

## Children In Ministry by Dick Gruber

It is Sunday morning. The first grade class is going well. Lydia\* smiles as she holds the visuals for her Sunday school teacher, Mr. Marvel\*. She likes to help. Lydia feels like an important member in the body of Christ. It is because of Mr. Marvel and other teachers like him, that Lydia will grow up active in ministry in her church. This girl is being trained in the way she should go. When she is old, she will not depart from it.

John writes, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name... except those twelve years old and younger." NOT! The "as many" in this verse includes boys and girls. Scripture is very clear on the subject of membership in the body of Christ. There is no age requirement. Children, youth, and adults of all ages are coming to know Jesus in our churches and communities.

Each member of the body has important gifts or abilities to be used in ministry in the church and community. Romans 12:4-6 (NIV) says, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."

Each member, young or old, can contribute to the life and health of your church. Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV) states, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Teachers who take the commission of Ephesians 4:11-12 seriously, are raising an army of excited, serving saints. Children want to be trusted with ministry. Children need to be prepared for works of ministry. One of my goals each week, as I teach in the children's church, is to involve boys and girls in ministry. I find that as I give opportunity, the children enthusiastically volunteer.

Take a look around your class this week. The child who volunteers to pick up crayolas may have a gift of serving. There is another who always jumps at the chance to pray for his classmates. Perhaps he is an intercessory prayer warrior waiting for your encouragement. The child who interrupts your lesson with Bible trivia can grow in his gift of teaching. You must recognize him as more than a nuisance. There is that girl who wants to help you organize the glue sticks and art projects. This little girl has a gift of administration.

I could go on and on, but I think you are beginning to see the picture. We must, as leaders of children in today's church, prepare them to be leaders in tomorrow's church. We must begin to view these saints as vital members of the body. In doing so, we must then treat them as part of today's church. Allowing and even training children for specific ministries to others is a key link to health in the local church. This generation must become involved in age-appropriate ministries that allow them to grow into their gifts even as they grow chronologically.

Pray for God's guidance in discovering the gifts of the children in your class. What a tragedy that teachers and leaders both in the public education and church

settings, recognize the giftedness of those who stand out in the crowd. I would rather that you and all teachers, look for the giftedness of each individual you serve. God certainly has endowed each member of the body with special gifts necessary for its health.

Right now, you are beginning to think of ways to allow children to minister in your class. Let us look at some ministries that I have entrusted to children. In each case, the boys and girls have been excited and have grown in service.

Prayer is a ministry that should involve every believer young and old. Boys and girls as young as two and three years old are taught how to pray for one another in our Sunday school. Children in prayer, laying hands on the sick must become a common practice in our Pentecostal churches. Children are invited to special prayer meetings. No, not to sleep on the pews, but to take an active roll in praying for others.

A child with a gift of service, may really take to helping you set out supplies and visuals in your classroom. I make it a standard practice to allow every child who comes early to class, a chance to help arrange chairs, set out supplies, and prepare the room for class. The ones who love to lay out each paper, or hand out snacks to each person, may grow someday to be medical missionaries, or church food service coordinators.

Children can teach! They can act and create and enjoy the Sunday school experience. The key to discovering giftedness is allowing every child the opportunity to serve in your class. The quiet ones may not enjoy speaking roles, but put them behind a puppet stage and watch them bloom.

In our church, children serve as ushers and worship leaders. They participate in clown ministry, puppet team, outreach ministries, and care ministries. What do children do in your church? I say that it is time to let them stand and take their God-given place in ministry in the body of Christ. Seek God's wisdom in placing children in ministry. The church of today needs their ministries and the church of tomorrow cannot survive without them.

(\*The names have been changed.)

For more information on involving children in ministry read Dick Gruber's books, Focus on Children: A Handbook For Elementary Teachers, or Children's Church: Turning Your Circus Into A Service. Both are available through GPH.