

The plan for We Love Kids Banquet

Dick Gruber

While serving at the A/G HQ in Springfield, MO, I was invited by Pastor Ron Pettit, to speak at a We Love Kids banquet in Kansas. Ron wanted to develop an evangelistic event for the children of his community. Imagine my wonder as I sat in a fellowship hall of that small church. The room was decorated like a party. The place was filled with children. Adult workers were dressed in crazy costumes serving the children. The adults literally waited hand and foot on the kids.

At the conclusion of the meal, children were walked to the sanctuary where my wife and I held a forty minute evangelistic service. I made a promise that night to my wife and myself. I promised that I would host such an event when God allowed me to once again become a children's pastor.

We began hosting We Love Kids banquets each February since moving to Bloomington A/G Church in 1993.

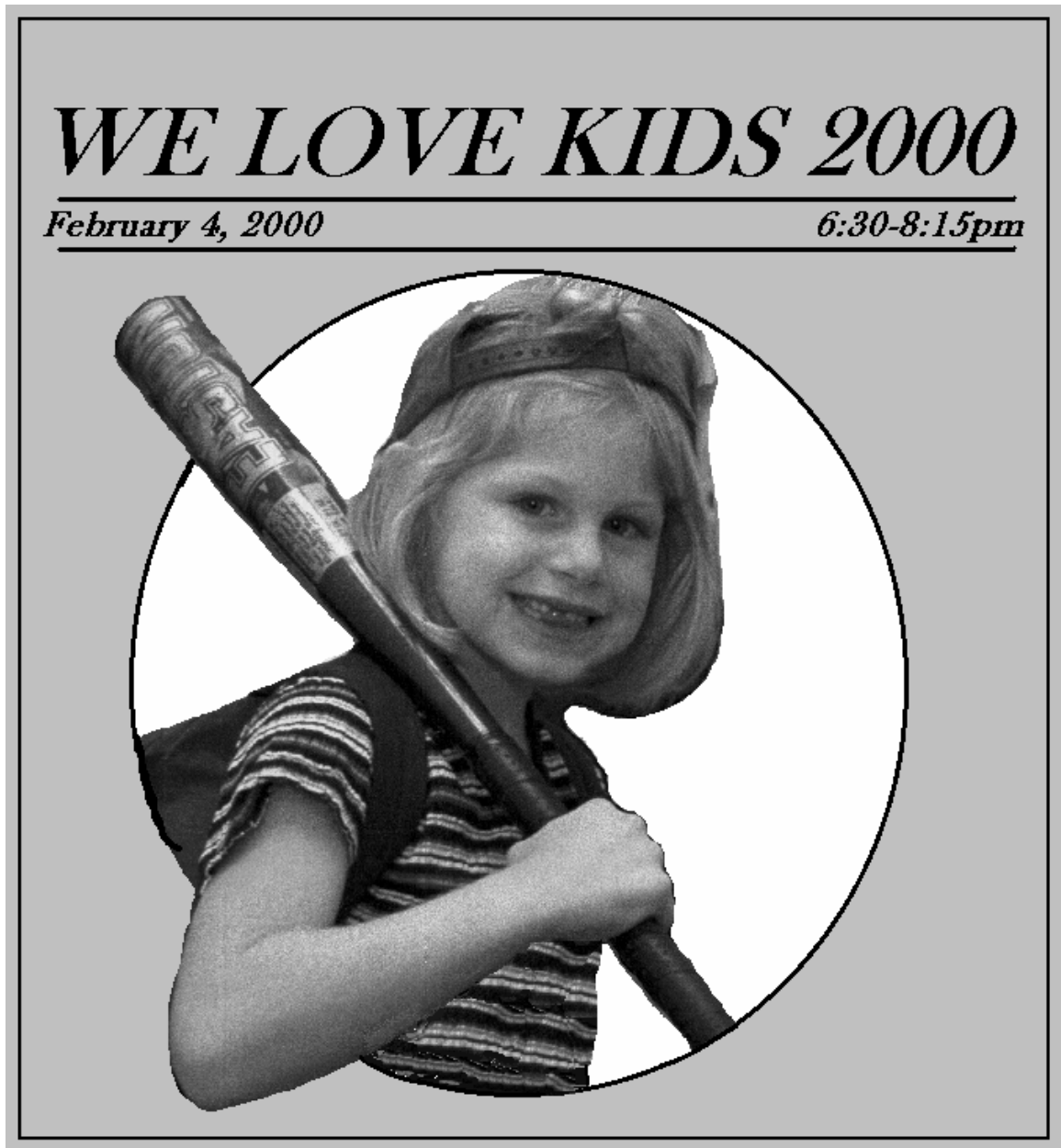
We begin initial steps in planning the banquet in February the year prior. A calendar date should be set, speaker signed, and committee formed. I believe in spreading the ownership out to as many adults/parents as possible. A theme is chosen early in the game. We have had themes such as Circus Night, Mission Possible, and Island in the Son. The decorating, music, and Gospel presentation will follow that theme.

Decorating can be as simple or elaborate as your budget will allow. Most of our decorations have been created at a parent/child work night about a month prior to the banquet. We always had a great turn out for this night. All table decorations and signs are made that evening. Any larger decorations are begun that evening and worked on at other times until finished.

The night before the banquet, helpers come and decorate the fellowship hall. Any finishing touches are added throughout the day of the banquet. Out of necessity, we ran a carnival with games and face painting in our lobby while children waited to be seated at the banquet. Our volunteers could arrive, leave their children under our supervision in the lobby while preparing to serve.

I dream of churches everywhere hosting events such as this. The We Love Kids Banquet is an event which places value on the child. It gives every child the opportunity to come to know and love Jesus.

At the time of this writing, I have been gone from the church in Bloomington for three years. They are still running the We Love Kids Banquet each year with over 500 children in attendance.



WE LOVE KIDS BANQUET

Volunteer Do's and Don'ts List

1. Be friendly! Smile and love on every kid you see tonight.
2. This is their banquet! Serve each child as if you were serving Jesus.
3. Do your best to keep children from spilling, but don't cry over spilt milk. Just get some help and clean it up. I do not want adults spoiling the fun by getting angry at a child who spills.
4. Once children have been assigned seating, they should not move to another table. Kids should remain in their seat unless a bathroom break is needed.
5. You have been assigned a table. Serve those at your table. God will use you to supply their needs and wants.
6. Keep children fed, watered, and happy. Encourage them to finish work/coloring sheets on their table. Have each child write his name on his party bag. Insure that children take these with as they go to the sanctuary for the concert.
7. If you have questions, find the children's pastor, banquet coordinator, or volunteer coordinator. In some cases we are learning as we go, so don't be afraid to ask questions or make suggestions.
8. No food fights!
9. If you are becoming impatient with a child at your table, ask for help. We can reassign you if you are having difficulty with a particular child.
10. Have FUN! Serving children is one of the most fun and fulfilling things any Christian can do. Enjoy this evening and remember, we need quality people like you serving these children every week. Perhaps this is just the beginning.

WE LOVE KIDS BANQUET VOLUNTEERS

All adult workers should dress in crazy costumes. Costumes do not have to relate to the banquet theme.

1. We follow a three-person rule. For the safety of the children we insure that there are three or more adults and children in any organized group. At no time during the event are you to be alone with one child. If a child requires special attention, enlist the help of another adult volunteer to work with you and that child.
2. All adult volunteers should arrive before 6:15 PM on banquet day. Please report immediately to the banquet coordinator, or volunteer coordinators. These leaders will be giving you a service assignment for the evening. Elementary children are encouraged to wait in the lobby for the 6:30 door opening. There will be things to see and do for children as they wait.
3. Most adult volunteers will be assigned to serve children at a specific table. There will be three or four adults per table. This insures that each child is given special care as they are served that evening.
4. Please read the list of do's and don'ts carefully. We are dedicating this evening to serving the children. If a child finds he or she does not like a certain food item, let them order something else. This is not a, "clean your plate or else," situation.
5. When doors open at 6:30, children will be escorted to tables filling the far side of the room first. As boys and girls arrive at your table, treat them with respect, welcome them, and assist them in working on coloring sheets and other table activities. There will be an appetizer at the table already. Prior to the banquet water is the only beverage served.
6. As soon as a majority of children are seated, the children's pastor will welcome all and open in prayer. This is typically around 6:45. When the prayer is concluded, assist children in ordering from the menu. Serve them food and drink as soon as possible. Assist children with ketchup and mustard as a waiter would in a fine restaurant.

7. There will be seconds and thirds available on most food items. Enjoy serving the kids. When your children are taken care of, you may indulge with them. Grab some food and enjoy. Remember that you are there to serve the children, not to pig out. Pay attention to them and do all to satisfy their needs.
8. Desert will not be served until about 7:17. The children's pastor will make an announcement when desert is available.
9. Sometime around 7:38, the children's pastor or his representative, will announce the end of the banquet, and dismiss tables by number to the sanctuary. Two adult workers should accompany and sit with the children you served in the sanctuary. The remaining workers stay behind to help clean up the mess. Our desire is to have every child seated in the sanctuary and begin the concert at 7:59. Those left to clean up in the atrium should have no trouble hearing the concert as they clean.
10. If you have signed up to serve, there is childcare available for your children who are not yet five years old. A special banquet for worker's three and four year old children will be held in the nursery wing. Childcare and preschool banquets are only available for children of those serving that evening.
11. Have fun and love on the kids during this event. If questions arise seek the counsel of children's pastor, banquet coordinator, or volunteer coordinator.

(This is a sample follow-up letter to those who volunteered)

Dearest Lover of God's Kids,

Greetings in the awesome name of Jesus!

Thank you! Thanks you for serving His children at our recent We Love Kids banquet. You did an incredible job of serving food, drinks, and entertaining children during the banquet. What an fantastic night! I do appreciate you and your attitude of service.

We love kids is not just an annual banquet. It is a way of life around this church. If you enjoyed serving that evening and would like to serve once or twice a month in Sunday school, children's church, or club ministries, contact me at (phone number). I would love to help you discover the joy of serving on a regular basis in a ministry which fits your gifting.

I am also forming two teams for future events. One will make decisions concerning our Halloween alternative this year, and the other will work on next year's We Love Kids event. If you care to serve on either or both of these teams, contact me.

I look forward to serving you and the children of this church into the next millennium. Join me in prayer for our kids and ministry to them. God bless you more than I could ask or imagine. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

His servant, your servant,

Dick Gruber

Organizational Outline for a We Love Kids Banquet

Dick Gruber

The Purpose

We Love Kids Mission Statement

The “We love Kids Banquet” is a family-friendly event hosted at our church. Our purpose is three-fold:

- to demonstrate Jesus’ love for children in a tangible way
- to give children a great memory
- to introduce children to new life in Christ in a manner that befits their age-level comprehension.

This mission will be accomplished by:

- Serving every child as if we were serving Christ.
- Providing a quality banquet experience at an affordable price.
- Creating an atmosphere of joy and love through decoration, multi-media, volunteer enthusiasm.
- Serving kid-friendly food and drink
- Involving parents and other screened workers to demonstrate Christ’s love by joyfully serving children.
- Present the Gospel in a post banquet service lasting no longer than 40 minutes.

The Plan

The banquet will be held every February. Planning for next year’s banquet will begin in February. Planning begins with the formation of a We Love Kids Banquet committee.

The committee will include:

- Chairman (usually the children’s pastor)
- Public Relations Coordinator
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Decoration Coordinator
- Program Coordinator

- Lobby Carnival Coordinator
- Ticket Sales coordinator
- Food Service coordinator
- Prize and Give-A-Way Coordinator
- Early Childhood Banquet and Childcare Coordinator

Here is a possible countdown calendar for this event. Make adjustments as needed for your situation.

- February – meet with committee
 - evaluate the last event
 - establish a theme for next year
 - entertain ideas for recruitment of volunteers needed
- March – Begin monthly prayer meetings for the event
- April – October – meet with the committee on a monthly basis and with members of it as needed.
 - These meetings should be fun and allow time for brainstorming in every area.
 - Remember, this is a team.
 - You want each committee member to feel they are making an important contribution to this event.
 - Send committee members notes of appreciation regularly throughout this time.
 - Volunteers recruited for all areas
- October – committee meets, sub-committees begin meeting
 - Begin work on decoration as needed
 - Create the event advertising campaign (posters and tickets designed and printed. News releases written and prepared for distribution.)
 - Church membership and local businesses recruited to donate prizes and or cash for the event
 - Volunteers recruited for all areas
 - Games secured and supplies ordered for lobby carnival

- Menu established with food service coordinator
- Develop budget for the event – Ticket sales will generate about 75% of your budget money. The rest must be underwritten. I found that such an event costs an average of about \$6.00 per child. I always want to keep the child's ticket price competitive with local fast food children's menus.
- November – December - committee begins meeting every week
 - Plug holes in the boat – check for blind spots or areas that are stalled
 - Help those coordinators in need
 - Posters should be placed around church letting people know that tickets will be available after Christmas.
 - Host a Christmas party for your coordinators and their spouses. Treat them right and they will work on your events forever.
 - If needed, begin working on larger prop and decoration items.
- January committee meets every week
 - News releases must be sent out the first week of January
 - Continuing work on all committee assignments
 - Ticket sales begin the first Sunday of the month
 - Double-check committee involvement
 - Program team meets every week for rehearsals
 - Food service will need an estimate one or two weeks prior to the event. Always estimate high so that you do not run out of food that evening. You can always deliver leftovers to a local shelter or send them home with volunteers.
 - Do not forget childcare and the early childhood banquet Give coordinator assistance in this as needed.
 - Host a creative craft night where families can get together and help paint, cut, and create all decorations and table settings for the banquet.
- February – Meet as needed until the banquet. The banquet is held the first or second week of the month.
 - Ticket sales progress
 - Advertising is full steam ahead by now

- Volunteers are in place and contacted the week of the event as a reminder that they are involved in this
- Tie up loose ends
- Decorate the fellowship hall the night before the banquet
- All final preparations are taken care of the day of the banquet
- Have fun

The People

Volunteers are recruited from among the parents and established workers of the church. Each volunteer fills out an application form and a background check is run. After the first We Love Kids banquet with attendance of about 120 children, I had no problem recruiting parents to assist. This is one of the most rewarding events you will run at your church. Volunteers like to be part of something short term and fun. This is it!

If possible, interview every volunteer personally sharing your vision for this event. The excitement will spread. We had teens, young adults, single and married people, senior citizens, and pastoral staff working this event. It became a church-wide outreach to children.

It may seem like I am suggesting too many meetings with the committee, but I have found that team building takes time. Make sure these meetings are not all about the business of the event. Take time to pray, fellowship, and encourage one another.

If you are going to an outside evangelist for your service portion of the event, make contact one to three years in advance. Good children's evangelists are booked far in advance.

The Program

Here is a sample schedule of a We Love Kids Banquet evening.

- 8:00am-6:00pm Final decoration takes place
- 12:00-6:30 Food is prepared
- 5:30 – 6:15 Volunteers arrive
- 5:45-6:30 Lobby carnival runs
- 6:30-6:45 Children are seated and welcomed by their servers
- 6:45 Children's Pastor opens in prayer and children are served
- 7:17 Desert is served
- 7:38 Children are walked to the sanctuary
- 7:55 Service begins
- 8:35 service ends and children are dismissed

Final Thoughts

All of these times are subject to adjustment based on the actual event. For instance, it may take less time to feed the children. Look for ways to speed this process up. Children order off of menus. You do not want children waiting a long time for food.

We always had workers stay behind in the fellowship hall during service to clean and reset for Sunday morning. I assigned several volunteers to serve as hall monitors throughout the entire evening. This was driven by concern for the children's safety.

Gift bags were set at each place setting as if every child were the guest at a party. Most of the items in these were donated by local fast food restaurants. We also gave away almost 100 door prizes throughout the banquet portion of the program.

Any church, any size can run a We Love Kids Banquet. Your committee may be smaller or larger. You may serve fewer or more children. The importance of showing kids God's great love for them is worth the effort it takes to put on such an event.