

getting started in children's missions education

By Jill Harris

Eighty-five percent of all missionaries who go to the field long-term make a decision for Jesus Christ and missions before the age of sixteen. And most of them make that decision between the ages of ten and twelve. According to a professional survey of those young people who attended the Urbana Conference in 2000, the number one influence for missions in their lives was personally knowing a missionary when they were a child.

Clearly we must impact the children in our churches for missions. Are the children in your church being given the challenge for missions? Do they understand the part they play in God's plan to see the world reached with the gospel? Can kids really understand what this is all about?

Whether you have been doing missions education in your children's programming for years or are just starting out, there are some very key points to consider. It is important for your children's missions program to fit within the greater missions strategy for the church. Having the support of the senior pastor and Christian Education

pastor can not be over emphasized. Will your youth pastor be ready to take the kids to the next level once they have experienced what missions is all about in your program?

START WITH A STRATEGY

Every good educational plan includes a set of goals and objectives that can be evaluated regularly. If missions is just a country or a culture to the children, they have missed the point. A well rounded strategy for children's missions education should include opportunities for kids to 1) understand the Biblical basis of missions, 2) understand the concepts of unreached peoples and persecuted Christians, 3) pray with focus, 4) give financially, 5) care for missionaries (especially missionary kids, MKs) and 6) participate in hands-on experiences.

A good place to start that plan is with yearly goals for a three year period of time. What do you want the children to have learned and experienced after those three years?

One example of this good strategic planning is Village Baptist Church in Beaverton, OR. (The church's website features one page on "kids and missions"—see www.vbconline.org/global/kids___missions.) VBC builds on a foundation of Biblical worldview, Christian history, culture and strategy throughout Sunday school, children's church, VBS, and club programs. They incorporate a prayer focus and giving projects that move children into personal involvement.

This church believes that many of its kids will choose full-time Christian service as a career choice including being a missionary. Those who don't go to the mission field will be involved in God's global plan by sending others, giving, praying and being personally involved in reaching their community.

Part of the plan



should include what is communicated visually. You can talk all you want but if kids can't see it in front of them the impact can be limited. If someone were to walk into your children's department, would they be able to tell that missions is a priority? Are there maps, pictures of peoples of the world, missionary pictures or information about a giving project on the walls?

EVALUATING YOUR EFFORTS

Here are questions to ask in order to evaluate your church's current children's missions education efforts:

- **Biblical basis of missions:** As a part of the regular Bible lessons, are children seeing God's heart for the nations? Do they know stories from the Old Testament that are missions focused? Do they see scripture as the "big picture" of what God is trying to communicate instead of from a "what does this mean in my life" perspective? Do they understand they were created to bring God glory?

- **Unreached Peoples and Persecuted Christians:** Do your kids know what the 10/40 Window is? Can they tell you what THUMB means? (Tribal, Hindu, Unreligious, Muslim, Buddhist) Do they know what their Hindu or Muslim schoolmate believes? Can the children explain what it means to be persecuted? Do they pray regularly for countries where persecution occurs?

- **Prayer Focus:** When the children have the opportunity to pray, do they just pray for themselves and sick relatives or do they pray for the salvation of children around the world and others in their lives? Do they understand what it means to intercede for others? Have your kids prayer walked around your church or an ethnic neighborhood?

- **Giving Projects:** Are your children encouraged to give regularly? Do they know what they are giving to? Does it relate to a child? Will the children hear back on how their money was used to advance the gospel? Have the children



been praying for the group or individual who will receive the funds or items?

- **Caring for Missionaries:** Do your children know who your church missionaries are? Have you had each class or group adopt a missionary to pray for regularly? When a missionary family comes to visit, are your children ready to welcome the MKs? Are families encouraged to invite the missionary family to their homes?

- **Hands-on Experiences:** Are children given an opportunity to minister to the homeless, elderly or international students? Do kids know how to share their faith with their peers? Does your church do a family short-term missions trip?

GETTING STARTED

You may be thinking this is all fine and good but, "we are just starting out! Where do we begin?" In whatever area you decide to start, start small! You want to have great success to begin with so

people will join the team.

Introduce children's missions education into your programming by focusing on prayer. Many times Sunday school teachers and other children's workers will complain they don't even have enough time to do the lesson so how can they possibly add something else? Prayer should be something that is already happening so it just needs to be focused on God's heart for the world.

Begin by having the children get to know the missionaries the church supports and pray for them. It will help to have a world map or globe in each classroom with a picture of the people the kids are praying for.

Expand from there to teaching about unreached peoples and have children pray for one of the THUMB groups each week. Provide more hands-on tools such as THUMB prayer cards, pictures or other ethnic items.

You may want to involve the children in prayer events that happen throughout



the year. **Seek God for the Cities** is a 40 day prayer focus before Easter each year. (www.waymakers.org) **The National Day of Prayer** is held each year on the first Thursday of May. (www.nationaldayofprayer.org) **The World Wide Day of Prayer for Children at Risk** is held every first Saturday of June. (www.viva.org) **Praying Through the 10/40 Window** occurs each year in October. (www.win1040.com) **The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church** is held in November each year. (www.worldevangelical.org/idop) Every year during the Muslim month of Ramadan there is a prayer focus as well. The date shifts with the lunar calendar. (www.ywam.org/prayer/30daysmuslim)

Another way to start is with special events. Plan a “Sunday for the World” on the fifth Sunday of the month. Make it exciting with decorations, missions videos, ethnic crafts and snacks. Give the kids something to pray for as well!

Consider an “Intergenerational Concert of Prayer” that everyone can be involved in from preschoolers to grandparents. Incorporate worship, prayer THUMB stations, pictures, cultural items, hats, etc. to hold the children’s attention. This is a great time to pray for the unsaved people in your own community as well as around the world.

BUILDING A TEAM

Building a team of people who have a passion for missions and children should always be your goal. If your missions education program is shaped around just one person then you are in danger of not having a program at all if that person leaves. Your congregation may have many people who would love to be involved.

How do you find team members? Ask the former missionaries or MKs in your congregation. Involve team members who have short-term missions experience. Find those people who have a heart for kids but can’t commit to a weekly obligation. They may be willing to help for a special event.

TRAINING YOUR TEAM

Once you begin to form your team, training is important. This training can include team members only or all the other children’s workers as well. You may want to bring in an “expert” from the church down the street to add value to what is being covered.

Watch for ACMC conferences (www.acmc.org) happening in your area so you can send some people to attend the children’s workshops and buy resources to bring back and share. Check out the Caleb Project website (www.calebproject.org) for articles and tips as well as resources.

Doing a special Bible study with the team such as *God’s Heart for the Nations* by Jeff Lewis keeps everyone on the same page as you plan and work together. Many other books could be read and discussed as well.

Once your team is in place and trained, your goals are set, and your program is planned, then trust God to touch the hearts of the children. Missions makes sense to kids when they realize that being a Christian is not just about being good but about bringing glory to God every day of their lives! Missions puts action to our faith.

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