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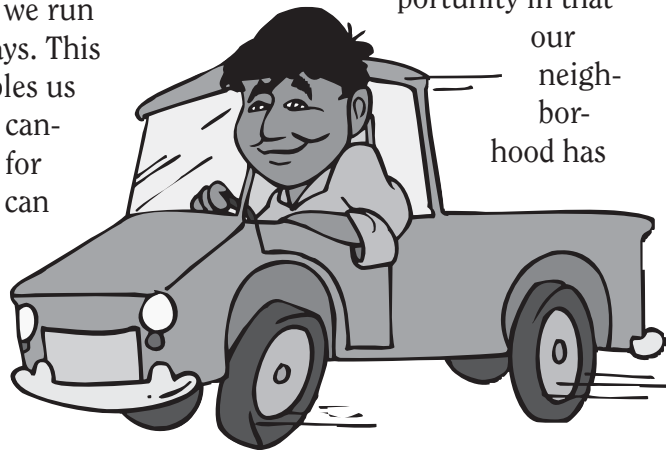
Go! Reach the Children

by Marshall Bruner

How effective is Sidewalk Sunday School as compared to other outreach approaches?

BAKER: The Sidewalk Sunday School is a bit more expensive to operate than the neighborhood Bible clubs, but it is a very effective method of evangelism. Plus it doesn't require a large labor force. We have four trucks that run five days a week, and then we run two trucks on Saturdays. This form of outreach enables us to go places where we cannot go with our buses for two reasons: First, we can effectively minister in the smaller communities that have fewer children. Second, we can reach the children in a less costly manner. Buses are expensive to operate. The moms and dads, everyone, will come out and see the puppet show, the gospel illusions, the games, etc. We also give away groceries at every site because so many of the families struggle with hunger. The love of Christ, I believe, must be demonstrated in acts of service.

CEBALLOS: We use the Sidewalk Sunday School approach very effectively, just in another manner. We don't use a vehicle or trailer but accomplish the same results. Ours is held the first of each month, then we do follow-up the next week. We go to a public park or an apartment complex with a high density of children. Our church location provides a unique opportunity in that



our neighborhood has

gov-ernment housing projects and apartment buildings. So follow-up is simple because we just walk from the church to the apartment buildings, and they have a lot of kids. Now, as a result, kids and their parents are coming to church.

How do you follow up and disciple those children being

impacted through your outreaches?

BAKER: This past month alone, we had about 800 kids and parents filled with the Holy Spirit through our outreaches, but we must let them know they are accepted where they're at and then integrate them into the church body. We offer the children and their parents a ride to church on Sundays. Also, we visit every child each week and minister to his or her physical and spiritual needs. In doing so, we see entire families being reached and disciplined. So it's not just a once-a-week thing in reaching the kids. Our goal is to reach the kids and their families at least three times a week. The key here is that you must visit the kids at home if you want to speak into their lives.

CEBALLOS: I think follow-up is the key to effective ministry, because if you don't follow up then everything else you do is a waste of time. One approach we use is to register the children, then invite them to church to win prizes the following Sunday. Also, we use the registration cards in doing follow-up calls to the children

and to do home visitation. Every child deserves a follow-up phone call within 24 hours, followed by a home visit. The other thing we do is send postcards to the kids. On the card we explain how the card can be returned to receive a free gift. That's very important, because the key is to get the kids into church.

How do you recruit, train, and keep volunteers?

BAKER: I've found that the key to effectively recruit and keep workers—I have 500 volunteers working with me—is to instill the passion to reach the lost and to continually encourage them and let them know they are valued in God's kingdom. My goal is to raise each of those workers to become a minister. Regarding training, we train our bus staff and Sidewalk Sunday School staff weekly. We do specialized training each month. And we do a quarterly training event with all the various children's ministry group leaders. Here's the key: You must communicate your vision every 26 days, reminding them of their objective—to rescue the perishing.

CEBALLOS: Most of our recruiting and training is done one-on-one. I don't announce from the pulpit or through the church bulletin that I need helpers. I observe people and see how they act with children, and

then I target those particular people for the children's ministry. We endeavor to train the children's workers each month. I use different curriculum from various church leaders around the nation. Also, we do specialized training—for puppetry, drama, choir, etc. To keep and encourage our workers, I constantly touch base with them by phone—constantly.

HILL: I have learned that new converts want to do something for the Lord, so we funnel them in the right direction as quickly and as wisely as possible. When new converts want to get involved in ministry, we require that they attend and graduate from our new converts training. We also train the young people through hands-on experience. We assign one or two of them to each teacher to serve as their assistants. In doing so, by the time they reach the age of 18, they're ready to serve as leaders.

How would you challenge other children's pastors and leaders to become involved in outreach?

HILL: There's one boy who started coming to our church about four years ago. All he did was give us trouble. He'd get into at least two fistfights every Wednesday night. Continually, I'd have to separate him from the other kids. Finally I took him aside and told him, "You

can't be acting like that!" I called him by his name, and he looked at me and said, "My daddy told me not to take anything from anybody." I responded, "Well, your daddy's not here, and as long as you're at this church, we're your family. And in this family, we don't solve things with fistfights. You know we love you, feed and care for you, and tell you about the love of God. But that's how it is." About three months later this boy developed a skin condition that was highly contagious. So we explained to him that he couldn't come to church until his contagious condition had passed.

This once brute of a boy was now crying with tears running down his cheeks and saying, "Can't I stay? Can't I stay? I do get to come back, don't I?" Now the boy is 14 and gets ready for church by himself each week, and we still pick him up for church. One Sunday he came dressed in a T-shirt that brandished some inappropriate words, but he didn't know because he can't read. He just wanted to be in church. Our church people didn't get offended but just hugged and loved him as if his T-shirt said "Praise the Lord." Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. His heartbeat is to reach the lost, and that's the reason we're here too!