

CHILDREN'S LEADER

S U M M E R

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A NEWSLETTER FOR THOSE WHO LEAD CHILDREN IN THE CONGREGATION

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Baby Church: Serving a New Generation of Parents

When it comes to caring for children at church, you can never be too careful," says Liz Hewitt of Generation Ministries (www.revgeneration.com). Hewitt, along with husband, Norm, own a company that provides Baby-Church in a backpack. Their backpack includes the following: a training DVD for church nursery staff, a book of monthly programs geared to toddlers and babies, bells on a plastic cuff, and cards with a picture of Jesus on them.

Liz and Norm remind us that parents today are attracted to church-run programs for the nursery age, provided the programs are done with excellence, the facilities are spotless, and the volunteers are properly trained and screened. The Hewitts offer the following suggestions for making sure the children in your program are safe and secure.

- ◆ Place noticeable security bands of different colors on children with allergies.
- ◆ Have a means of communicating with parents, whether by pagers, cell phones, or large screen projection, in case of an emergency.
- ◆ Keep pictures of non-custodial parents to eliminate any confusion.
- ◆ Have a plan of action for emergency situations. For instance, have a lockdown procedure in case a child goes missing. "In Colorado, a child was gone and way down the street in 45 seconds." The nursery leader should be able to page a deacon with a missing child alert. The deacons should have their own plan to search the premises and check the immediate neighborhood.
- ◆ Keeping the nursery away from the exits can increase parental trust.
- ◆ After an emergency or an emergency drill, do not let parents take their kids until everyone is outside and accounted for.
- ◆ Encourage parents to participate in the nursery program by serving as a volunteer once a month. Put moms and dads both on the rotation, but not for the same week.
- ◆ Have someone besides the leader watching bathroom breaks at all times. This volunteer can help the child from the doorway, never closing the door.
- ◆ Screen (including a national background check) and train your nursery workers. If there is even an allegation of mis-

conduct, have that worker do something that does not involve children. Read *Reducing the Risk II*, a booklet from insurance companies designed to train teachers in screening and safety. It can be found at www.reducingth-risk.com. Your church can get help with screening from www.protectmyministry.com.

Teens are key to a well-staffed church nursery. Offer training for them twice a year, and rotate teens so they too serve no more than once a month. Use them to super-

vised one baby or a group of 2-3 children. Don't have teens greet the parents; make sure an adult does that to confirm to the parents that an adult is in charge. You can make this ministry more popular for teens by giving a tuition scholarship at their local Adventist school or a gift certificate at the Adventist Book Center.

Keeping the nursery spotless is as simple as keeping the area sanitized with a weekly big clean when you spray the toys and chairs (Check out www.zep.com for a spray.) or wipe them down with Clorox wipes, and spot clean the

carpet. Once a month dunk the toys in bleach and water. Have a regular rotation of carpet shampooing.

A professionally run nursery can persuade parents to join your church—if they find security and peace of mind there. Parents are attracted to join your church when they find clean rooms and a great nursery program. In a sense, the nursery leader pastors the parents as well as the children. To learn more about the ministry of the church nursery, check out the Hewitts' website and ask to preview the Baby-church backpack.

Family Function: Do Children in Your Church Know They Are Loved?

In Sept, 2004, I visited a small church in Wyoming. With a membership of 50 and very few children in attendance, they were struggling with the usual “not enoughs”—not enough money, not enough talent, not enough space, not enough warm bodies and certainly not enough children. One of their primary concerns was that the pre-teens and teens that they had often opted for friends, sports and other Saturday morning entertainment rather than Sabbath School and church.

As we shared these challenges and possible solutions, I urged this small church family to get acquainted with their kids. One of the blessings of a small church family is the ability to really get to know everyone. I encouraged them to learn their kids names and each kid's personal likes and dislikes, as well as their friends names and the things they were the most passionate about. As I gathered my things before leaving, I once again said “Even if all you do is just learn their names and each

Sabbath that you see them, greet them by name and welcome them using their name and making eye contact, you will get results.”

Months later one of the Sabbath School teachers called me to report, that the next Sabbath they had begun their plan to learn the children's names and seek them out to greet them and welcome them, even inviting them to take part in the service. She shared that as a result, the attendance of all their pre-teens and teens was close to 100% each Sabbath. They cannot report yet that their membership increased, but the increase in attendance is gratifying.

An extra bonus turned out to be that, as the older folks began to invest themselves in the lives of their kids, they became less judgmental and critical and began to be more accepting of the differences and more loving and

supportive of the struggles the youth were facing. In a very tangible sense they began to function more like a family. Imagine the possibilities: now that they have loved them back in attendance, they can begin to plan events, programs and opportunities that will



spiritually nurture them and perhaps also their friends. Once kids know they are loved and wanted there is no end to the ways we can further invest in their eternal future.

The New Face of Bullies: What Should Parents and Teachers Do?

There was once a time when bullies were restricted to the schoolyard and alert adults could intervene. Nowadays, that's no longer the case.



Cyberbullies are children using the Internet to threaten and harass other kids at an age when they are especially vulnerable to insults.

Taking advantage of the anonymity of the Web, they use email and blogs as their playground and send hurtful messages and pictures without having to witness the consequences. Parry Aftab, Internet lawyer and executive director of www.WiredSafety.org, an online safety group, says, "Some kids can't wait to get home so they can continue taunting."

There are different reasons which lead to cyberbullying, some of which include power, vengeance, and even defending a friend. Victims of cyberbullying experience fear, withdrawal, embarrassment, and a reluctance

to tell adults of what is happening.

So what should parents and teachers do? The first step is to keep the computer in an area where children can be supervised when online. Forbid chat rooms, and monitor instant messaging. If a child is being victimized, ignore the bully and block further online communication. If the cyberbully is identified, contact their parents and request that the behavior stop. As an overall precaution, adults should check every computer's history on a regular basis to see which Web sites are being viewed. Lastly, encourage children to get parents and teachers involved as soon as possible and not suffer in silence. Once children know that adults are aware of the possibility of cyberbullying, they will be more open to disclosing the fact.

News & Notes

VBS Workshop Appeals to Community

Potomac conference children's ministries director Barbara Manspeaker has long wanted to share her conference's Vacation Bible School training resources with churches in Shenandoah valley. A longtime VBS master leader, she organized, in 2005, a free conference-sponsored workshop, inviting churches of various denominations to attend. Thirty people from 11 different churches attended. Companies such as David C. Cook, Group Publishers, Gospel Light, Concordia, and Augsburg Press provided samples of their VBS material for display purposes. "We're hoping to do more church-based activities so churches can combine strengths and work together," says Lisa Seeders, Manspeaker's daughter and willing assistant. At the conclusion of the seminar, participants made a unanimous request for a similar event next year.

Children's Festival Celebrates 9th Anniversary

Nearly a thousand children and families attended the Oregon Conference Children's Worship Festival. This

year's professional drama group, MCO Productions, presented the Esther story, "Hadassah," as a musical. The day started with a family worship service at 10 a.m. followed by lunch. The children's afternoon activities focused on Joshua 1:9—"Be Bold, Be Brave." Byron Keller, founder and executive director of Agape Youth and Family Ministries, presented a parenting seminar.

More than 750 people viewed the Hadassah story in the morning, and many invited friends and relatives to the evening's encore presentation. "We even had some Sunday pastors with their families attend the evening program," reports workshop coordinator Sherri Uhrig.

"Fearfully & Wonderfully Weaved"

A great way to recruit new children's volunteers is to honor them in your church. The new DVD, "Fearfully & Wonderfully Weaved," is a powerful tool to raise the value of children and their leaders in your church. With background music sung by artist Wendy

Newell, this DVD captures images of various children and comments from children's ministry volunteers to create the perfect tool to attract children's workers. The DVD provides a complete five-minute version, as well as an abbreviated four minute version.

Play the program between Sabbath School and church or, for more emphasis on Children's ministry, schedule it to be included in the church service itself. And bring it out again in October for Children's Sabbath.

Helping Kids Use their Bibles

Some Christian groups discourage kids from reading their Bibles, saying that the Bible needs to be explained to them by people who have experience studying it. So why do Seventh-day Adventist place such emphasis on helping kids use their Bibles?

First of all, we in children's ministry know that even toddlers can understand the core truth of Christianity—that Jesus loves us and wants to be our Friend. We who have made a practice of reading the Bible know that when we read the Bible in a translation that we understand, we hear God speak to us. We do not hear his voice; we do not hear words. But nevertheless we know when God is convicting our hearts of the truth found in the stories that we read. We know without a doubt what God is telling us to do about what we read. And children age 6 and up are capable of this understanding too. They can know that the Bible is God's Word, talking to our hearts. That's why we want children to know their Bibles.

I read recently of a young woman placed in solitary confinement during World War II. Under the harshest of conditions, she kept her spirits up by praising God and reciting Scripture. God spoke to her heart words of encouragement by bringing to mind texts she had memorized as a child and teen. We don't know when our children will need encouragement later in life; that's

why we want to help them memorize their Bible texts.

Kids learn to know their Bibles when we ask them to do the following:

- ◆ Learn the Books of the Bible. Finding their way around in the Bible helps kids to feel that the Bible is a more friendly book.
- ◆ Read the Bible for themselves. Kids want to know for themselves what the Bible says, but some may be self-conscious about their reading skills. So, let children volunteer to read the Bible within a small group; don't embarrass anyone by calling on them to read unless you know they want to. And let kids pair up, readers with non-readers.
- ◆ Remember that a child's reasoning skills develop later; this can affect Bible reading. That's why we teach with Bible stories. God talks to them through the stories. After they have heard the story, their Sabbath School daily lesson study asks them to read parts of the story in the Bible. Primaries and juniors are not ready to study by looking up proof texts.

Helpful Hints

- ◆ Always teach from an open Bible in your hand, so you model from the Bible.
- ◆ Tell kids what you read in the Bible and what God showed you to do about it. This models that the Bible talks to you.



- ◆ Tell kids, "When your birthday is coming up, ask Mom and Dad for a Bible."
- ◆ Ask God to show you what He wants you to get from this article.
- ◆ Help kids feel comfortable with the Bible and they will come to enjoy it.

Activities

- ◆ Get kids looking up texts, copying texts. It takes time but it helps them learn and remember.
- ◆ Give kids a Bible, the version you want them to use. Inscribe it and date it. This makes them more interested.
- ◆ Keep Bibles of your preferred version and give them one to use while in your class.
- ◆ Bible exploration activity. If you do a puzzle, add to the bottom a box for them to check when they have looked up a text.
- ◆ Keep asking children, "How many days this past week did you remember to read your Bible and pray?"