



Effective Evangelism

by Randy Hurst

I tried to imagine what a crowd of 1.8 million people would look like. The only mental image I could conjure was a baseball stadium I had been in that seated 50,000. I tried to visualize 36 of those stadiums.

That mental picture represented the number of people who had signed salvation decision cards in Brazil during 30 years of evangelistic crusades preached by the late Bernhard Johnson, long-time Assemblies of God missionary.

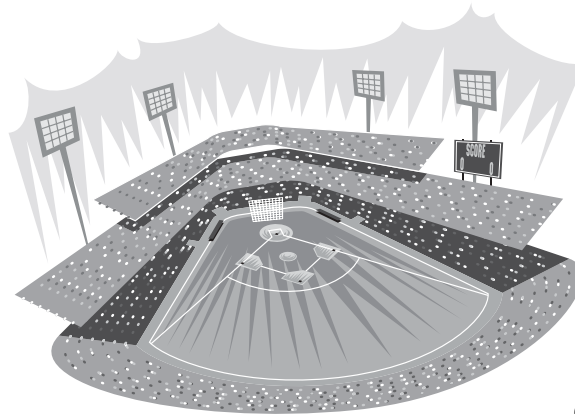
As Bernhard talked with me about his evangelistic ministry, the thought of those 36 baseball stadiums boggled my mind. Then he said something that jolted me. "If I was 25 years old and beginning my ministry in Brazil today, I would not be a crusade evangelist. I would devote my time to working with children."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I believe the long-term results would be greater," he replied.

On February 16, 1995, Bernhard Johnson went to be with the Lord. But in the final years of his life, Bernhard devoted increasing amounts of his time and resources to children's ministries. Children of Brazil Outreach (COBO), which he founded, has built twelve

Christian schools and daycare centers in Brazil that serve a total of 4,000 students. Local churches operate each school. COBO has also provided Bible curriculum for 25,000 students in 110 public schools, produced an AIDS prevention comic book with an evangelistic message for distribution to children and youth in schools, and has conducted seven children's crusades



that have seen more than 16,000 decisions for Christ.

Evangelist Dwight L. Moody began his ministry in humble circumstances. In 1857, he roomed and took meals at "Mother" H. Phillips' house. From Mother Phillips he learned not only the importance of prayer, Bible study, and Scripture memorization, but also the importance of evangelizing children and making disciples.

Moody was moved by the des-

perate physical and spiritual needs of thousands of poor children who roamed the streets and alleys of the poorest neighborhoods. While doing street evangelism, Moody met J.B. Stilson, who preached to sailors along the Chicago River. Together they recruited children for at least 20 different Sunday Schools. Moody boldly went into the Sands, the worst district of Chicago. Most of the children in

this area lived in one-parent homes where alcoholism and drug addictions were common. The children rarely attended school because their parents did not make them go. Eventually, Moody established Christian schools for these boys and girls. Though he was best known as a great crusade evangelist, he had a heart for reaching spiritually lost children, especially through Sunday schools.¹

Bernhard Johnson and Dwight L. Moody, two great crusade evangelists, shared a similar perspective and passion. Possibly this was because these men had ministries that dealt with such large numbers of people. They had a special insight and appreciation for the value of reaching children, while many in the church ignored or underestimated this critical ministry.

One missionary once said, "When an adult comes to Christ, a soul is saved. When a child comes to Christ, a life is saved." Because children's hearts are tender and their minds impressionable, children are influenced in many ways. Reaching them for Christ and investing in their spiritual lives will produce lasting results and help shape their spiritual and moral character before a life of sin brings its destruction.

Children today are being targeted by an increasing number of organizations, groups, and movements. Those who are committed to a cause, whether good or evil, recognize that children are the future, and now is the time to reach and disciple them. Critical life decisions are made at very early ages.

Cary Tidwell, personnel and family life director for Assemblies of God Foreign Missions, presents the following statistics concerning the ages at which missionaries received Christ or sensed God's call to missionary service. In a 1995 survey, more than 42 percent of our missionaries reported they received their call to missionary service between the ages of 5 and 19. Almost 87 percent accepted the Lord as their Savior before their nineteenth birthday. A child's capacity to comprehend the truth in an adult service and respond to the Holy Spirit should never be underestimated.

Sunday School is a major force for making disciples, but it is also a means of evangelism. The small-group setting of a Sunday School class offers a highly effective environment for connecting with unbelievers and

leading them to Christ. This is especially true of children. Christian children can effectively reach other children. This kind of evangelism can have an impact on entire families.

In the last 14 years, Book of Hope International, an Assemblies of God Foreign Missions ministry founded by Missionary Bob Hoskins, has distributed more than 100 million copies of an evangelistic Scripture book called *The Book of Hope*. Presented in an easy-to-read format with colorful illustrations, *The Book of Hope* is a chronological harmony of the Gospels that includes a clear invitation to receive Christ and instruction on Christian living. The vast majority of books were given to schoolchildren. In many cases, these children have taken the message of salvation to their parents. Entire families have come to Christ, and churches have even been established as a result of this evangelistic outreach to children. In Brazil, part of the strategy of Bernhard Johnson built into the Children of Brazil Outreach is to teach children to evangelize their unbelieving parents.

One day my son, Rolly, introduced me to a prominent heart surgeon. He had heard me speak at a local church. I asked him how long he had been attending this church.

"Just a few months," he replied.

When I asked what brought him to church, he told me that his 11-year-old daughter had visited Sunday School at the invitation of a friend and had begun attending regularly.

"She just wouldn't leave me alone," the doctor said. "She kept saying, 'Daddy, you just have to visit my church.'"

I doubt that anyone from this church could have made the same request and elicited the same response. But the doctor acquiesced to his daughter's pleadings.

Later, I pondered the means God used to reach this man. Evangelism strategists who teach pastors how to reach professionals might recommend joining the Rotary Club or some other social group to gain contacts. But it was this doctor's 11-year-old daughter who convinced him to attend church. Often children can open doors to reach their parents in ways no one else can.

Evangelizing and discipling children can help a church increase in numerical growth. While a smaller church may be limited in its ability to provide programs and activities for youth and adults, Sunday School teachers and children's church workers can be motivated and trained to make an impact on the lives of children and their families.

The local church that makes a serious commitment to evangelize children effectively will see the results multiplied. Children are not only the future of a church, they are a vital part of its present.

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ENDNOTE

¹Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Life of D.L. Moody: A Passion for Souls* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 64,65.