

MentorNet #26

Helping Children to Participate Actively in God's Work

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Before Jesus fed thousands in the wilderness, He asked his disciples what resources they had. Andrew replied that a boy had five loaves and two fish. Jesus took this boy's offering and fed the crowd (John 6:9-10). Early church writers reported that this boy later became a Christian leader. Children who take an *active* part in God's work develop spiritually more readily than those who merely listen *passively* to teachers.

A wise Christian leader will recognize what children have to offer. If a leader lets children become bored and passive during worship and other weekly activities, then many will fail to grow up using the gifts and resources that the Master has given them.

Guidelines to Mobilize Children

1. Children benefit from working and playing with adults and with children of different ages.

- Children of every culture desire the friendship of older youths.
- To develop socially, children should balance time spent with children of their age with time spent playing and working with persons of different ages.
- Traditional public schools and Sunday Schools often deny children such opportunities, segregating them abnormally by age.
- We should free children from the stifling, socially-damaging practice of consistently clustering children of the same age.

2. Children love to act out Bible stories for adults during weekly worship.

- Before the worship time, children can meet with a teacher and prepare a short dramatization of a Bible story that relates to the adults' study topic.
- Keep the children's dramas very brief and simple. Avoid long *productions* and elaborate costumes; employ only the simplest of props. Such dramas do not need much preparation. The children will enjoy looking around the meeting place to find props such as rocks, sticks, chairs, tables, papers and baskets.
- Coach the children to speak loudly. To help them do so, have them talk to those who are standing on the other side of the room.
- The dramas are more effective when children of different ages and adults do them together. Very young children can play the parts of spectators in crowds, other members of a family, animals, and even trees.
- Normally children do better if they do not memorize lines word for word, but rather the general ideas. Their teacher can give them ideas for short dialogues and can prompt them if they forget. For example, tell 'Philistines' to laugh at little David and remark in their own words how silly it is for him to fight a giant.

3. Children enjoy being creative. God has given them good imaginations.

- Let older, energetic children write poems, skits and short songs to present to the other children and, if they do it well, to the adults, too. Such compositions should illustrate the topic that the adults are learning that week. Let musicians occasionally set children's poems to music.
- Children enjoy drawing symbols and pictures of Bible stories. Let them show their pictures during worship and explain how the pictures illustrate the teaching.

4. Children enjoy teaching and discipling others.

- It is extremely valuable for older children to help teach and disciple younger ones.
- Teachers can help children to prepare questions beforehand about details in a Bible story. When the congregation meets, the children can ask these questions, after acting out a story. Children can give the correct answers to their own questions, if the adults do not remember the details well.
- Children enjoy memorizing Psalms and other Scriptures and reciting them for the adults.

5. Children learn well from non-verbal teaching.

- Younger children enjoy singing songs to lively music while making hand motions. They should practice songs with hand motions and sing them for the whole congregation.
- Children love lessons presented with objects that they can see, touch and handle. A wise teacher uses physical objects to illustrate topics, allowing the children to handle them and explain what they mean.
- A teacher can prepare objects beforehand, coaching the children how to explain them during congregational worship.

Most church planting movements multiply congregations that are strongly family-oriented. Many such churches are small and have no nursery, accepting the presence of children as *normal*. When children take an active part in worship, they know that they are an important part of the church body. When children help others understand the truths that they themselves have just learned, the truths take root in their hearts. Children will also recall the teaching better and be more eager to participate in worship. They are also more likely to grow up loving the church instead of thinking of it as a boring ordeal forced on them by their parents. Jesus welcomed children and found ways for them to participate in His ministry. He made use of their gifts and resources. We should do the same.

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