

# Partnering with the children's department

by Nancy Tichy

If you're old enough, you remember the famous commercial for Reese's peanut butter cups. One person is walking around eating chocolate and one person is walking around eating peanut butter. Each is so absorbed in how great his treat tastes that they accidentally run into each other. In so doing, they both end up with a chocolate/peanut butter combination. At first they accuse each other of clumsiness, but after tasting the combination, they like it better. The idea is that while chocolate and peanut butter are great apart, they're even better as a "partnership."

We talk a lot about strategic partnerships in missions. I would suggest that for the sake of educating children about missions, there is nothing more strategic than developing a sturdy link between those missions enthusiasts who want to mobilize church-wide missions interest, and those children's enthusiasts whose primary focus is on reaching and teaching the kids.

This is particularly important for two reasons. First is the fact that some of life's most important decisions are made by children. Statistically, the majority of Christians make the decision to follow Jesus comes in the "4-14 Window" (between the ages of four and fourteen). Similarly, the majority of missionaries make their first decision during this window of time to follow Jesus into cross-cultural service. Thus it is critical to provide the kind of discipleship experiences that children need to respond to God's call on their lives while they are still young.

Second, God is accomplishing wonderful things in outreach through children today. More and more stories are told of ten to fourteen year olds who take on significant challenges and perform significant feats for the Kingdom of God. For example, Bethany Hamilton, the world class surfer from Hawaii, lost her left arm to a shark attack last October, when she was 13 years old. Today she continues to compete. But she also now partners with World Vision to raise \$50,000 for the world's children who have lost limbs, mostly through acts of war. (Visit [www.justgiving.com/pfp/surfingforchildren](http://www.justgiving.com/pfp/surfingforchildren).)

Given these facts, I encourage your church's missions leaders to deliberately connect with those who lead your church's children's ministry. Here are some suggestions for doing just that:



- Ask for a member of the children's leadership team to serve on the missions committee, or visa versa, thus providing a liaison between the two groups. If this is not possible, assign someone on the missions committee to communicate your plans and activities to those responsible for children's ministry. Do this clearly and well in advance.
- If possible, host an annual dinner (or breakfast or dessert hour) for all members of both teams. This provides time for mutual encouragement, networking and prayer.
- Urge those in children's ministry to integrate missions vision and action for the children throughout their whole program. You might invite and pay the registration costs for children's workers to attend ACMC conferences. Almost without exception, these conferences have strong "children's ministry tracks."
- Give books and videos to the children's department that present the importance of enlisting children as young as possible for Kingdom purposes.
- Help purchase missions curriculum materials and video presentations created specifically for kids. Consider buying missions fiction books and biographies and set up a kids' lending library.
- People are resources. The missionaries and mission agencies your church supports can be shared with children. Design ways to put them in touch with the children.
- Kids can be a powerful source of prayer support. Send your next short term team of youth or adults to Children's Church. After they have shared, let the kids lay hands on them and pray. And be sure to send them back when they return to report to the kids.



- Work together to create opportunities for kids to do significant ministry and missional activities now.
- Plan for ways that children can participate in "grown-up" activities by developing family-friendly, intergenerational missions teaching and service opportunities.

You will not regret spending the time to teach children about missions, whatever challenges your church faces in building missions commitment. Remember, God is pleased when you unleash the power of Godly kids in your midst!

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