

Programs that Support and Are Sustainable

are set by the pastors. These programs support, not replace, the parents' own spiritual training of their children. Church programs may ebb and flow, depending upon the vision of the pastors; families' needs; and, program sustainability, in terms of church volunteers and other resources required. Care for the WHOLE church--families and volunteers-- is of prime concern to the pastors, and directly affects what programs are offered when.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

- Children's Ministry is sometimes used as the "magic key" that will attract families to church and keep them coming back.
- Sometimes, Children's Ministry programs become so numerous as to crowd out important family time.
- Children's Ministry programs frequently enlist more volunteers than any other ministry in the church.
- Once a Children's Ministry program is offered, the expectation is high to keep it going, sometimes, even at the expense of what is spiritually best for your volunteer teachers.
- Sadly, the most kid-friendly, exciting published curriculums are not always the most biblically sound. The "wow" factor of these curriculums can be very attractive, but can lead to unbiblical, simply moralistic, teaching. Read the curriculum carefully before purchasing!

What Churches Can Do:

- Pastors set teaching priorities and approve curriculum choices for Children's Ministry programs. They decide which programs the church will implement, taking into consideration need, family time, available budget, and number of volunteers needed. Healthy spiritual growth for and healthy sustainability for the whole church, not a program's attractiveness or its potential to swell attendance, drives their decisions.
- Pastors determine when to add, close or modify programs. They teach members to expect some ebb and flow in programs in order to care well for the spiritual needs of all--volunteers and families alike.
- Children's ministry leaders, teachers, parents and others can help the pastors understand their biggest needs in being better equipped to spiritually care for the children. Pastors can regularly seek the wisdom of these people in order to make the best decisions for the whole church.
- Start small. Offer less. Only add more, slowly. When you feel you cannot offer a particular program at church, recommend resources that parents can use to teach these same truths to their children at home.
- In some very small churches, the programs supporting parents might look as bare bones as regularly praying for parents; encouraging them and their children from the pulpit during the worship service; recommending good resources to use with their children in the pew and at home; and, facilitating honest conversations among fellow members.
- As the church expands, the leaders re-visit what might be beneficial to the growing congregation and what is now possible with the increased resources on hand. It very well could expand to a bookstall of resources for family devotions, child care for babies and Sunday School classes for parents and children on all or most Sundays.

From there, it might grow to include many other programs. But always, whatever is done, the pastors take into consideration healthy limits for the spiritual well-being of all.

- Sometimes the volunteer pool or the budget shrinks. Or, there are so many kids, that the church can no longer provide the same number of programs or for the same group of children. The church shape has changed again, and the leaders respond to these changes, trying to continue to care well for everyone. This might mean only offering classes for K-6th grade, when previously you offered classes for K-12th grade. It might mean putting a cap on the number of children you have in a classroom, rather than over-taxing volunteers beyond what is good for them.