congregation will decide they are not poor when compared to people in other countries. And these families will begin to sacrifice, give, and be satisfied with what they have instead of comparing themselves to the people who have more.

I have discovered that I can give far more to missions and reach more souls overseas by emphasizing missions to the families in our church through our children. We are raising kids who minister, and we're impacting the mission field. We do this through the Boys and Girls Missionary Crusade.

Questions for Further Study—

1. How often do you give children an opportunity to respond to a call from God?
2. What role can your adult layleaders play in equipping children in ministry?
3. What goals do you have for the children in your ministry five to ten years from now?
4. How can your missions emphasis be developed to enhance your children's ministry?



Children's Ministries Today, part 5 of 5—

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What are important procedures or concerns children's pastors need to be aware of when structuring their ministry to children?

GRUBER: We follow Richard Hammar's (the Assemblies of God legal counsel) safeguards. We do reference checks, police background checks, and fingerprinting. We have a legal and moral responsibility to safeguard those under our care. We want to have the best people in ministry to our children and need to make sure no child will be hurt in any way in our classrooms.

We never have a leader alone with a child in any setting. We have the three-person rule: There are always two or more leaders with any child. When the first child is checked into a Sunday School room, there needs to be two adults in that room. Some churches also use video surveillance.

We also have check-in and check-out procedures for the preschool. We are talking about implementing that in the upper-age levels as well, rather than letting kids leave to find their parents. In the nursery and preschool, we have guidelines

for changing diapers and using bathrooms. Every church, small or large, needs these kinds of things.

Some guidelines and restrictions include not allowing men to change diapers. The incidence of child molestation is far greater when men are involved rather than women. We use antibacterial hand lotion to try to stop the



spread of diseases. We also have latex gloves available for workers who change diapers.

WIDEMAN: We have video surveillance in the halls and classrooms. We don't allow workers to accompany a child into a bathroom; workers stand outside. We also require two or more people to be present with

children. No one is ever left alone with a child. Parents sign in and pick up their children.

We do more than a basic criminal history check. A person can be arrested, and it may not show up on his or her police record. If you are checking on a person in a particular state, and that person has not lived in that state all of his or her life, you must check every state in which that person has lived. We do a known sex offenders check with the FBI. We also do a Department of Corrections check to see if the person has a police record. We do a social security verification. Some people have multiple social security numbers or a dead person's social security number that they purchased. Find out if they are who they say they are. The same Bible that says "whosoever will come...let him...follow me," says "know them which labor among you."

When you are conducting worker interviews, never be alone in the interview process. I have a prayer warrior whose discernment can override my eagerness because of my need for workers. I require all staff who conduct worker interviews to have someone with them.

We have a plan for various safety issues. Some churches don't have an emergency nursery evacuation plan. If they do, they may have never practiced it. We have an evacuation crib (one that will fit through a door) in every nursery. My ushers have practiced, and we've timed loading dolls into the crib to see how quickly we can get them out if there is a fire or another emergency. If every mother runs to the nursery, you've got a problem. Every time I go to a church, if they have a policy and procedures manual, I purchase it. I have five different manuals that answer questions the workers may have about procedures.

Share some final thoughts.

GRUBER: Many teachers and children's church leaders don't believe God wants to do great things in the lives of boys and girls. They need to realize God wants children to be saved in Sunday School. He wants them to be baptized in the Holy Ghost in children's church. They don't need to wait until camp every year. God desires that boys and girls be used in the gifts of the Spirit, pray for one another, and see people healed. I encourage senior pastors to encourage their leaders and workers to look at the children's ministry through Jesus' eyes.

WIDEMAN: We should expect God to do big things in our churches. Stephen Covey, in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, says to begin with the end in mind. Pastors should ask, "How do I want the children's ministry of this church to end up? What do I want boys and girls to do as they get to the youth group?" They then need to establish a vision and develop a plan. We get a plan by looking at where we are, determining where we're going, and taking steps to get there. God promised to lead us. God will honor the steps, and we can have the children's ministry that we've dreamed.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What procedures could be added to your current policies to better safeguard your volunteers and church?
2. Do visitors/parents feel safe and confident with your current sign-in/sign-out procedure?
3. What resources do you have regarding policy and procedures? Do they need updating?
4. How do you want your current ministry to end?