



How Family Needs Shape Children's Ministry Today

by Ann Colley

"Raising kids today is hard." How many times have you heard (or thought) that? Was raising kids ever easy? Adam and Eve had obvious struggles ... as did so many of the families we read about in Scripture.

How can we help parents in this precious, difficult task? What does the church have to offer in terms of parenting help that is different from *Nanny 911*? We have a wonderful opportunity and a God-given responsibility to reach out to the family as we do "children's ministry."

What are the trends affecting the family today? An abundance of choices and opportunities are considered the norm, and most families would describe themselves as "very busy." Our kids are living in an instant generation of TV remotes, Internet surfing and downloads, instant messenger, video games, and I-pods. In most families parents have jobs and activities, kids have their own activities, and rarely do the two coincide. Even in the car, the norm is no longer conversation between parents and kids with entertainment distractions such as headphones, video games, television.

To have consistent communication on any level within a family requires great effort and intentionality. How can ministries be structured in a way that helps the family communicate and grow closer?

First and foremost, we come alongside parents in love and consider children's ministry to be a place of ministry to the whole family. Have you ever seen an episode of *Nanny 911* or its counterparts? The common theme is that we quickly realize that the nanny is necessary, not so much for the kids, but for Mom and Dad. They are crying out for help. They love their kids and want what is best for them, but they need skills and kids don't come with instruction manuals!

In a spirit of love, the church can assist them with understanding their importance in the child's spiritual development and equip them to embrace that role.

In practical terms, this looks different in every church. But the common idea is that each activity, each program and every curriculum, is viewed through the lens of "family ministry." What can be added, deleted or enhanced so that what we do can benefit the family

as a whole? How can we use our opportunities with kids to help their parents be the spiritual leaders God intended them to be?

Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- "In the Car" question. This is ONE question you send home with kids to discuss on the way home or around the dinner table. Include a brief summary of your lesson and a reference for parents to find it in Scripture.

- Make LOTS of devotional materials available to your families and present a fun skit that shows what "family devotions" can look like.

- Give families ideas about how to help their kids best participate in the worship services.

- Encourage families to have "Sunday night family meetings" to prepare for the week ahead and then spend a few quiet moments in prayer as they dedicate the week ahead to God.

- Prayer partners within the family. Consider furnishing journals for prayer requests and praise reports.

- Provide opportunities for families to serve together within and outside of your congregation.

- Pull together the creative folks (each church has them!) and brainstorm ministry expansion from the child alone to the child within the family.

In summary, children's ministry IS family ministry. It is wonderful, scary, exhilarating and exhausting. But it is worth the effort. Let's put the 911 nannies out of work! God had all the answers for the families we read about in Scripture, and He certainly has the answers for our families today. May He bless our efforts.

Ann Colley is a 1984 alumni of Concordia, Ann Arbor and is the Director of Children's Ministry at Shepherd of the Lakes, Brighton. She has a wonderful support system in her husband of 22 years, Jeff and kids Alyssa, 18, Amanda, 16 and Jordan, 14. Ann feels blessed to work with the precious little people who are BIG in God's eyes!