



# Building Blocks

Planning and Resourcing Children's Ministry  
in Small or Mid-size Congregations *by Chris Stodola*

As spring approaches many churches may be meeting to evaluate your children's ministry, make plans for VBS, and budget. One practical way to evaluate includes asking several important questions. Are the children's ministries fulfilling its mission statement? Are the current ministries effective? Are there new or better methods? In this process, also take time to ask the question, "What are we **not** doing that we **should be** doing for our children?" It may be time to eliminate what is not producing fruit, and reallocate resources to new programs. Asking the right questions while you evaluate may enable you to envision new ministries.

So, where do we find these new and creative ideas to fulfill the mission without spending big dollars on big conferences, workshops, or resources? First, examine what other churches are doing. Do not limit your search to one size church or one geo-

graphical area. Search the Internet to find children's ministries around the country. Contact those that have programs of interest. I have found that children's ministry people are willing and even excited to share program information and resources.

Another idea source is the local library and community education program. Explore what your community is offering. You may find that there is a void in recreational programming due to budget cuts. This could be an opportunity for the church to

provide those activities in a Christian environment.

Another source that is helpful is the newspaper. Newspapers often run pictures of local and regional "happenings" in churches, schools, scouts, and clubs. There may or may not be a short human interest article with the picture, but a caption giving a short explanation. Articles and pictures on kite making, beanie baby collecting, knitting, sport camps, and community needs can result in ministry opportunities.

Do not limit your research to local offerings. Communities





across the country offer creative and exciting programs for children after school, during breaks and summer vacation. Many times these programs tap into whatever the latest craze is for children. Your church can consider these ideas to provide activities for the children of your community.

Ideas are great, but how will we find people to serve? Whether in a large or small church, there are a limited number of volunteers who enjoy working with children and those volunteers have a limited number of hours to give. If your church does not have paid children's ministry staff, you will need leaders who are put in charge, but they do not have to be in charge of every ministry offered for children. Divide the leadership responsibilities to a number of teams or task forces. Allow those who have had leadership roles to volunteer for much less stressful positions in other programs. Encourage volunteers to lead ministries they are passionate about. A bonus: that passion will spread to others involved in the ministry and you will gain and retain more volunteers. In addition to dividing the leadership tasks, divide all other tasks into smaller segments. This does result in the need for more people, but because the task is smaller you may receive more "yes" responses.

What about materials? Ask bargain hunters to be VBS supply shoppers, detail people to fill supply baskets, and clean closets, enlist social people to man

the registration tables and be greeters.

And just how are we going to pay for these wonderful new ministry programs and supplies needed? Building structures from cardboard and duct tape, garbage picking, dumpster diving, and radar that scans everywhere for the word "FREE" are skills any children's ministry person with a small budget should develop. Cardboard from glass companies, foam core scraps from sign makers, wood from lumberyards and factories, Plexiglas scraps from hardware stores, sheets, pillowcases, and towels from laundry services, scrubs and lab coats from hospitals, gallons of "mistake" paint from the paint store, foam from an upholsterer, end rolls of newsprint from printers, and yes, with permission, a variety of items placed by the road for pick up. Consider borrowing. I have borrowed such items as ambulance gurneys, blow up moose heads and carved wooden bears, and a golf cart. Gain attention of the children using the unexpected. It does not have to be the biggest and best, but it should be fun!

Curriculum can be a very large budget item. When searching for curriculum materials do not be afraid to ask for and use last year's materials when feasible. Bookstores may have items that might be available for free or sold at a much-reduced cost. Churches often donate used and leftover materials to another church. Search for free materials on line. The key to using donated materials is adaptation.

As your church strives to create exciting ministries where children can grow in their faith and love for the Lord, remember that money, beautiful facilities, and the newest curriculum are never as important as providing a place where caring relationships can form and flourish and in those relationships the love and Good News of Christ can be shared. Cover your ministry plans with prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you. Allow the God who created this universe to bless you with His creativity in ministry.

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