



The Changing Role of the Children's Pastor

by Jay Hostetler, Church Team Connections—
a consulting and staff placement ministry

It has been my privilege to serve as a full-time children's pastor for over 20 years. During this time, ministry to children in the local church has grown into a specialty field embracing hundreds of faithful servants. In the early 1980s, a new national interest in children led many institutions, including the church, to study its approach to this special group. This led to discoveries that now guide the local church in many of its fundamental ministry applications for serving kids.

As we reach the end of this decade, changes in children's ministry are linked to our culture, church psychographics, educational methodologies, and the ever-changing world of the child. The level of effectiveness of many programs is associated with the leader—the children's pastor.

The following discussion defines the changing components in the role of the children's pastor. This will provide information for senior pastors who might hire a children's pastor and will help those involved in children's ministry to understand the present and future dynamics associated with this field.

Role Change #1

Children's pastors' portfolios

are including more ministry to the whole family.

This paradigm shift has been in process for about 5 years. Greater partnering with parents to facilitate the spiritual growth of kids is needed. The need for this new teamwork is driving children's pastors to be involved with parents in focus groups, special events, training, and other forums.

Role Change #2

Children's pastors are becoming more people managers and less program managers.

Managing people requires a different set of skills than managing a program. In recent years, I have attended seminars like: "Effective Team-Building," "Managing Volunteers," and "Developing Your People Skills." This role change is one of the most difficult for children's pastors because they sense their drive in ministry is to kids, not spending a lot of time with adults.

Role Change #3

More administration, less time with kids.

For several years I have moderated a think tank for children's pastors sponsored by Leadership Network (Dallas,

Texas). Each year we discuss our allocation of time for ministry. We discuss the increasing amount of time spent on budgeting, long-term planning, facility management, and less time to see little league games and recitals.

Many children's pastor's church contact with their kids is decreasing because they are racing around on Sunday morning dealing with a plethora of details.

Role Change #4

Children's pastors are becoming counselors.

Spiritual counseling has always existed as a wonderful facet of the children's ministry portfolio. The new edge of counseling includes helping children understand their fractured family and difficulties at school and in the neighborhood.

This role change is having a significant effect as many children's pastors are playing catch-up to find education resources to help them become good counselors.

Role Change #5

Children's pastors need to be "pharmacists."

Prozac is now being prescribed for preadolescent chil-

dren suffering from depression. Ritalin is used for kids with Attention Deficit Disorder. Ministry to children with special needs is growing, and this requires the children's pastor to understand techniques and approaches best suited for them.

Role Change #6

Children's pastors need to be "lawyers."

This includes proper screening of volunteers to the filing of

parental permission slips for field trips. Today's children's pastor needs to understand the liabilities associated with ongoing ministry.

Role Change #7

Children's pastors need to be developmental theorists.

Working with kids today requires a depth of knowledge of issues relative to learning styles, environmental stimuli, curriculum block building, audio-visual productions, etc.

Conclusion

As we head into a new millennium, children's ministry will continue to change. These changes should not be viewed as problematic, but rather as opportunities for the Holy Spirit to create in us new dreams and new approaches to positively influence kids. Alvin Toffler, an American futurist, states, "It is not our moral responsibility to stop the future, but to shape it."

Questions For Further Study—

1. How has the changing role of children's pastors affected your ministry to children?
2. How well-equipped are you and your children's ministry team to fill these added roles?
3. What steps can you take to address your areas of weakness in filling these changing roles?