



Children's Church Models

by Dick Gruber

Children's Pastor at Bloomington Assembly of God, Bloomington, Minnesota

It's Sunday in Bloomington, Minnesota. The children's church has just dismissed. In the back of the room parents meet their boys and girls spilling out into the hallway. Several boys are playing today's object lesson while a crew of sixth graders puts away the sound and video equipment. Children of all ages crowd around me at the front of the room. Each one has a story, joke, or question to share. I am their children's pastor.

Jon, 10 years old, approaches me. "Pastor," he says, "I shared the gospel with three of my friends this week. One of them prayed and became a Christian." I congratulate Jon, visit with my other parishioners, and another morning at church comes to its close.

Driving home, I contemplate the events of the morning. I evaluate each portion of the children's church service and consider what Jon shared with me. He is making a difference in the lives of others, because Jesus has made a difference in his life. Children's church has played an important role in encouraging his lifestyle evangelism.

Since the spring of 1975, my wife Darlene and I have served as both volunteers and pastors in the children's church setting. Over the years, we have worked in numerically and organizationally varied children's churches. We have ministered to crowds as small as a dozen 4- through 12-year-olds and as large as 300

children 5 through 12 years old.

There are numerous variations to the basic children's church structure. Nevertheless, whatever liturgy or organization pattern you follow, your children's church will fall into one of two categories: First is the *Marathon Morning*. The second is the *Share a Service*. Because your children's service will fit into one of these models, it is important to study them further.

Marathon Morning

This children's service begins at the conclusion of Sunday School and runs until the adult service is over. For many years, I ministered in churches that followed this model. Worship music played as boys and girls hurried from Sunday School into the children's church room. My workers joined me at the front of the room for prayer and final instructions. The service began with the introduction of rules, theme, and a prayer time. The following balanced service included worship, giving, preaching, and prayer.

Most Marathon mornings will run 90 minutes or longer. In one church, we planned a solid two-hour service for our children's church each week. The advantage of this kind of service is that you have plenty of time to develop the theme, using a variety of methods each week.

The disadvantage is that there is plenty of time. It is a common temptation in such a church to

simply fill time with games, activities, or snacks that have little or nothing to do with the theme of the day. Everything done in the children's church should emphasize the theme or objective of your lesson.

Share A Service

This children's service begins after boys and girls have shared in the adult or "family" worship experience. Our church currently follows this pattern. Children move from Sunday School to the family service. They sit beside mom or dad during the opening, worship, and basic announcements. As people are invited to greet one another, the boys and girls are encouraged to go the children's church.

We meet children in the lobby, line them up by age level, and walk them calmly to the children's church room. Once we all arrive in the children's church, the service proceeds, incorporating all that a longer service would include. Lessons are cut shorter, and adequate time is given for altar response. The Share-a-Service children's church service typically runs no longer than 90 minutes. We average about 80 minutes.

Proved Pointers— Whatever Your Approach

Here are some pointers for your children's church. These are proved no matter how long or

short the service, large or small the crowd, or whether you serve in a shared or marathon service.

The message is more important than the method.

A quality children's church service must have a solid gospel message. Every song, puppet show, object lesson, Scripture passage, and story must present the theme of the lesson in a clear, understandable manner. Some leaders use curriculum while others write their own. I find *Radiant Life's Young Explorers* material to be workable in either style service, Marathon Morning or Share A Service. It contains a solid Pentecostal message and a

ton of great ideas for presenting the gospel.

Children's church is for the children.

Workers must keep in mind the child's developmental level, reading capability, and visual field. A great message must be wrapped in words and methods the child can comprehend. I have watched leaders present wonderful lessons while holding the visuals below the eye level of anyone sitting beyond the second row of chairs. Others have a wonderful visual, held high for all to see, accompanied by a lesson that would choke a theologian. Keep the message simple and give it

visual impact at the level that every child can view.

Keep the goal in mind.

No matter how long or short a time you have with the boys and girls, you must *teach for response*. Children want to meet God. Give yourself adequate altar time. Pray with the children every week. Watch the clock so that children have freedom to pray without interruption. Boys and girls will be saved, healed, delivered, and baptized in the Holy Spirit in your children's church service.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What style of children's church service does your children's ministry use?
2. How effectively does your children's ministry team use the time allotted to bring the children to a spiritual response?
3. What can you do to make your children's church services more effective in ministering spiritually to the children?