

The Preschool Manifesto

(Why preschool ministry is crucial to healthy churches and insights on making it a healthy ministry)

By Randy Christensen

God has an incredible plan for growth in each person's life. That plan should not be delayed until later years, but should be encouraged as early as possible. Young parents would be concerned if their infant did not physically grow. They would jump and take the child to a doctor. Weight, height, eating habits, bowel function – all of it would be checked! Blood would be drawn. Temperature taken. Test after test would be ran so that a diagnosis could be given. If their child appeared to be socially or emotionally disconnected, they'd seek advice on how to help their child improve. Specialists would be brought in. Parents are concerned about each area of their child's development physically, emotion-ally, intellectually and socially. It is a natural occurrence for a child to grow.

But, what about spiritually? Do we nurture our children spiritually from the point of birth? We should!

Paul makes a strong case for ministry to youngsters in 2 Timothy 3:15-17:

“and how from infancy you (Timothy) have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

We know that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). That means that God does not show favoritism based on race, age or gender.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Children are included in "all creation"

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Children are "whoever's"

2 Peter 3:9b He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Children are "anyones"

John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" Yes Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Children are little "lambs"

Mark 10:13, 14 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Children who come to Christ are possessors of the kingdom!

We need to respect children, at even the youngest of ages, as co-members of Christ's Church. They "believe" at a young age, often far more than adults do!

Martha Williamson states, "I don't believe that children are talked into believing in God, I believe they are talked out of it. We are all born with an understanding of our creator and a deep longing for his love. If we don't seize the opportunity to reinforce what children intuitively understand when they are young, over time the world's influence will slowly erode that belief away. We must give their young faith wings for flight."

This time of a child's life is crucial to their healthy spiritual development. Just like the first five years of physical nutrition and emotional development is important, so is this time of spiritual nurturing. It sets the pace for years to come. Positive influence and input helps set the pace for the rest of one's life. Lack of healthy spiritual feeding may establish a negative pattern that may influence them throughout life. Children who suffer physical malnutrition as infants never become as strong and healthy as children who are fed well.

Children are an important part of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

1 Corinthians 12:18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Preschoolers should be treated with special honor.

1 Corinthians 12:21-24a The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" and the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with

special honor. And the parts of the body that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our representable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Many areas of ministry do receive special recognition and honor on a regular basis in our churches. This often happens simply because of their visibility in the adult services. According to 1 Corinthians 12:24, these areas “need no special treatment.” But preschool ministry areas are hidden away from the rest of the body. Paul shares that these types of “weaker” ministries are indispensable and they should be treated with special honor.

Why? Because when God looks at a church, He wants to see one with integrity. The word “integrity” comes from the greek word “integer” – one, complete, whole. It is not two-sided. The strength you see is not just viewed in one area, but throughout the body.

If our ministry to preschoolers does not thrive, our church will not thrive.

1 Corinthians 12:26,27 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

When one part of the body is hurting, it affects all of the rest of the body. When a person has a broken toe, it affects everything. When a church has a broken ministry to children, the church will hobble along, at best. The adult ministries may appear to be thriving – like a body builder who does exercises for his upper body—but if the ministry to children is weak, that local church body can have upper body strength but not be able to climb the mountain of God because of its crippled debilitated legs.

Many churches in decline have panicked, looking for answers to their plight in the areas of adult ministries. I propose that the leadership may be looking in the wrong place. A doctor will not diagnose lung cancer by looking in a person’s ears.

Each of us is part of the body of Christ. Each person – including each child -- has an influence on the spiritual health of a local church body.

To grow a strong church, it is crucial that the ministries to our youngest ones be strong, healthy and consistent. Fact is, a person (or ministry) does not become strong or healthy without consistency.

A Plan for Spiritual Health

God’s plan for spiritual health begins in the home. God has given spiritual authority and responsibility to each parent. Each church should strive to help parents feed their own child healthy spiritual food. Here’s some of the ways that can be done together:

1. By providing enjoyable age-appropriate learning experiences at church for the child that share clear biblical truths and concepts.

2. By involving parents in their child's worship and learning experiences at church. Some parents do not feel equipped to be a Bible teacher. But by participating in their child's class, parents may observe teaching models which may be used in the home. This may be a learning experience for both the child and the parent!
3. By providing follow-up information which shares the Bible lessons with the parents. (i.e. take home papers and online family devotionals) This material may be used for family devotions and follow-up.
4. By providing parent support groups (i.e. TeenMOPS and MYC)
5. By providing ongoing parenting training (i.e. seminars & take home library resources)

Ministry Jobs

1. Service Coordinators (every week)
2. Teachers (every week)
3. Helpers (every week)
4. Helpers (rotational)
5. Auxiliary Workers (non-regular service time tasks)

The Kidsworld Early Childhood Department Model

Kidsworld Early Childhood Ministry is only as strong as each worker's vision and commitment. If our vision, at best, is for babysitting, we will never accomplish more than babysitting. If we grasp God's vision for spiritually healthy and vibrant children, this ministry could be explosive!

The Kidsworld Preschool Ministry is overseen by the Early Childhood Director. The Kidsworld Preschool Ministry is divided into three primary age groups with five different areas of possible commitments. The three areas are "Infant Nursery" for children birth up to age two. Toddler Town Ministry is for children aged two and three. KinderChurch Ministry focuses on children aged four through kindergarten-ten. Each of these primary divisions also are broken into smaller groups within those departments.

Each department (Nursery, Toddler Town and KinderChurch) have a coordinator that weekly oversees the facility and workers in that department. The coordinator is responsible for staffing and overall supervision of their ministry area and is under the direction of the Early Childhood Director.

Each department has different service time service coordinators. For example, the Toddler Town has one coordinator, but three service coordinators (Sunday 9:00 a.m., Sunday 10:45 a.m., and Wednesday Rainbows). Each of these service coordinators oversee their service

time ministry and activities including child-registration, worker direction, Bible teaching and learning activities weekly.

Each service area has a Teacher position. The teacher prepares and presents an age-appropriate Bible lesson under the supervision of the service coordinator each week.

Parents and other workers may serve on a rotating basis as helpers. Most ministry areas will require a minimum of once a month. These helpers interact with the children during crafts, snacks, large muscle activities, and the lesson time. The service coordinator and teacher will guide helpers to fill needs and ensure a safe and enjoyable church experience for our young believers. It is important that helpers arrive 15 minutes early, focus on the children during the servicetime, and also help clean and reset the area after their service time.

Helpers are asked to find their own substitutes by trading with other approved workers and then communicating that change to the department assistant coordinator. If each children's ministry person takes individual responsibility in this area, it will help the ministry stay healthy and well-staffed.

The Assembly of God leadership views children's ministry as a first priority and responsibility. If a helper has a schedule conflict with another area of ministry involvement, the worker should contact the coordinator of the other ministry area and make the leader aware of the conflict. Fulfillment of preschool ministry responsibilities is crucial. Worker to child ratios are essential. One-on-one interactions with youngsters are indispensable. Supervision and security is only achieved by each worker taking individual responsibility and making each scheduled time their main concern at church.

Remember, we have two Sunday morning services. You may actually participate in the sanctuary during one service (i.e., usher, choir, band, etc.) and enjoy the morning worship and sermon, and during the other service, work in children's ministry.

Auxiliary Workers

There are a number of ministry opportunities for people who do not have the patience to be in a room full of preschoolers or have other service responsibilities. You can still minister to children by helping with projects and activities outside of service times. You may:

1. help prepare crafts
2. pick up needed supplies at the store
3. prepare snacks for special occasions
4. work with registration and record-keeping
5. create, build, decorate and paint sets
6. build specialty props and game activities
7. disinfect toys and clean early childhood facilities
8. help with parenting resources and classes

Each of these tasks needs to be done on a regular basis. We would love to have your help if you are available.

Kidsworld Ministry seeks to use the Master Teacher Method.

The Master Teacher Method uses the principle of mentoring, delegation and empowerment. No one person is responsible for service planning, preparation or presentation. Teams of people work together under the direction of the Master Teacher. The Master Teacher uses effective ministry methods as an example to the other workers. After displaying numerous options in illustrative and “hands on” methods, the teacher delegates various responsibilities for future lessons. The helpers then prepare and present small segments of the lesson (i.e., Bible story, craft, scripture memory, music). The helpers should try to imitate the effective examples previously seen modeled by the master teacher. It is understood that the Master Teacher will actively coach the helpers to help them grow and improve their abilities. Each person should remain open to instruction and advice so that we, as a church, may grow in our effectiveness.

Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, “If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.” That means that if we will sharpen our abilities and skills, we will be more effective. When our approach to ministry has a dull edge to it, we waste time and effort. Let’s be sharp for our kids and for the Lord! We become sharper as we remain teachable and grow in our abilities.

Kidsworld Ministry encourages prayerfulness.

Every Early Childhood worker is asked to be in prayer prior to arriving in the ministry area. Please pray for direction and God’s blessings upon the other workers and the children and families that will be attending that day.

Please take specific time to pray individually for each child during your time in your ministry setting. While holding a baby, pray for the child and the child’s family. Expect that God will help you to create a spiritual atmosphere in our ministry areas through your prayerfulness.

After helping clean up and reset the ministry area, take a moment and pray with the other workers. God wants to use you to encourage others in prayer.

SUCCESS Sheet

For us to have a successful children’s ministry, please remember to:

1. Mark your calendar for the dates and times you are to serve.
2. Be there 15 minutes early and plan to stay after to help reset the area.
3. Be prayerful.

The Preschool Manifesto

Whether or not this “manifesto” is nailed to the door on the outside of your church, the principles should be manifested in the culture of your church. We must make a conscientious effort to equip young children and parents.

1. We must nurture our children spiritually from the point of birth through teaching, training, and providing worshipful, prayerful atmospheres of age-appropriate engagement. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

Children who suffer physical malnutrition as infants never become as strong and healthy as children who are fed well. It is just as crucial in a child’s spiritual life to receive nourishment also.

2. Show respect and great value to our babies and preschoolers understanding that *“God is no respecter of persons”* (Acts 10:34). God does not show favoritism based on race, age or gender. (1 Corinthians 12:21-24.)

3. With consistency and on special occasions our youngest should be treated with special honor as an important part of the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:14, Matthew 18:2,5,10 & 19:13-15)

4. To have a healthy church our ministry to our youngest must be healthy. If our ministry to preschoolers does not thrive, our church will not thrive. *1 Corinthians 12:26,27 says, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.”*

5. The Church recognizes and encourages the spiritual authority and responsibility of each parent (Ephesians 6:1-3). The Church serves as a resource, coach and partner in imparting age-appropriate truths in teaching and training.

6. A child’s security is found in knowing their environment, their routine and their care-giver. An effective Church will provide caring consistency in these areas on a weekly basis. Supervision and security is only achieved by each worker taking individual responsibility and making each scheduled time their main concern at church.

7. One-on-one interactions with youngsters are indispensable. Jesus modeled this when he halted his adult ministry and lovingly focused on each child individually. (Mark 10:13-16) Each ministry should maintain high ratios of compassionate workers to children.