

Making Your Church Child Friendly



As a child we moved a lot. I remember only one of the twenty plus churches/pastors from my childhood. I was six and his name was Henry Morgan and he was from Wales and every Sunday after church he shook my hand, thanked me for coming and asked God to bless me during the coming week.

The hand shake and personal attention were great...the memory of a lifetime... but Pastor Morgan did more. One thing I remember still was the guided tour of the church. He personally walked with my parents my brothers and I on an adventure in Church land. We learned where the unlocked doors were and the bathrooms. We got to see the kitchen and the office and where there

were phones. Afterward I felt comfortable in the church building and truly welcomed.

The next thing I remember about this church were the pictures of Jesus hung at child height. They were all through the church but the one I remember most is the one by my pew. I was too short to see anything but the heads in front of me so I looked off to the side and at just my height was a picture of Jesus knocking at the Hearts Door. I liked very much listening to Pastor Morgan's Welch accent but I recall nothing he said...at least not consciously but will remember always the picture and what it made me feel. (There is actually very solid science behind Christian Art. What we SEE is stored in the permanent memory part of our brain.) If these memories were not permanent we could not find our way around our own home. What we hear however is stored in temporary storage...on the average about two weeks. Church or home I remain a super fan of Christian Art. Some of my other favorites are "Christ Our Pilot", "The Good Shepherd", and "Christ Walking on the Water". Nearly two thirds of all Christians accept Christ before age 18. Why wouldn't we do our best to make our church building child friendly?

Third on our list of making a church child friendly is giving them something to do. According to Dr. Margaret Meade and nearly all anthropologists the ONE THING that gives a child a sense of belonging is BEING A CONTRIBUTOR...having something to do. My own

number one thought is to arm each child in the church with invitations to visit their Sunday School. Child to child evangelism is likely the one thing most likely to reach this next generation. The printed invitation should have the name of the church, address, phone number, Time class starts and if available a phone number to get a free ride or if desired the child could offer his parents as Chauffeurs. This child to child outreach is critical in an age where many churches are closing their Sunday School and VBS programs...a likely explanation for the huge increase in church closings (over 10,000 a year) over the past 20 years. Making a church child friendly is literally a matter of survival, of not abandoning the next generation.

Fourth on the list is helping children experience God at least as much as explaining him...the difference between hearing about God and hearing from God. We pray that as many church leaders current and future visit www.teachustoprayer.com, and set up “prayer cups” for each of the children they serve or will serve. A child who has had just one answered prayer will remember it all his or her life. After a child has his or her prayer cup and puts in the first prayer we tell them simply that we can’t TELL God what to do we ASK him what we should do or believe...that we can’t move God’s hand it belongs to him but he has given us his heart and will SURELY minister to our heart. Every child in a church should know that God (Immanuel) truly is with us with the evidence of at least one answered pray.

There is no good place for a reminder of the need to do background checks on those who work with children so we will put ours here but being child friendly definitely means keeping children safe from would be abusers. A good rule of thumb is ALWAYS have two adults present (or at least one adult and mature teen) when working with children...we should however focus on the positive more than the negative.

We begin part two of making your church child friendly is with three key facts making clear that being child friendly means PARTNERING WITH PARENTS.

1. A parent can teach in one minute what it takes a teacher (Sunday School Teacher) five to ten minutes.
2. The average interaction time between parents and Sunday School teachers is less than 30 seconds a week.
3. Well over half of all Christians prayed the sinner’s prayer with a parent.

Based on these statistics and God’s commands to parents one great way to make a church child friendly is equipping/partnering with parents. A good start are God’s commands to parents; Deut. 6:6-9. These four verses are actually connected to the greatest commandment by the word AND: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength. AND...” **You shall teach them diligently to your children,**

...when you lie down, and when you rise. We choose flip over bible calendars as our number one choice for family devotions because we can imagine NOTHING more effective than starting and ending each day with a Bible Verse.

There is also no simpler or more effective devotion. Parent or child reads the verse then they pray together for God to move it from their heads to their hearts. Being simple matters a great deal as our best research shows that fewer than one out of 100 families has DAILY devotions. Churches can purchase calendars for the children in their church or visit www.bibleparent.com and make your own. These flip over calendars are a great way churches can partner with parents. There are of course many other sources of GOOD family devotions. Whatever you choose, do something.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand (Carry them with you). Ten years ago the last of the nations leading 30 denominations quit printing Bible Memory Cards. These child friendly cards are nearly extinct. Even on the internet the only site we know of that offers free printable DAILY Bible Verses is ours, www.bibleparent.com. We call them pocket scriptures because carrying a verse with them gives a child the feeling that God is with them. This site offers free bulletin inserts as well as easy to use strips. No pastor or church worker should allow these cards to become extinct as REPETITION is a child's number one means of learning. Cut out the verses and put them by the front door so everyone leaves the home with a verse in their pocket as well as being handy to offer their child's friends "One for the Road". Everyone puts their verse back in the bowl at the end of the day. The verses at www.bibleparent.com focus on one of God's BIG words for seven days in a row so that at the end of the year they will know those important words: Mercy, Hope, Forgiveness, Savior, Redeemer, Faith, Rebirth etc. These verses are a great way churches can partner with parents. **Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.** God's word ON DISPLAY in the home blesses both parent and child. For parents they serve as the one thing we need most REMINDERS. For children they make up for the days our parents forget devotions AND are memories that last a lifetime. The verses my grandmother had in her home were the one thing I asked from her estate...verses I now have in my home. Three coloring projects which give children the power to change their homes are: a. Son Catchers colored and hung in a window remind the entire family that God's light enters the home through his word. b. Small crosses over doorknobs are reminders that God's word opens the door to him. c. Mirror verses must be held up to a mirror to read just as we must hold them up in prayer to understand. Other coloring projects are for the dash of the car, surprise verses for inside cupboards etc. We call this "giving your home a Bible Makeover"...but...they could also be used for giving the entire church a make over. Image how many art projects even ten children could color. These free coloring projects are a great ways to partner with parents.

talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, a great way to help children get personal with God is to SHARE how he has been personal with you...answering a prayer, making a scripture real, comfort in times of sadness, guiding us when faced with decisions, helped me to trust him and not to worry, he helped me with temptation, etc. Parents sharing their personal walk is very high on the list of being child friendly. May your church encourage it, maybe with one Sunday a year dedicated to sharing our personal experiences with the children. *It is called witnessing and it is a command.*

Our final two thoughts for pastors and aspiring pastors. One: make at least one service every two months open to children (anyone age four and up). Appoint one or two families, children and all, as greeters/ushers, choose children's songs, something adults can join in. Choose one or two children to read a Bible verse key to the sermon. Perhaps ask a child to read a benediction after the service is over. Preach something age appropriate for a specific age group, maybe even ask the children the week before what they would like the pastor to preach about. In short ask God for a **spirit of unity...children included...not excluded**. Two: use the phrase "when I was a child" at least once in every sermon. It reminds us of what it was like to be a child and opens the door for God to add at least one sentence per sermon directed to children...something age appropriate.

Charles White is a retired inner city Christian pre-school teacher and web editor of both www.teachustoprayer.com and www.bibleparent.com.