



What Matters Now in Children's Ministry

33 Perspectives on How to Influence Children's Faith Now

■ Matt Guevara, Amy Dolan, Henry Zonio and Friends



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■ introduction

■ Ideas can be infectious. Like a drop of ink spilled on paper, an idea keeps reaching, stretching until it has run dry. What Matters Now is an idea that began with the simplest of questions: “What matters now in children’s ministry?” This is a question that every leader in the field of children’s and family ministry answers on a daily basis through their decisions, communication, meetings, programming, curriculum, recruiting, and schedule. This is the question that underscores countless hours of time and effort by pastors, support staff, and volunteers. This is the question that gets answered every time a church opens its doors to children and families. This question matters.

Because of the gravity of the question and its importance to our work in children’s and family ministry, we decided to share our idea by asking leaders from a variety of denominational backgrounds in vocational church ministry, education, parachurch ministry, non-profit organizations, and business to answer the question with one word. Our responses are as varied as the environments where the contributors serve. These unique one-word themes are colorful and catalytic, inspiring and conversational, innovative and foundational, timely and true.

Now our challenge as you engage in this resource is for you to pick a few themes that speak deeply to your heart and ministry and follow up with the contributors who submitted them. Join in the conversation. Develop those themes in your ministry. Share them with others. Use them with volunteers and staff members as a tool to answer the critical question in your own ministry context: “What matters now in MY children’s ministry?”

We are proud to present this resource to you. It was made possible by the generous contributions of thirty leaders who care about you and three people who really enjoy networking, laughing, and exploring the best ways to help kids meet Jesus and become more like Him.

MATT GUEVARA WITH AMY DOLAN & HENRY ZONIO

broken cisterns



■ *For my people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug their own cisterns, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water at all.*
—Jeremiah 2:13

I wrestle with what is my work in ministry and what is God's. This verse humbles yet encourages me for what really matters in 2010:

- Much more God's business—a lot less my busyness
- Much more Spirit—a lot less entertainment
- Much more listening and obeying—a lot less copying and pleasing others

Where do we get this living water?

- Be still... (Psalm 46:10)
- Cry out for the living God... (Psalm 84:1-2)
- Trust and listen. Don't try to figure it out... (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- Not by might... (Zechariah 4:6)
- Make the Kingdom of God your primary concern... (Matthew 6:31-34)
- Withdraw and pray... (Luke 5:15-16)
- Abide to abound... (John 15:1-17)
- Come back to your first love... (Revelation 2:2-5)

I ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing Him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is He is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life He has for Christians, oh, the utter extravagance of His work in us who trust Him—endless energy, boundless strength. —Ephesians 1:17-18 (MSG)

GARY STRUDLER currently serves as the Family Life Pastor at Rolling Hills Community Church, Oregon.



■ collaboration

■ *Working Together to Create a Shared Result.*

We're all on the same page. Families want nothing more than to see their own kid—let's say his name is Lil Zigi—have a richly blessed life and to leave his beautiful mark on the world. Teachers and mayors want to see Lil Zigi enter high school poised for success. His soccer coach is hoping for him to learn teamwork and how to play fair. Even the neighborhood bully wants him to know the rules of the playground. They are all working together to shape Lil Zigi's journey, most of them without even thinking about it.

All these influences are shaping Lil Zigi's world and spiritual understanding. Kids ministry today needs to work alongside all these influences with the intent not to compete but rather to collaborate with the family and community.

Influence isn't gained by just vying for the loudest voice, but rather by working with the existing framework. The church is at its strongest when it not only serves its surroundings but also partners with it. Churches and pastors need to collaborate to find out what relevantly connects all these elements together for Lil Zigi. All working together—Family, Community, and the Church—shaping Lil Zigi's physical, emotional, and spiritual destiny. Here's to collaboration.

MIKE SHIPMAN leads The Father's House Kids team in a highly creative and diverse multi-site church in Rochester, NY. Mike is a visionary, freakishly driven, fresh to kidmin, playful motivator, dad to a toddler and small dog. Oh, and he's Canadian.

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community

■ All the Bible stories, catchy songs, classroom creativity, and fun snacks don't mean a thing without healthy Christ-centered relationships that connect our children to one another, to adults who care about them and to the God who loves them.

When children are part of a community that models unconditional love and acceptance, they have a glimpse of what it means to be loved by God. When children trust and commit to people whom they can see then they can begin to trust and commit to God whom they can't see.

Adults have a serious responsibility as part of the community helping to nurture children into a relationship with Christ. We are always teaching whether we've "signed on" to teach or not. We teach children when we do something as simple as learn their names (or not), when we include them in the worshipping community (or not), when we surround them with adults who are gifted and called to work with children (or not).

Community has never been a greater need for children because of this "hurry-up-and-fit-it-all-in" culture. The church needs to do community well for it to make a difference.

LIZ PERRAUD is a Regional Advisor for The LOGOS Ministry where she supports churches through training, coaching, and resourcing into more effective ministry with young people.

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confidence



■ Oftentimes, I daydream about God choosing me. I imagine Him looking out across the entire world, searching for someone who will rise up to the challenge of making the world different for children, and I see myself raising my hand like a little kid begging and pleading for God to pick me.

“Pick me! Pick me!” I scream.

I hope with everything in me that I’m good enough, smart enough, educated enough and experienced enough so that God will see me raising my hand and choose me to lead and love for the sake of children.

Most days, I feel confident because I hear God saying to me, “I’ve already picked you.” And I feel peace knowing that God is good.

There are other days: days I feel insecure because I believe the lies that I’m not good enough. I forget God’s gentle voice, “I’ve already picked you.”

Today, I raise my hand again and imagine Him choosing me, whispering to me, “You are the one I need. You are the one who will make a difference. Lead strong and with great confidence. I have seen you and have chosen you.”

Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 1:6

AMY DOLAN is the leader of Lemon Lime Kids, and believes with confidence that she is called to empower the church for the sake of children.

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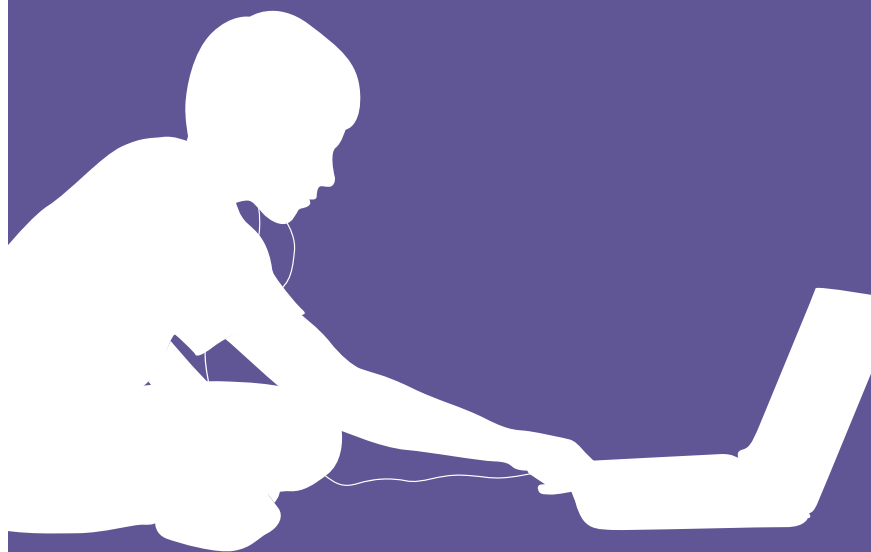
■ conversation



■ What would ministry be without conversation? Conversation requires an investment of time. It is hearing and listening, mutual contribution, sharing, and investment into something. To talk at or teach at a child will not inspire or invite them to find their place in God's story. Without conversation the grand Bible stories I share are just stories. To dialogue about a storm, one sleepy Jesus, 12 freaked out disciples, and what it means to trust someone with your life, when you fear your very death could leave a person amazed at God's power and moved to trust Him.

Conversation must happen between leaders and kids if *transformed lives matter*. Conversation must take place between pastors and ministry leaders if *raising up leaders matters*. Without conversation, we lose our ability to connect, to relate, to encourage and lift up those who we serve. Conversation is essential between leaders and parents if *coming alongside parents matters*. Conversation between God and me should be at the crux of my life because it is the catalyst to these vibrant relationships.

KATEY HAGE. Children's Director at Quest Church in Seattle, WA. Wife and mom of two.



■ digital

■ Research makes it clear that the generation of children in our ministries today is vastly different than any other group of children the Church has sought to reach. They engage and edit media, experiment with culture, and experience community in new ways. They are fluent in the language of technology. They collaborate, teach, connect, and relate using a network of individualized digital tools. They prefer a unique learning experience with parallel processing, multitasking, feedback, and relevance. They navigate the digital world deftly and quickly. They blur the lines between the physical and virtual. They are open to the truth of God's Word.

It is clear that this generation is fundamentally different than any generation that the Church has ever faced. This generation requires agile leadership, renewed teaching and learning processes, openness to change, and creative resources. Such change will bring about a completely rewired children's ministry, poised to connect children to the community of faith, teach children the truth of God's Word, and help children grow in relationship with Him.

MATT GUEVARA is proud to be outnumbered by his wife and two daughters. Matt serves as the KidsWorld GroupLife Director at Christ Community Church. He also serves the Cory Center as a webmaster and blogger, where Matt is a passionate evangelist for digital learning.

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effectiveness



■ The brilliant Peter Drucker wrote, “Knowledge work is not defined by its quantity... knowledge work is defined by its results.”

In ministry, what we do rarely has tangible results. Working to build relationships that will encourage faith formation does not yield spreadsheet-friendly results. Perhaps this is why as children’s pastors we often find ourselves busy with projects that allow us to see immediate results.

We can enjoy great environments, watch killer videos, and laugh at entertaining sketches.

However, is the time we spend on these really worth it? Is the work that is most satisfying in the short-term worth the time investment for the long-term? Maybe, but maybe not.

As you create amazing elements and events, ask yourself, “Do these help us build relationships of trust with families?” If you can answer, “Yes,” then keep going. If you can’t, stop and start over.

Your effectiveness is not measured in products but rather in story. You’ll only know results by hearing about lives changed. Spend time creating avenues to capture those stories. Then, publish them and celebrate them. Those are results that encourage excitement about what God is doing through your ministry.

DAN SCOTT is the Elementary Coordinator at Ada Bible Church. He is still blown away that he receives a paycheck for doing what he loves, seeing children and families experience God. He couldn’t do anything without the support of his amazing wife Jenna and their four children.

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empowerment



■ When reflecting on what children's ministry needs NOW, I kept returning to this thought: We need leaders who work under an empowerment model that is strength-based and family-centered. What does that mean? First, our ministries need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Second, and more practically speaking, we need leaders who work to build on the strengths of children, families, and volunteers to promote spiritual growth and development for everyone involved. Children's ministry provides an opportunity for children to develop their skills within a safe context and use them in ways that serve the church (I Timothy 4:12).

It also allows for relationship development that has implications for socio-emotional and spiritual growth. Further, this model helps leaders to partner with parents, building on family strengths to enable and equip them to be spiritual leaders at home. Finally, we can empower volunteers, plugging them into areas that are congruent with their passions and abilities. This approach increases commitment, consistency, and leadership potential. I believe that when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and a commitment to build on the strengths of children, families, and volunteers, the impact of children's ministry programs will be amplified in both present and eternal outcomes.

BRIANNE FRIBERG (Ph.D) has a doctorate in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Wisconsin. She is a passionate Christ-follower, wife, mother, professor, and children's ministry volunteer.

■ encounters



■ Yes, encounters matter! Special encounters! Here are five encounters that can help kids grow and be formed in their faith.

First, children need to encounter voices from *all* generations. Of course that includes Mom and Dad, but it must also mean the *whole* faith family sharing faith stories with each other, worshipping and praising God together, sharing meals and playing together.

Second, kids need encounters with peers of faith—kids with whom they daily walk side by side on their faith journey.

Third, they need to encounter places where they can use their gifts and abilities to serve the whole faith community.

The fourth encounter children need is with God's love Story to them—the Bible. They need to recognize and own that they are in this story, finding their place in it.

Lastly, but most importantly, children each need encounters with God himself. (Even very young children have these but often in surprising ways and places.) To be intentional in these encounters requires sacred space—places where the pace and volume are slow and soft; where the spirit of the child meets the Spirit of God.

Flesh out with some colleagues how to facilitate these encounters. You, your kids, and your ministry will be enriched.

SCOTTIE MAY teaches courses in children's and family ministry at Wheaton College. She is co-author of *Children Matter* (Eerdmans) and *Listening to Children on their Spiritual Journey* (Baker).



■ evaluating

■ At times, I've been reluctant to part with ministry programs that still had great qualities to them. They were functional. They had some beauty. They'd been around for a while and people were familiar with them. But they no longer suited the needs of the children in that ministry. Kids change. The tools they use to learn, the situations they face, the struggles that plague them and the joys that thrill them change. Evaluating what these changing aspects are in order to better teach them the constants of our faith is what matters now in children's ministry.

Evaluation affirms that what you're doing is God's best for your ministry, or it reveals a need for something new. Once, we found a better use of our volunteers and a more effective way of reaching our kids when we had evaluated what we had been doing. Another time, we discovered we were highly effective.

When you evaluate and make sure that your ministry is reaching the children in your church right now, you affect more than the now. You equip the children in your ministry with the tools needed for a lifelong relationship with their Savior. Ultimately, that's all that matters.

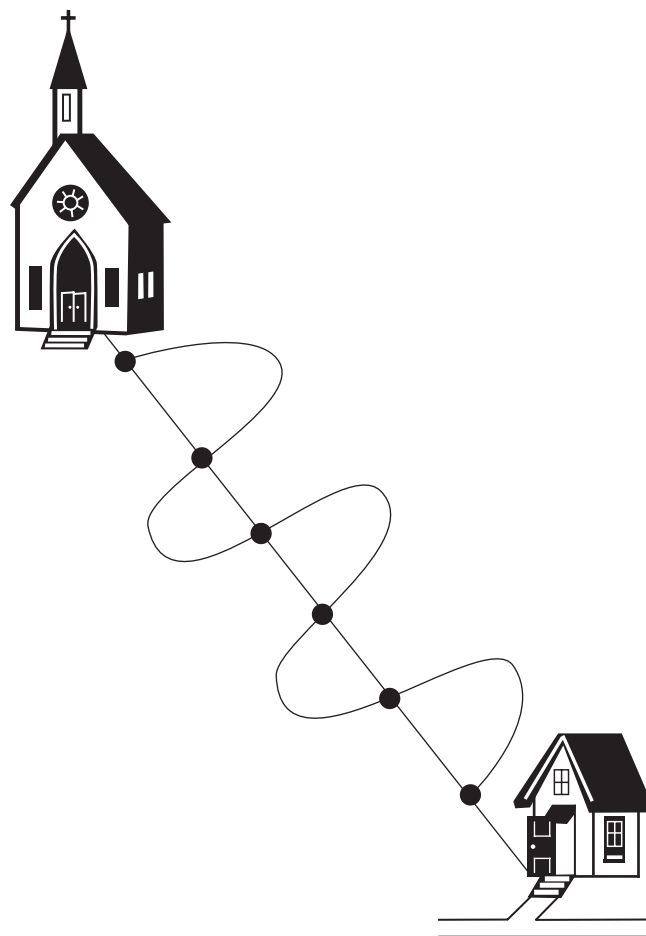
JILL NELSON is the Children's Ministries Director at Morning Star Community Church in Salem, Oregon. She loves leading her team of staff and volunteers and having the freedom to dream for their ministry.

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■ faith milestones



■ Faith milestones mark the moments when church and family naturally intersect for the greatest partnership and impact.



CHRISTINE YOUNT JONES is the children's ministry champion at Group. She's also the executive editor for *Children's Ministry Magazine*.

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■ imagination

■ Children's ministry leaders don't lack imagination, but their imaginations can be captured by the wrong things rather than those things mirroring the Kingdom of God. When our imaginations are informed by God's story of love, justice, reconciliation, shalom, community, and mission we model that vision to children. In turn, we capture their imaginations with a vision of a world much larger than themselves and more in keeping with God's vision. When that happens, God's spirit can break through spiritually forming all in its path and bringing about that day when the lion can lay down with the lamb.

In order to allow our imaginations to be captured with God's story, it means we need to lay other stories to rest and walk away from them. We need to walk away from the world's story of desiring more for ourselves and walk into God's story of loving the world to the point of personal sacrifice. When we become walking, breathing vessels of God's story, our imaginations truly captured by the vision of the kingdom, we will make that story irresistible to our children.

IVY BECKWITH writes and speaks about Children's Ministry. She has served as a Children's Minister in several churches and worked in publishing in the area of Children's Bible curriculum and resources.

infectious



■ Traveling around with The Lads we see all sorts of churches and children's ministries. One that stands out is a church near Chattanooga, TN that asked us to play a concert at the end of their VBS week—and what a week it had been!

We met one kid at the church who invited his whole baseball team to VBS (his Dad invited most of the club). We heard that one boy, new to church, accepted Jesus on the second day of VBS and brought his Dad a couple of days later (who also became a Christian). On Friday, they were both baptized!

Young people are so full of energy and emotions (sometimes it may seem like 'waaaay' too much!). If we can funnel all that energy and those emotions into 'God things' then young people will have the ability to change their families, their baseball teams and, perhaps, even the world.

The children's pastor at the church we were at summed up what we were seeing. He said, "Everything's upside down. When I was a kid our parents used to drag us to church. Now, it's the kids bringing the parents to church"

THE LADS are a band from New Zealand of friends that grew up together. **The Lads** are all about relationships. Their lifelong friendship is part of the glue that has kept them ministering together for so long. However, their relationship with their Creator is, by far, the biggest motivation behind the mission of the Lads. They are passionate about helping families and kids connect with the Creator of the universe, too!

www.theladsband.com



■ ingenuity

■ Following a recipe is easy to do. It takes little skill. One only needs to follow directions.

Short order cooks follow recipes. World-class chefs create mouth-watering masterpieces.

Creating a culinary work of art isn't so easy. It takes finesse and the understanding of how ingredients combine to create a dish that is tailored to the specific palate of an individual.

Why is it that you attend conferences, read books, network with others, and buy curriculum? Is it simply to gather and trade recipes for ministry? Or is it to gather inspiration, taste something different and discover ingredients you've never tried before?

True creativity, innovation and reformation in children's ministry will only come when we dare to step beyond the tried and true recipes and are willing to experiment with new strategies and practices.

HENRY ZONIO is a husband of one and father of four. He is also the author of the **Elemental Children's Ministry** blog where he explores the spiritual formation of children and families within a missional context.

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justice

■ Social justice has gained sweeping importance throughout developed countries. Children are being exposed to the great needs around the world, yet if they only do these things because they are right and good, they will be left empty of lasting hope.

We must be leading the way in providing instruction and opportunity for kids to engage in social justice with right understanding. We need to teach them that when they give to the poor and care for the sick, God's Kingdom is being seen. We do not have to wait for heaven to see God's Kingdom. We can see it here and now. When justice is met, heaven and earth overlap, and we glimpse His Kingdom on earth.

Children can and should be involved with social justice. We **MUST** get them involved. We have a responsibility to teach them not to do justice for justice's sake, but to do justice for God's sake.

MEGAN TOWELL is the Director of Children's Ministries at Park Community Church in Chicago, IL. She coaches others in leadership development and oversees a multi-site, urban childrens' ministries.

kingdom



■ You've never had more access to information than you do right now. Never before, in the history of the Church, have you had as much access to other ministers, authors and artists as you do today.

So... what are you doing with that information? Are you building a castle or a kingdom?

Castle-minded churches are often at the end of a road. They gather information and ideas for their own use. They build giant walls to keep those inside safe and to keep outsiders away. Castles do not share and don't understand why they should.

A kingdom-minded church is gutsy. It's bigger than itself and shares in the creative process with those outside its walls. These churches will have a greater impact on the world around them because the work they are a part of is simply bigger than themselves.

Now, which one are you?

In this new era, you need to be willing to share and collaborate with churches in your community. You need to be less concerned with where a family ends up going to church and more concerned that families in your community are deciding to follow Jesus. You need to think bigger than yourself.

Go.

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■ leadership



■ Everybody in Children's Ministry will face one undeniable challenge no matter what church or organization they are a part of and that is the need for leaders. There are never enough, and it seems we tend to go back to the same pond hoping to catch some new fish. Maybe God wants us to fish in some different ponds? God ideas defy logic. When you have fished all night in the same place, He may ask you to throw your net on the other side.

I had to begin to think differently. Instead of going through the normal channels God told us to develop leaders from different channels. We developed a leadership program for 3rd-5th graders called J-Life where kids are mentored in different areas of ministry and then lead in ministry. Now, 200 kids help fill spots from registration to worship. We did the same for teens in a leadership program called Teen-life. Now, 250 teens fill roles once occupied by adult leaders. We saw adult leaders being caught from unusual ponds. Many that had never served in children's ministry before. We didn't look for leaders that had the best experience, we looked for leaders who wanted to experience God's best.

CRAIG JOHNSON is currently the Director of Ministries at Lakewood Church, the largest and fastest-growing church in America, overseeing all pastoral ministries and staff, as well as serving as Family Ministries Pastor.



■ memories

■ Memories Matter.

When I reflect on my early images of God, my feelings toward the church, and my childhood prayers, it's the memories I held that shaped each of those.

Did I like going to church? Were they nice to me? What was the funny skit about? Did I feel included?

With internet groups, clubs, sports, camps, ministry programs, and the like vying for a child's attention, it seems like we are competing for a slice of a decreasing portion of a child's time. As we seek to build relationships, care for parents, educate in Christian knowledge, and ultimately raise children in Christ's love, our lens ought to be, "Is this worth remembering?"

Ultimately, creating memories is a call for intentionality. As children are overloaded with information and experience, we must acknowledge that our best efforts, our time, our creativity, and our passion ought to be focused on what a child walks away with. Be it home cell groups, large midweek programs, or week-long camp retreats, what matters is what they remember.

Ministry is fragile. We may spend weeks on conjuring up the best curriculum, but all that Grace or Austin will remember is that Mr. Tim was short during the lesson or that they were bored. Creating lasting memories is a mighty challenge indeed.

SARAH KILLELEA is the Director of Children's Ministry at Forest Home, Inc. Prior to this role, Sarah served at San Clemente Presbyterian Church as the Director of Preteen Ministry and earned her Master of Divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary.

mentalmorph



■ It's a made up word that influences the products we create, the ministry we lead and even the way we raise our families.

Mentalmorph describes the constant exercise of integrating head and heart knowledge with hands and feet knowledge in every area of our lives.

Mental- *preparing your mind for action* (1 Peter 1:13)

Learning Scripture is bigger than simply memorizing facts. It's knowing the Word and hiding it in our heart. An effective way to cultivate this in children is to help them apply the truth of Scripture in situations they face. Taking the time to stop and talk about circumstances in light of Scripture shows that Jesus is relevant, and it shapes and sharpens their biblical worldview in the process.

Morph- *put it into practice* (Philippians 4:8-9)

Wisdom is intelligence plus character: knowing what's right and doing it. To cultivate this, we must encourage children to allow the truth of Scripture to change the way they act. It's a never ending, daily practice that nurtures faith and strengthens their relationship with Christ.

It's this kind of radical and transformational living that gives strong evidence for a cluttered world to stop and notice Jesus in each of us.

TODD HAMPSON and **SEAN COPLEY** are Timbuktoons, an animation studio dedicated to changing the world one cartoon at a time. They produce content for clients and media for children's ministry.



■ **more**

■ I am almost 50! I recall the days when my two sons were babies. Occasionally, I got the call to feed them a nutritious meal from a jar. I can still hear the click noise once the lid is opened! I creatively tried everything to magically force the boys to eat: Pickled squash, sweet potatoes and even some peas!

Nothing really worked. All of that seemed to change once we got to dessert: fruit and puddings! They went from refusing to enjoy the Gerber's main entree to inhaling the desserts! I can hear them saying, "MORE, daddy! MORE!"

What I am hearing is children asking for MORE! We continue to ramp up the fun, excitement, lights, crazy and volume in hopes to satisfy their thirst for God. What if we became burdened and restless to make sure our ministries are creating space for our children to hear the mighty voice of God and a huge thirst to seek and follow Him? This is the MORE I am talking about! They want it. What about us?

BYRON RAGAINS is the west coast point person for David C. Cook. Byron is all about networking and encouraging leaders to keep moving forward! Byron and his family live in St. Charles, IL.



orange

Children's Ministry needs leaders who will paint in a fresh new color—*orange*. It's what red (the heart of the home) and yellow (the light of the church) can do when they combine efforts to reach the next generation.

We need Orange experimenters—people who combine different influences (leaders, parents, churches, communities and schools) in new ways to pass on our faith. Experimenters take risks because they know it's all part of the process and God wastes nothing.

We need Orange artists—people who layer different elements to create unique environments that lead us to connect and express our love for God in new ways. Artists help us worship with our whole body and all of our senses, not just with our minds.

We need Orange visionaries—people who know the stories of what God's done in the past and in their own lives. They clearly see the potential in where He's already at work today and in the future. Visionaries invite others to share and to be part of what God's been and is doing in His big story.

Leaders with an orange mindset can do more together than we could ever do alone in Children's Ministry.

CARA MARTENS has a background in education and ministry. She is currently a researcher and developer for projects at reThink and lives outside Dallas, Texas.



parenting

■ We must not ignore this fact:
Nothing the Church does will influence children as much as what happens in their homes.

As one who loves the local church, I believe we must change our focus or lose a generation. The local church, I would argue, has more positive potential to influence the family than any other organization. In your community, that church is your church.

Your church stands in a unique position to speak into and care for families:

- To equip them
- To encourage them
- To partner with them

Your church has both the influence and the tools necessary to equip parents. Help them become the primary spiritual voice in the lives of this generation. *What matters Now in Children's Ministry* is that we continue the transition from providing child-care to equipping parents.

Here are some places to begin:

- Pray for God's direction
- Identify resources for heads of households
- Create classes, events, and programs that are family integrated
- Provide training
- Build community

Children today urgently need this one thing: Godly parenting. What will you do? Will you allow God to use you to equip and encourage parents as you partner with them?

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■ parents

■ Parents. Every parent has a vision for their kids whether they know it or not. A vision for an education... from a Doctorate to simply an educational step higher than they achieved. A vision for a certain lifestyle... from multi-millionaire to simply a step above what they had growing up. A vision for opportunity... from NCAA athlete to simply more open doors than they had opened for them.

Some visions are more precise than others. In the end, parents want more for their kids. This vision drives decisions they make: where they devote their time, money and attention and where they lead their kids to devote their time, money and attention.

Parents in your church need a vision for their family.

A Family Vision

...that leads parents to dream about their child's pursuit of Jesus

...that encourages parents to lead by example

...that drives them through the challenges of everyday parenting

...that exceeds the external and embraces the eternal

...that lays the groundwork for successive generations to follow Christ

...that extends beyond the time they attend your church

Parents will pursue their dreams for their kids. Lead them to dream about a life lived for Jesus.

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redemption



■ Our church is in the middle of rebranding itself. Our new name will be Redeemer Church. I guess that would explain, in part, why I have been thinking about the power of redemption.

One of the greatest messages we can give to every family we come in contact with is the message of *redemption*. In kids' ministry, today, we deal with more broken hearts and broken families than ever before. I believe every family needs to experience the power of *redemption*.

Oftentimes, parents stay at arms length away from our ministries because we can set the bar so high they feel they can't reach it. The message we need to be sending to the parents who attend our churches and to those who have yet to attend is that we are not looking for perfect families because they don't exist. Our goal in kids' ministries needs to be helping families understand that following Christ is a process where we fail and *He redeems*. When our kids grow up understanding true forgiveness and real *redemption* they will never settle for cheap grace.

SAM LUCE has been the children's pastor at Redeemer Church in Utica, NY for the past 12 years. He is passionate about empowering the local church to effectively reach kids for Christ. When not working he loves spending time with his beautiful wife and three kids.

relationships



■ *Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever. (Psalm 119:152)*

The most incredible aspect of Creation was that God walked in the garden with the crown of His creation. They had a *relationship* with God that sin severed: ending a fellowship we can only imagine. For centuries, that *relationship* became one of distance and of fearful respect until Jesus came to walk, talk and relate with man. He came to live in *relationship* with mankind. He didn't just die on the cross to offer salvation. He invites His beloved creation back into an intimate *relationship* with Himself and to genuine fellowship with each other. What matters now in children's ministry is the same as in any era of history: *Relationships*. All that has changed is the means in how we relate to each other. At one time, we walked to each others' homes, rode horses, drove cars, and used rotary phones. Now, many text and use mind-boggling electronic social networks on devices that can span the globe in seconds. Who knows what might be next! What matters, though, will never change! It is *Relationships*.

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■ safety



■ It's tough to be a kid today.

One national study showed that 100% of kids are called hurtful names. A third live in single parent homes. Almost one in five report being bullied. Too many suffer from physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse. Pressure to excel in school, on a team, or in any other activity removes fun as quick as a punch in the stomach. Oh, and make sure to add in the staggering number of children who lack basic necessities: nutrition, protection, or parental affection.

Many kids arrive in ministries with wounds. Some are minor scrapes. Others are much deeper. It's easy to pretend all's well and do nothing.

Safety means creating a place where children can relax. A place to be a kid again; to enjoy life even if only for about an hour.

It's easy to view safety as weekend policies and procedures to protect kids from predators at church. Those positively must be done. But little hearts and minds long for a safe harbor from all that pulls them down throughout the entire week. When ministry serves as that safe place, then (and only then) start to talk about Jesus because they'll listen.

DAVID STAAL, serves as the president of Kids Hope USA, senior editor of *Today's Children's Ministry* (from Christianity Today International), and is the author of *Words Kids Need to Hear*.

■ scripture



■ Taking the Word of God seriously! II Timothy 3:15-17 supports this. Here's how I see it:

- *Salvation.* The Bible guides young people to faith leading to salvation. Each person needs that!
- *Teaching.* The Word will be a life-long developer of walking with Christ, avoiding error and setting an example (I Timothy 4:1-13). Every church should be filled with Christ-followers like that!
- *Rebuke.* God's Law will show the error to a young person, so that parents will not be flat-footed in discipline, and school personnel not despairing because of the lack of such. Every community needs that!
- *Correction.* God's Counsel will turn us back to pursuing Christ with a pure heart. Every society needs that!
- *Training in Righteousness.* God's Precepts will enable families to see their children develop into good people, ready to serve. Every generation needs that!
- *Character.* The Scriptures provide ample prompting to fear the Lord--that's wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) and completeness in Christ. Every nation needs that!

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sight



■ These are so many things that children's ministers need to watch. We monitor our recruiting deficits and our to-do lists. We're good at observing other thriving ministries to benchmark the quality of our own programming. Keeping our eye on these things is necessary.

But I fear that, for many of us, the culture we minister to is in the periphery of our vision. We're in danger of not seeing the very people Jesus has told us to reach. Jim Wideman defines vision as *seeing a need and meeting it*. So, if we don't take the time to see the people in our community we develop programs based on our traditions, biases, and benchmarks. And since our efforts don't meet our neighbors' felt needs they don't engage our churches.

We need to see our culture through research, studying trends, but most importantly, by befriending our neighbors and listening to what they have to say.

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space



Physical space matters. We have all seen children run up and down the halls of a church pointing out their spaces to parents, giving spur-of-the-moment tours to their friends, like they own the place... because they do. Physical space gives children ownership in their family of faith. Physical space, especially in the age of e-space, matters. Physical space helps to build memories for children, and when children remember that there was space for them in the church, they will remember the church to be a place of meaning and purpose for them.

Spiritual space matters, too. Giving spiritual space to children means taking seriously their budding ideas. Not in the context of “kids say the darndest things” or “the children are the future of the church.” These statements aren’t about giving kids spiritual space; these perpetuate the myth that how children express themselves is silly and not significant and that children will someday matter... but not now. Giving children spiritual space provides the freedom of theological and spiritual expression in worship, in our learning environments, and in our community life now and not just when they are grown ups.

REV. SEAN MILLER serves as Associate Pastor for Children, Youth, and Family Ministries at the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights.



■ sufficiency

■ The most important question facing children's and youth ministry in the 21st century is: Will we use the Bible as an all-sufficient guide for our ministry strategy? If we were to lock ourselves in a room with the Bible and ask, "God, what have you said in your Word about how children are to be disciplined?" what would we find?

The first answer would ring loud and clear. God created parents to take the lead in passing faith to their children at home (Gen. 18:19, Deut 6:5; Psalm 78; Eph 6:4). Therefore, the church's number one job must be to equip parents for this mission and family worship in the home should be seen as our most important "program."

The second answer the Scripture gives is that we are to include children in the regular corporate worship gathering of the church (Deut 16:9-14; Jos. 8:34-35; Ezra 10:1; Joel 2:15-16; Acts 20:7-12). Children's ministry may be a great spiritual vitamin, but it cannot replace the spiritual meals of family worship in the home and children worshipping with their parents in the weekly worship service.

The question is: Do we believe Scripture is a sufficient guide for our ministry strategy...or not?

DR. ROB RIENOW'S most important ministry is loving his wife and spiritually leading his children. He serves as Family Pastor at Wheaton Bible Church and is the founder of Visionary Parenting.

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the end



■ Not that it hasn't mattered before, but our ministries must be laser-focused on the end. In years past, ministries thought little of the end but relied on a curriculum's scope and sequences to guide them in producing life-long Christ followers. No more. Studies have shown us that this approach isn't working, and we realize that ministry is so much more than curriculum.

In the end, we want the children who populate our children's ministries to be fully devoted followers of Christ, able to feed themselves and spiritually multiply. Although we often get too busy and overwhelmed with the here and now, this end is our greatest desire. If this end result is what matters most, then everything we do must be evaluated in light of the end.

"Does this activity help us reach our desired end? Does this curriculum help us develop life-long Christ followers? Does our staff structure efficiently help us achieve this end? Does everyone involved know the end and are they bought in to making this happen?"

What matters most is that we all own what the end looks like for the children in our ministries and go after it with reckless abandon.

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us

■ South African Apartheid was not stopped by Nelson Mandela standing alone.

Segregation in the South of the United States was not extinguished by one speech from Martin Luther King, Jr.

It took a lot of passionate people building up a tidal wave of justice to overthrow inequality and prejudice. It's true that one person can make a difference. In fact, more than ever in history one person can be heard.

Our children need to realize that their individual voices have the potential to be louder than ever before... but volume has never guaranteed influence. When enough voices unite together, a moment happens, a tipping point occurs and a movement emerges. The conversation turns from a lone voice in the wilderness to a crowd in the town square.

A Super Bowl ad is not going to redeem a culture that desperately needs God. It will take a generation whose faith is not only personal but grounded in community. Their prayers should be filled with "WE" and "OUR" not just "I" and "MINE".

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has". (Margaret Mead)

What matters now? US!

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wonder



■ I believe one of the most compelling questions in Scripture is the disciples' asking about Jesus, "What kind of man is this?" After a glimpse of his power, the disciples were driven to discover the answer. Our churches should instill that wonder in children and propel them to a lifelong adventure of finding out the truth behind that question.

When it comes to children's ministry, we all want engaging programming, flawless theology, deep relational communities, great tools to equip parents, etc. Ultimately, we want all that so we can point children to Jesus. Sometimes we do that by giving answers, other times by raising questions.

I wish that children would always leave churches with answers and questions, with a sense of wonder and amazement at the person and work of Jesus.

I hope that our ministries help children encounter Jesus in such a way that multiple times throughout the week they will, with a sense of wonder, ask themselves the question, "Who is Jesus?"

I pray that every child influenced by children's ministries everywhere will wonder so fully, so deeply, so passionately that they embark on a quest to know, "Who is Jesus?"

RANDY ISOLA has been in children's ministry for over 18 years. He is currently the children's pastor at Christ Community Church, a multi-site church in the suburbs of Chicago. Randy and his wife Michelle have 4 boys.

www.kidsworldccc.org



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