

# Transformational Ministry

Our ministries are not about child care, they are about helping form children so that they might be more receptive to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

We often hear people refer to ministries of the church as programs. Programs are defined as an ordered list of events or as a system of services or opportunities. The reality is that any organization can develop programs. The church develops ministries which are based upon the mission of the church. There are indeed programmatic elements to our ministries, but by using the word “ministry” we acknowledge that we are involved in something deeper. We are not instituting a program for the sake of the program itself, no matter how well intentioned. Rather, we are involved in ministry for the sake of walking alongside children and their families, so that together we can grow deeper in Christ and further in mission.

So much of what we have focused on in the past has been cognitive, without regard for how the cognitive permeates the heart. The Pharisees, for example, knew a lot, but Christ kept asking them about their heart. This may not mean a change in our ministry so much as a change in our approach and attitude toward our ministries. Whether we minister in the nursery, Sunday School, or weekday ministries our focus should be on the spiritual development of children, not on getting through a chunk of curriculum.

So what can we do?

- ❖ When we minister in the nursery it should be with the idea that we can reflect Christ by the way we hold, cuddle and care for the children.
- ❖ Listen for moments to help a child grow. A child may ask a question that is not covered in the curriculum; rather than automatically redirecting the child back to the lesson, consider taking a moment to reflect on his/her question.
- ❖ Approach God’s word and prayer with the expectation that you and the children will meet God and that God is present.
- ❖ Be sensitive to the varying developmental levels and learning styles of children.
- ❖ Approach your ministry with enthusiasm, sensitivity, and joy. Helping children and their families grow in Christ, although challenging, should be a joy, not drudgery.
- ❖ Partner with parents.
- ❖ Integrate children into the body and ministry of the church.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for leadership.
- ❖ Emphasize the truth that every child and person is made in God’s image and is special to God.
- ❖ Offer G.R.O.W. opportunities for each child and family.

Finally, God continually reminds us throughout Scripture that children and adults are equally invited into God’s kingdom. Our relationship with God is spiritual and, as such, children may experience a personal relationship with God long before they can articulate it. It is a high calling to the church and parents to help children on their own spiritual journey of growing closer to Christ.

## Biblical Foundations for Children’s Ministry

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| ◆ Children are welcome in God’s kingdom     | Matt. 18:2-5; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 18:15-17 |
| ◆ The Word of God is for children           | Deut. 31:10-13; Psalms 78:5-7; Prov. 22:6 |
| ◆ The promise of the Gospel is for children | Acts 2:38-39                              |
| ◆ Children can be God’s ambassadors         | I Samuel 3:1-19                           |

- ◆ Parents are called as spiritual mentors
- ◆ Children are an integral part of the body
- ◆ Children are receptive to the call of God

Deut. 6:4-9; Prov. 1:8; Eph. 6:1-4; Titus 1:6  
 I Corinthians 12:14-26  
 I Samuel 3:1-4



## How God Intervenes in Our Christian Formation

- ◆ Transformation through the Holy Spirit.

Coming to Christ: Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:3-8  
 Maturing in Faith: John 14:26; Romans 8:9-10

- ◆ God graciously working through individuals, families, and the gathered church.

Discipling Children: Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
 The Gathered Church: I Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:15-16

Christian formation includes the head (*knowing*), the hands (*doing*), and the heart (*being*). All are needed and all should be incorporated into a children's ministry whose purpose is to help form children so they might be more receptive to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The question is: "*What does this look like practically?*"

The main difference is that Christian formation is not a classroom exercise. Christian formation includes Christian education; Sunday School classes may well be a part of your Christian formation ministry, but the focus is always on transformation over program. This may mean that children have questions about their faith which do not "*fit the lesson*" but which should be addressed for the sake of helping them to grow where they are.

Children's ministry should provide children with an opportunity to:

1. Explore God's Word: telling, reading, praying, reflecting and reacting to Scripture.
2. Engage in relationships that help mentor children in faith so they are equipped to naturally share their faith.
3. Act on their faith: by providing opportunities for service and mission.
4. Celebrate their love for Christ through worship and encourage them to live a worshipful life by putting Christ first.