

FOR LEADERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Evangelism with Children



Congregations have these opportunities with children:

1. to provide opportunities for children, along with their family, to engage in Christian education and nurture. Children will grow as disciples of Christ. Their parents and members of the congregation fulfill the promises made at baptism.
2. to reach out to children who are not connected to the church and share the gospel with them in a relevant way.

Never has #2 been more important! Our neighbourhoods are full of children and their families who need good news. This article is intended to help your congregation develop or enhance your outreach to unchurched children.

How do you introduce children to the gospel?

- Get to know unchurched children. Find ways to build bridges between their world and the church. Here are some examples:
 - if children play together on sports teams, provide donuts or cookies after games. Wear a church t-shirt/sweatshirt. After several games, invite children to a program or the Sunday school of your church.
 - If your congregation has decided to focus on outreach to a specific age level, visit those grades at school. Find a teacher who has sympathy for your cause. Tell the teacher about your church's hope of offering positive, good news programs for children.¹ If possible, enter into conversation with both teachers and children. What do the children enjoy doing? What are their frustrations and hurts?
- Plan an after-school program that will capture the imagination of children. Call it "Cookie Corner" or "Hugo's Homework Haven" or "The Place to Be" or "Open Door," or your own creative name.

¹If you have not heard about the wonderful resources on "40 assets" for children and youth and how this awareness may be used in schools, contact Dorothy Henderson at Church Offices for more information.

Inquiries about the content of this newsletter should be sent to Dorothy Henderson at
1-800-619-7301 (e-mail:dhenders@presbyterian.ca).

November/2002

A newsletter produced in cooperation with the Covenant Community with Children and Youth
Writer—Dorothy Henderson

Design—Pat Martin

- Plan a program that seems helpful to parents. Your program might be advertised as a place to have an after-school snack, conversation, stories and activities with caring adults. When parents come to pick up the children, offer creative services. Here are some examples:
 - handout entitled "Ten Wonderful Things to Do with your Family on Weekends"
 - instructions for simple family rituals
 - recipes for quick fix, nutritious dinners
 - a note telling the parents what homework has been done.
- When planning a program, keep the ratio of leaders to children as low as possible. Six children to one leader is ideal. This allows close relationships to develop and grow.
- When recruiting leaders, the important thing is that the leader must communicate the significance of God in their lives. When children see that warm, mentoring adults have a close relationship with God, they will become curious about God themselves.
- If you don't feel comfortable doing a congregational evangelism program on your own, join others in your presbytery to do a large weekend or Saturday event.
- When developing a program, approach the gospel through things children already know about. Here are some examples:
 - **Literature:** Find out what the children are studying at school. For instance, if they are studying the story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, use this theme in your program. Have lion games, go through the wardrobe (a big painted refrigerator box) to enter a story time, have traveling snacks for the trip to Narnia. Conversations may focus on battles between good and evil which can only be resolved positively by a greater, outside power.
 - **Relationship:** Most children have positive relationships with a parent, sibling, grandparent, friend. Tell/read/find stories—including Bible stories—about other children who have these types of positive relationships. Describe God in terms of "like a loving parent." Describe Jesus as "friend" or "brother." Describe other Christians as "brothers and sisters."
 - **History and story:** Find out what local heroes are a focus at the children's school. Help children identify and associate with feelings they may have in common with people who help to build up society.
 - **Ritual and symbol:** In developing a program, find and use a simple Christian ritual, which uses symbols. Children love pageantry, repetition, and pictures (symbols).



How do you communicate the gospel to unchurched children?

- When doing programs, use both action and reflection and discussion.
- With older children, introduce Christian ideas by posing a "big question of the week." Why am I alive? Who am I? Where did God come from? What will I do when I am grown? How did the world begin? Why do bad things happen to people? What happens to people when they die? Do pets go to heaven? Where is heaven? ²
- Do as many activities as possible to strengthen the bond between parents, grandparents and children. Your program may include parent and child events, family concerts, family cluster events, all-age celebration and all-age worship. The family is the most important factor in a child's life. Support family life.

² An excellent resource is the book *How to Talk to Your Kids about Really Important Things*, Jossey-Bass, 1994.

- Plan a strategy to communicate the gospel with children. Can you set evangelistic goals for Sunday school? Will you plan holiday programs, Vacation Bible School or an afternoon club? Will you offer a camping program? Set goals and work toward attaining them.
- Be careful with language. Unchurched children may have no religious worldview or vocabulary. Remember that children are literal thinkers. Unchurched children will find some of our church lingo quite confusing.

Common Phrase to Christians	How it might be interpreted	How to rephrase it
Let Jesus into your heart	Open up your chest	Let Jesus be a close friend
Taste and see that the Lord is good	God can be eaten like food	When we know God as friend, we will find out how wonderful God is.
You must be born again	You must get back into your mother's tummy	Make a new beginning with God.

Emphasize that children can know, love and follow Jesus.

- Budget for a good children's Bible for each unchurched child. A good suggestion is *The Family Story Bible*, Ralph Milton, Wood Lake Books, 1996. In using Bible stories and religious conversation with unchurched children, follow these guidelines:
 - use the miracle stories carefully (many children will interpret them as magic)
 - avoid abstract ideas like sin, redemption, salvation
 - avoid asking for adult-style forms of commitment
 - accept children in a just and loving manner
 - build trust by exploring trust images and developing trusting relationships
 - help children explore their own and other's feelings in relation to gospel ideas
 - work less at talking at children and more at being with them.
- Evaluate your program regularly. As part of the evaluation, ask, "Can these children now be invited into the regular nurture and educational program of our congregation?"

What opportunities can we give children to respond?

- Give children good models. Children respond by affiliating with and copying adult and teen leaders' responses to God.
- Give children lots of opportunity for action—worship, caring for others (e.g. visit to seniors residence), social events (e.g. family concerts), social service (e.g. helping at Food Bank), helping with justice issues (e.g. writing letters on behalf of refugees), community service (e.g. cleaning up a local park), neighbourhood projects (e.g. organizing a paper bag luminary path on the street on Christmas Eve).
- Invite adults to share their stories of God's grace. Invite children to tell stories of an occasion when they thought God was near. In time, the children will feel comfortable doing this.
- Pray with the children and invite them to pray for others.

