



Managing Your Ministry, part 2 of 2—

# Parents, Children, and the Church

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## Myths About Children's Ministry Construction

Though the list of children's ministry myths can be long, I mention two:

### 1. Parents want "tons" of programs and events for their children.

There are a number of things children and parents can do without. Just as Eugene Peterson wondered if his congregation would mind if he stopped doing "busy-work," we also stopped a few things. Most people didn't care. Those who cared soon understood we were trying to be more effective.

### 2. Parents do not want their children with them in church.

This is not true for every parent. Many parents would like to have their children in the worship service, but they are not able to for two reasons: The church fosters family separation more than togetherness, and parents are not aware of ways to create enjoyable together-in-church times.

In her book, *Parenting in the Pew*, Robbie Castleman said, "Churches sometimes develop programs for children because parents are not equipped or willing to train their children in the things of faith." Many parents are not willing because they are not equipped. The church and children's ministries can do a better

job at helping families experience church together.

During my first years in children's ministry, I took it personally when parents would not send their children to children's church. I thought, "Why would anyone not want their child in my children's church?" I look at it much differently now. If parents are truly training their children in church, then I am thrilled when children sit with their parents. But if parents allow their kids to play around during the sermon, having the children there can be counter-productive.

## Children's Ministry + Family Ministry

The biggest aspect of our children's ministry remodeling process is a deliberate focus on parents. We decided that if we really want to make a difference in the lives of children, we must focus on making a difference in the entire family.

In his book, *The Future of the American Family*, George Barna said, "After a 5-year period of experimentation, Boomers have been departing from churches in record numbers." Many came back to church for help with their families, but left again because of the lack of practical help. Others wanted to experience church as a family, but were disappointed because the church did not foster

family togetherness. Barna explained, "People will be open to ministries that provide tangible help. In fact, how adequately a church responds to family needs may well determine how that church grows in the years ahead."

Family ministry at our church is seen in three different avenues:

- 1) providing parent education;
- 2) being available as a resource and support; and
- 3) coordinating events that bring families together.

In parenting education, we offer classes, small groups, and one-evening seminars. We have also held a parenting retreat. Being a support to parents is accomplished through ministries such as a network for home-schooling parents, a Bible study for young moms, and a parents' newsletter. Being a resource means being available for questions and counseling and providing a number of meaningful times with parents. We do not attempt to have all the answers. We simply connect parents with those who have been dealing with similar issues.

Our family events are: father-son retreat, father-daughter dinner, mother-son picnic, mother-daughter tea, dad's day out with preschoolers, family camp out. Other events that were just for children in the past—such as kids' crusades—are developed as family events.

The first event we established was Family Worship Sunday the last Sunday of each month. Elementary-age children join their parents for the first two-thirds of the morning service. I share a 5-minute lesson, and the children are then dismissed to children's church. Two events we are planning are: the "We Love Parents" banquet and the parent-child Sunday School class. The "We Love Parents" banquet will provide children with an opportunity to serve their parents. Kids will buy tickets, invite their parents, and serve as waiters and waitresses.

Our parent-child Sunday school class will be open to parents and elementary-age children. We plan to use interactive lessons, drama, and other creative teaching methods. Each week a different family will be assigned to act out next week's Bible story. The class sessions will work in cooperation with weekly family devotions that we will provide.

It is exciting to see the difference a family-ministries focus makes on families. I have seen moms and dads take their parenting more seriously, children and parents sharing spiritual experi-

ences, and children being a witness by the ways they conduct themselves and show love to others. We must help parents disciple their children. God gave the responsibility to them first.

You may wonder how a children's pastor can focus so much time on family ministries. We do not have as many children's ministry special events as we once had. We simply make sure we do the basics well (children's church, Sunday School, Wednesday evening programs, and a few other programs and events).

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### Questions For Further Study—

1. What activities/programs in your children's ministry address the needs of families in your congregation? your community?
2. How does your children's ministry utilize parents in discipling the children in your church?
3. What can you do to better equip the parents in your church to effectively train their children?