



part 1 of 2—

Go! Reach the Children

by Marshall Bruner

The following interviews are with pastors who have been successful in ongoing outreach to their communities' kids and their families.

Rod Baker serves as Christian education director and coordinator of outreach for Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma. At this mega-church, Rod ministers weekly to 2,000 kids through bus ministry alone.

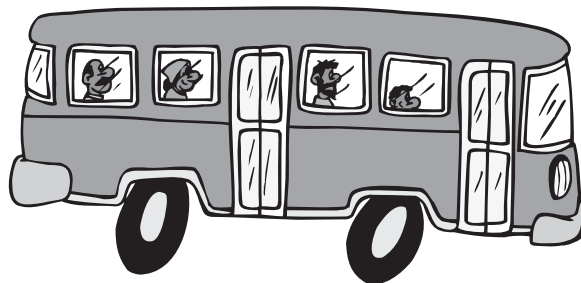
Gilbert Ceballos is children's pastor of Glad Tidings Assembly, Omaha, Nebraska. The church has over 500 children, and Gilbert—who was raised in a major inner city—conducts ongoing outreach in the community and in Native Indian reservations.

Robert Hill is the senior pastor of First Assembly, Spiro, Oklahoma. His church has made great strides in the past eight years in reaching the kids of that small community.

What would you consider to be the most important evangelistic events conducted by your church?

BAKER: We're reaching about 4,000 people a week

through our outreach efforts—75 percent being kids and 25 percent being their parents. We do three primary modes of outreach: We do a bus event every Saturday, and six days a week we conduct Sidewalk Sunday School. The third major outreach is our small-group neighborhood Bible clubs. Each is equally important, but for the average church in America



the best option is the neighborhood Bible clubs. This form of outreach is very economical and efficient and does not require a large labor force. It can be conducted at an apartment complex or at a person's home, in the urban swells or the rural communities. In reaching the children that are nearest you, it becomes one of the best discipleship tools around. The leadership team can consist of a husband and wife or

an adult and older teen.

CEBALLOS: Our primary outreach is to the Native Americans. KidsQuest USA is the number-one evangelism tool we use. Prior to an outreach, we scout the areas to study the needs of that tribal community. We train our young people and form ministry teams to go into the reservations to do KidsQuest outreaches simultaneously as the adults and youth do outreach in that same area. We've ministered in several reservations and neighborhoods of cities populated by Native Indians. Our goal is to conduct outreach in the various tribes every few months and to plant churches in inner-city areas that have a concentration of Native Americans.

HILL: One of our biggest outreaches is our day care, which has brought children and parents into the church. Another is our Wednesday night bus ministry, where we pick up kids in vans. Buses are not as practical in our smaller community. Also, we conduct fall festivals and summer day camps, which are offered free. During Thanksgiving and Christmas, our church

serves a big meal to about 350 kids because most of them have no traditional Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners. We are now preparing to conduct Sidewalk Sunday Schools.

How do you see the bus ministry operating in the church today?

BAKER: It's one of the most successful evangelism tools. But because our bus ministry reaches such a large number of kids—over 1,200 each week—it's not a strong discipleship program. So we do other forms of outreach—such as the neighborhood Bible clubs—to disciple the kids. I'm believing in God for an awakening in bus ministry,

that churches will see the value of it, because the main benefit of bus ministry—different from the Sidewalk Sunday School and the neighborhood Bible club—is that it takes the children out of their environments and places them in a church-structured environment. I believe the Assemblies of God is one of the greatest Pentecostal organizations in the world. However, we need to continue being the pacesetter in doing bus ministry, plus other forms of outreach. The Pentecostal message must be spread. So my prayer is that the Assemblies of God will be passionate about reaching the lost.

HILL: We started our bus ministry about 10 years ago.

We began with just one van and made several trips. Today our church, of about 300 in attendance, runs eight vans and picks up about 100 children on Wednesdays. The bus children represent a variety of ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. For most of them, the only spiritual influence they receive is on Wednesday nights. When the kids go home, their moms and dads aren't concerned about God or the memory verses the kids have learned. So instilling God's truths into the children is an important part of what we do.

Questions for Further Study—

1. Reflect on the evangelistic outreaches your church has been involved in. Which have been the most successful? Which have been the least? What might you list as keys for effective outreach in your community?

2. In what ways can you ignite the passion for evangelism within your congregation?