

RESEARCH REPORT

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*Summary of
Children's Evangelism Study Focus Group*

Robert A. Rennie

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North American Mission Board

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Introduction

In February 2004, Skip Arnhart (Children’s Evangelism Associate, North American Mission Board) initiated a research project to explore the effectiveness of churches in evangelizing children ages 9 to 11. The purpose was to identify principles and methods of effective child evangelism that would be used in development of a questionnaire to be distributed to a larger random sample of Southern Baptist churches engaged in children’s evangelism.

After negotiation with the Research Team it was decided to conduct two focus groups comprised of representatives from churches that had consistently baptized children ages 9 to 11. The focus groups were initially scheduled for March 23, 2004, but had to be postponed to May 11, 2004, due to lack of willing participants. Ultimately, a single focus group was conducted on May 11, 2004 that consisted of seven people. Some of the topics explored in the focus group included outreach methodologies, parental involvement, discipleship of children, and level of support by the pastor and key leadership.

A copy of the focus group moderator guide and the transcript of the focus group discussion are included in the appendixes of this report.

Methodology

In order to identify churches that were effective in children’s evangelism, the 2001 and 2002 Annual Church Profile (ACP) databases were examined. First, a set of Southern Baptist churches with reported baptisms of children ages 9 to 11 in each ACP year was selected. This subset of 12,217 Southern Baptist churches was further classified by size. Four categories of churches were formed corresponding to a quartile distribution of church size based on the number of resident members (adjusted). Churches were then ranked by number of baptisms within each of the separate size categories. The table shows the four categories according to number of resident members.

Category	Resident Membership Range	Quartile
1	3 – 169	25
2	170 – 319	50
3	320 – 599	75
4	600 – 2,816	100

The intent of categorizing churches by size was to include small and medium size churches in the discussion. If only a single category of churches reporting the most number of baptisms of children ages 9 to 11 were included, the study would be focusing entirely on the largest Southern Baptist churches. By categorizing churches by size and then ranking those churches by their reported number of baptisms, a more comprehensive view of churches effective in reaching children could be developed.

A recruitment list limited to churches from Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and North and South Carolina was created. The goal was to find representatives from churches close to the North American Mission Board so the focus groups could be conducted in Atlanta. The initial goal was to recruit 10 to 12 participants from various churches in size

categories 1 through 3 for one focus group. A second focus group of 10 to 12 participants representing category 4 churches would also be conducted. Due to lack of response in recruiting, only one focus group was conducted.

Participants

There were seven participants representing six churches in the single focus group conducted. Five of these participants were from size category 4 churches. There was one person each from churches in categories 2 and 3. Three of the seven participants were women. There was a married couple representing a single church in the focus group. Four of the participants were from Atlanta metropolitan area churches.

Findings

Current Strategies

Participants were asked about unique outreach methods their churches employ in children's evangelism. The activities included fall festivals, outdoor stadium-type crusade for children, engaging needy families in the community, conducting Vacation Bible School, and Awana. The purpose of these events was clearly evangelistic, yet additional comments focused on not putting pressure on children to make a decision for Christ. As one participant stated "You've got to be cautious, you don't want to go out there and draw a child in because of guilt, because of a friend. When you have a group-type invitation, children are moved just because another child is moved." However, participants stated that all teachers and children's workers are trained and encouraged to be prepared to share a gospel presentation. While there was caution about how far to press children for decisions, it was also clear that an unapologetic gospel presentation permeated all events conducted with children.

Some specific materials used in children's evangelism included those created by the North American Mission Board, Awana, and Child Evangelism Fellowship. At least two participants developed their own materials. Participants stated they did not find a comprehensive source for materials related to children's evangelism.

Parental Involvement

There is a clear disconnect between parental involvement and a church's evangelistic efforts with children. According to members of the focus group, a few parents share the gospel with their own children only to seek help from church staff to ensure the children made a sincere decision. A participant mentioned that her church offers willing parents an opportunity to attend classes on how to share their faith with their child—but confirmed that some parents do not know Christ and are indifferent [when their child makes a decision for Christ] saying "Well, if that's what they want to do and its okay with [the pastor] then yeah, that's fine."

Children's Discipleship

Most participants stated that their church offers a children's worship service that is high energy, interactive, and participatory—incorporating music with hand gestures, games, and skits. In these services, children are not simply observers of worship but often lead in various elements of the service. Children's worship services, although a little rowdy, present an atmosphere where children learn about leading and being full partners in the worship experience.

Participants from the larger churches stated their church has a dedicated children's worship. A gentleman from a smaller congregation said that in his church the children are a part of "big church" so they can be exposed to the baptismal service and be a part of worshipping with their parents and other adults—and then at a specific time in the worship service they are dismissed to children's church. One participant said she learned to worship by sitting in church with her parents when she was a child, and believed that the decision to worship with other children or stay and worship as a family should rest with the family. Another woman mentioned that her church did not have children's worship during summer in order to allow time for family worship.

Most discipleship opportunities for children revolve around church staff, Sunday School teachers, and other adult volunteers. The Awana program was cited as a good avenue for discipleship where children are encouraged to learn Bible verses and parents are actively involved.

While participants were excited about children's discipleship in various endeavors such as Sunday School, children's church, Awana, and other mid-week activities, they tended to be more guarded on the topic of effectively incorporating children into the life of the church. When asked how children assume roles in the church, the participants deferred to ways children can be involved within the children's ministry itself. One participant mentioned that older children could be part of a "FIT" team—where a child has an opportunity to assist other children who are new to the church. "Kare Kids and Prayer Pals"—instances where children serve in a similar position to that of an adult outreach leader—were also discussed.

Participants were favorable to the concept that children who had accepted Christ could actively share their faith, but most churches do not recognize and encourage this endeavor. One participant noted that "Kids are capable of so much more. [We need to] ground them early...in salvation, assurance of salvation, growing with Christ, and how to be a personal soul winner...."

Evangelistic Outreach

When asked whether children's outreach was focused upon children in the church or children in the community, participants saw their churches as focused on the community. Ways in which their churches conduct evangelistic outreach include Vacation Bible School, special Easter celebration, fall festival, recreation ministry, ongoing bus ministry, and involvement in local public schools.

Pastoral Support

All participants strongly affirmed the role of the pastor in setting the tone for children's ministry and evangelism in their church. Besides the pastor's support contributing to the success of church programs, a pastor is seen as having considerable influence in the direction taken by a church's budget. Unfortunately, some pastors believe children's ministry is basically child care and therefore they are reluctant to put sufficient effort and money into reaching children. Church budgets tend to favor programs for adults who give the money rather than programs that cannot support themselves—and a church spends its money on its priorities.

Conclusion

The focus group was dominated by participants from larger churches, both in number and in level of participation in the group discussion. This was not the original intent of the study. As such, the focus group suffers from lack of perspective from small and medium size churches that are effectively engaged in children's evangelism. Still, the information gleaned from the participants was helpful in understanding some of the issues related to effectively reaching children.

While committed lay and staff leaders as well as a strong pastor who is supportive of children's ministry are instrumental to a church's effective outreach among children and are characteristics of large churches, there may be other less tangible reasons for effectiveness that were not explored—for example the church's position within the community or the population growth of the community itself. These less tangible environmental factors may have a greater impact on the small size churches potential to reach children, rather than the variety and breadth of children's programs they offer. Therefore, this study's lack of participation by small churches, which may be influenced more by these external factors, is a serious limitation.

These participants' churches are intentionally and unapologetically evangelistic toward children. Also, these churches have lay and staff leaders who have a heart for working with and evangelizing children. All participants stated that teachers and children's workers are trained to share a gospel presentation. All participants voiced strong affirmation of the role of their pastor in setting the tone for their church's active involvement in children's ministry and evangelism. Participants also indicated that their ministry to children is focused not only on the children of church members but also toward children in the surrounding community. Most of these churches have separate children's worship services, Awana, and Vacation Bible School among their strategies for outreach. Special events were often mentioned as strategies for reaching kids in the broader community.

A disconnect was noted between parental involvement in evangelism of their children and the efforts of their churches with their children. Concern was expressed about willingness of parents to abdicate the responsibility for the spiritual development of their own children. Furthermore, focus group participants seemed unsure of how to get parents more involved. It appears that parents who want their children exposed to the gospel have gravitated toward the larger churches that offer a myriad of children's activities. While these churches are willing and able to assume the responsibility, to some extent this only further erodes whatever interest a parent may have in accepting the role themselves.

APPENDIX A

I Introduction

Hi, my name is Bob Rennie and I will be your moderator for today's discussion. I work in the Research team here at the North American Mission Board.

My role is to cover the issues and guide our discussion. That does not mean I will be doing most of the talking because we want to hear from you. Your opinions are very important to us and we want to hear from everyone. We will be taping the session. This is not so we can identify who said what, but is merely for recording accurately what was said. After the report is prepared the tape will be destroyed. Since we are tape recording please speak clearly. I would also ask that only one person speak at a time.

I hope the meal was satisfactory. We will not be taking a formal break, however if you need to use the restroom then please feel free to quietly leave the room. The restrooms are located just down the hall from this room. Go out the back door and turn left outside this room, go past the hall where the elevators are, the restrooms are in an alcove on your left—or just behind the elevators. If you do need to use the restrooms please rejoin us as quickly as possible.

We have some observers with us as well. They will be doing some note taking on our discussion, but will not be a part of our group. The observers are Skip Arnhart and Phil Jones.

The reason you were selected to participate with us today was because your church is a leader in children's evangelism. We want to learn from you and hopefully teach other churches about what we learn. So, your opinions, perceptions, and beliefs are very important to us. There are no wrong answers. Whatever you want to share about children's evangelism we want to hear it.

Let's go around the room and identify ourselves. Tell us your name, where you are from and what is the most unique thing your church does to reach children.

II Current Strategies

What are some events you do specifically targeted to children?

****Probe for clarity and depth****

Why are these events successful?

Tell me more.

Help me understand.

Is there more you would like to share?

****Thank them for sharing—invite other comments****

Are you using children's worship?

What does children's worship look like in you church?

(separate, part adult—part separate, within adult)

How is your children's worship different?

III Church Outreach and Parent Involvement

Are church members trained in evangelistic methods geared toward children?

Tell me about what that training entails.

How are church leaders/SS teachers involved in children's evangelism?

What is the expectation of the church for SS teachers in child evangelism?

How is that manifested—lived out?

What role do parents play in children's evangelism?

How does the church support parents in evangelizing their children?

What are your church's expectations for the spiritual development of children?

IV Discipleship of Children

Tell me about how children are involved in the life of the church.

Is there a primary means through which children most become involved in the life of the church?

How does that happen?

What is journey a child may take in your church?

Are there specific goals?

How is a child's progress in discipleship measured in your church?

Tell me about the role of VBS/SS in children's discipleship.

What are some ways in which children can become more involved in church?

(Other than VBS/SS)

V Reaching out to children evangelistically

Some churches primarily reach children of parents already involved in their church, others tend to reach out more into the community and involve more children from outside the church--where would you say the children your church is reaching are coming from?

If from families already involved in the church, then:

Why are they effective in reaching this group?

If from children in the community with no prior church involvement, then

Why are they effective in reaching this group?

VI Support of the Pastor and other senior leadership

Tell me about the ways in which your pastor and deacons support children's outreach and evangelism.

Did your pastor move your church toward being evangelistic with children or was it someone else?

How did the pastor/person motivate the church to become more involved in children's evangelism?

How important was the pastor/key person's role in children's evangelism for your church?

What qualities of the pastor/key person were most helpful in leading your church to become effective in children's evangelism?

Conclusion

Our time is almost over, but before we dismiss let's just go around the room again and tell us what kind of advice you would give to another church if they asked you how to be effective in reaching children for Christ?

Thank you for your time and your willingness to share with us today. Your input is invaluable to us as we partner with you in reaching children for the Kingdom of God—again, THANK YOU!!

Skip has some final words and some tokens of appreciation for coming to the North American Mission Board and sharing with us today... Skip...

APPENDIX B

Transcription of Children's Evangelism Study Focus Group recording

Bob: What is the one most unique thing that your church does for it's children? Jerilyn, would you share with us?

Jerilyn: My name is Jerilyn Stout and I'm Director of Children's Ministries at Summit Baptist Church in Acworth, Georgia. The one most unique that we do for us sharing Christ with children is more of a... we don't do children's revivals as such, we don't do a lot of prayers with uplifted hands leading children in that way, pushing children to make decisions. We always give them those opportunities, and I guess something that's very simple, but we always make sure to do is that every teacher and worker in our Children's Ministry has gone through a very short and very simple training so they're always ready to give an account and they have materials and they have everything ready so at any time there's an extra person that can take the child to the side and talk to them one on one that's really important and I've found that (15).

Bob: Good. Thank you for sharing. Rob...

Rob Brooks. I'm Children's Pastor at Hebron Baptist Church in Dacula. I've been there a little over four years and before that I was at FBC in Snellville for about eight years as their Children's Pastor there. There really isn't just one thing that we do; we just finished something that Hebron does that not a lot of churches do anymore—we do an annual Starlight Crusade. Big outdoor stadium kind of crusade that not many churches do anymore. The church growth folks say you can't do this any more but we have 5–7,000 every night turn up. It's something we've been doing for 18 years and we do a children's night on it, it's like a big kids' crusade back in the auditorium and we usually have anywhere from 1,500 to 3,000 kids depending on who we bring in for it. We give a Gospel presentation, always have a lot of counselors we do a big, our Vacation Bible School we run over 2,000 in VBS and usually have anywhere from 120 to 140 salvations. I think the unique thing about all that is the fact, is not tons of salvations, but the follow-up process that we put in place. You know, we do a very unemotional without trying to coerce kids, without trying to play music that appeals... I mean we don't try to set the atmosphere that'll emotionally draw them, we just simply and clearly present the Gospel and like Jerilyn says, all of our Sunday school teachers are trained in how to counsel with a child, and a lot of them come out for Starlight are there for Vacation Bible School to help counsel kids and we have a real thorough... I think the unique thing about us is we have a real thorough process. When a child comes forward, you know we're trying to weed them out even as they're coming forward. We give them reasons. We've presented the Gospel, but then we're giving them reasons not to come forward. You know—we don't have a prize up here for you. If you're coming because you're curious or something like that your teachers can talk to you later; or you know, if you're coming for a friend, we'll take care of your friend you just don't come because a friend is, we'll get your friend hooked back—we're always trying to give them, we're sharing the Gospel with them but also trying to give them a way out just in case they don't understand. They don't actually pray in there, we bring them in the back. We go through the Gospel again. This is like everyday of Bible school as well as Starlight, and other big kid's nights we do. And then weed them out again if there's any of them that don't understand or don't want

to be there or are unclear, unsure or have any other reason—we gently encourage them to leave and they...in a positive way, and then really get down to the ones that really, really have questions about salvation and really want to talk with somebody about trusting Christ and then the counselors are the ones that take them through the Gospel a third time and they're the ones if the child's ready, they pray with them.

Bob: Great.

And I think over the years God's honored that. Plus we have a new Christians class that we try to get them all in even before we talk, even before we get to baptism we want to get them grounded in the faith in the new Christians class that we've written ourselves to really try to help them get started right. And I think God over the years at Snellville and here at Hebron has just blessed thoroughness and care as well as intentionality.

Bob: Great. Thanks for sharing, Rob. Pam...

I'm Pam Golden from Riverside Baptist Church. I'm the volunteer pre-school and children's coordinator. I think the most unique thing that we do as a church is we are very intentional to get in the community where the families are. We do have sponsored events at our church where we do always have a Christ-centered focus, we always present the Gospel in some way. If it was the spring celebration we have the cupcakes and do the [51] and just things like that that we always offer and share the Gospel. But we do get in the community. If there's a kids' fest coming up, well we will rent a booth and be there to help sponsor that. We'll give our money to help sponsor it. We go to the schools. We talk to the guidance counselors—are there any families who need help? And then we begin to minister that way and then pray for their salvation as we minister find opportunities to witness to those. And I think that's the most unique thing for us is getting to them.

Bob: Great. Thanks for sharing, Ronnie...

My name is Ronnie Mitchell; initially I've been the outreach and evangelism minister at First Baptist Sonoma, or just here recently in the last couple of months I also took on the responsibility of minister of evangelism plus some other duties. But I think it starts with the pastor having an evangelistic heart, and then it flows out to the people and down to the children and we have, as already mentioned, the VBS and it's always an evangelistic message given to the teachers through the teachers the pastor gives a message on Thursdays prior to VBS being over. We have Backyard Bible School as well as in Sunday School, and all those things we take our teachers, we just really make an all-out effort to take [67] to the core to get some training there and insure that they are giving an evangelistic message, and I think as Rob was mentioning a while ago, but there's also that caution that it's a heart sense salvation experience rather than a knowledge through the head and I think we probably have gone too far to the left in the cautionary part as far as even in our educational material and things of that nature. I know we just—I don't know if this is a bad word, but we have just recently started Awana and they are very evangelistic in the message they give out. And that sets a tone for the children as far as salvation—very evangelistic we just really [75] we have children's church—yes, it's the puppets—but it's evangelistic message. Each time that we're in front of the children it's evangelism as well as other things. That's it, it's the whole program. It's no one thing that you do I think that causes you to reach children. And of course as we've already said, the

follow-up that takes place is so important. And you've got to be cautious, you don't want to go out there and draw a child in because of the guilt, because of a friend. When you have a group-type invitation, children are moved just because another child's moved, and you just have to really be real strict, I guess you could say as far as [83] that it is a heart sense salvation rather than a mind-type knowledge decision on their part.

Bob: Thanks for sharing. I think we've already gotten into a little bit of this, but, John, I believe you said that your church really doesn't do put too much focus on events it's just the whole process and Ronnie you talked about that as well. But just if you are using events, what do you do specifically that's specifically targeted to children? Just anybody. What specific events? Rob, you mentioned one. The children's night crusade at starlight....

Children's night of it.

Bob: Anybody else have specific events? VBS was mentioned.

Ronnie: We have Backyard Bible School and we have that right at church. We had talked about going out in the communities and doing it but we want to highlight the church. It's in the yard—they don't come inside, we use the porta-potties outside, the whole 9 yards to keep them outside so it would be a backyard event and that draws the children [97] as well as other activities most especially in the summertime, we have like a water-type slide parties and things of that nature where the children comes together and that attracts the children as far as them being there reaching out an outreach-type...

Rob: We use the Awana program, also. It's not a bad word.

Pam(?): Anything that works isn't a bad word.

Rob: The thing about it, it's not just a mid-week program like you were saying Ronnie, it's extremely evangelistic it's tailored to be that, yet for kids that are believers, that are growing in the Lord, the intense scripture memory levels in it, you get God's word in a kit they're going to get saved and they're going to grow. And we treat it as big huge side-door entrance into the children's ministry and into the church. We run bus ministry Wednesday nights for it, and everything. And there's kids that come to that on Wednesday nights that their parents allow them to come or bring them that may not normally come on Sunday right away, but we have a connection with them it's like you're saying, it's very evangelistic, there's a lot of salvations, and all the Awana leaders, especially in the older clubs, they're very, they're children's counseling trained also for when the kids make decisions.

Ronnie: It's [112] to me, though, within our Southern Baptist and Georgia Baptist [112] there's a fear of being too evangelistic, you know, and I think you have to be cautious in that area, we've already stated make sure it's a heart-sense salvation rather than a knowledge... It's almost, we don't want to get too evangelistic, you know, with these children, you know, we don't want, and there's, but, Awana has stepped out there with the memory verses and things of that nature, and it's touching children's hearts.

Rob: You and I are thinking a lot alike. I think we've been too cautious because, as a Convention, we haven't fully understood children's ministry. But when the research

shows that children's morals and values are largely set by 9 or 10 years old and that 75 to 80 percent of people that trust Christ as their Savior will do so before the age of 14, you know. I mean, even the secular research in education says that their learning curve for foreign languages, and math skills, art, things like that are between 5 and 9, you know, we'd better get intentional about evangelism.

Ronnie: Do you agree with, excuse me. Do you agree with me also, as far as we've stirred away from that?

Rob: Yeah. I think largely we have.

Ronnie: Excuse me.

Bob: Oh, that's all right. Let me just jump in here a second. I just want to welcome—you go by Lou Lynn? And Doug we want to welcome you and [127] that way I can see your name. We really have just gotten started to the meat of our discussion. The topic that we're talking about right now are events specifically targeted to reach children in your church. What events do you do in your church? And we also want to know, related to that, why are these events successful? Not just what you're doing, but why do you believe that they're successful? So that's what's on the table for discussion, just jump in there. We'd like to hear from everyone, so...

Doug (?): When you say "event," you're talking about non-weekly type things?

Bob: It could be anything that you classify as non-on-going. For instance, I would not consider Sunday School an event, probably Awana may not be an event since it's on-going, but I would say VBS would probably be an event. If that helps. So, events; what kind of events are you doing?

Woman: We have an annual hoedown in the fall, usually on Halloween night. This past year we did a, had the children and families go on a hayride and as they went around the field there was a drama presentation which basically presented the Gospel. And then they had a chance then to hear, while they were on the hayride they had a guide who further explained the Gospel presentation.

Bob: So why would you say that was successful? because they heard those presentation or...

Woman: Yes. And it was a fun time, too. They got to have a good time and then they were able to hear the Gospel at the same time. We do not have a decision time from that, but usually we do. If they want to accept Christ, there's an opportunity. But that was really a neat thing.

Bob: Other events.

Man: One of the things we do, we have a community-wide Easter celebration. And what triggered it was when you said about the drama, but we use it on the local baseball fields, there's about five or six baseball fields, so we're able to gear it to age groups in that 3 and 4 year olds would hunt... or 2, 3, 4 year olds—toddlers up—could hunt on one field and then on another field 5, 6 and so on so they won't be trampling each other. But also, we

give a drama presentation at the beginning prior to the egg hunt and give the Gospel there as it's a narration thing, but it's acted out so the kids can see that Easter's something more than just hunting of eggs or the Easter bunny and so forth. And there is a Gospel presentation given, you know, for any that might come forward at that time. [164—over talking] We go all the way through, we have a field that's 9 and up, you know, and what we did that there might be some handicap children that might be even 10-12 years old that might participate in something like that, but we'd start with toddlers—have the parents help and then go all the way up like I said the field 9 and above would hunt.

Bob: Let me just summarize what I'm hearing so far is the events we're hearing are fun events and they have some means by which the gospel's presented; probably age appropriate means. Am I jumping too far ahead here or is that a good summary?

Woman: That's a good summary. And Bob I just wanted to add we have done a drama for ages of Walk Through the Bible at our fall festival. We do a Walk Through the Bible with candy appropriate to Bible stories—that sort of thing. And we did a complete reversal from that this year and did a huge program that we just tried to bring the community in and we probably had 8,000. 8,000 people there, before where we've been having just a kind of a you know small church carnival atmosphere where we maybe had 200–300, you know, just our folks and, that's, the parents were taking their kids other places because it was on Halloween and they were trying to show the grandparents their costumes. All of this that we're competing with so we moved this back a week and just did a huge blow-out carnival on our campus with the idea that we wouldn't present the Gospel. We wanted to be seen as a place that families could come for help with their kids. So, just a fun place. That's the first time we've done that and haven't done a drama, haven't presented the Gospel anyplace. Had an information table where people could pick up things to get our schedules and that, but it was just kind of a soft sell that our community really bought into. I mean we just didn't anticipate 8,000 people coming to this thing.

Man: What night did you do it on?

Woman: Thursday

Man: We did it on Thursday night where school was out the next day.

Woman: At the break. We did it at the 9 week break.

Man: Stayed away from Halloween; didn't really tie it to any Halloween thing. It's the first time we've ever done this. We had always in the past done a Halloween night fall festival thing and it went well. It was a totally different event.

Jerilyn: We've really found success, too, if we have it after if we have ours like the weekend after Halloween. What we try to do is tell our people you know kids that their families are lost, the unchurched, generally they go out to houses and the house is dark and locked up tight as a drum and they go "Well, those people are either too cheap to give us candy or they're Christians so they're not going to give us anything. And so we really encourage our people to be at home because how often do they have their neighbors come to their doors; you know everybody's so isolated that that's usually one night where people in neighborhoods are going around and so they give them just a little

thing that they attach candy to—I told them “Please attach candy to it”—but it says this is good for 20 free tickets at the [199] Church and what happens is we give every child a hand stamp and they get 20 free tickets and every activity is 2 tickets and everybody wins something. They either win candy or a prize and we’ve been amazed at how many people have come, families have come into our fellowship, because they said “We came and you didn’t want anything from us. You weren’t trying to sell us anything, you didn’t push anything down our throats.” And they came and found out that Christians, especially in our area we have people from all over the county, most of them are not from Southern Baptist backgrounds and they think we’re snake handlers. I mean, I’m just being... I’ve been Southern Baptist all my life but that’s their perception.

Man: We’re not?

Jerilyn: I mean, they think we’re foot-washing, snake handling kind of folks and so

[laughter and over-talking]

Jerilyn: Anyway, it’s just been wonderful to see that they came and it’s like these folks are okay and they care about me and they didn’t want anything from me. And we found people from Vacation Bible School from our family night programs and from things like fall festival months later we always have “How did you hear about Summit?” and a lot of times they put on there “We came to your fall festival.” Well, that was like November the 3rd one time and I remember it was like 4 months later and we haven’t heard from the people since then really, they probably heard from us, but we had not heard from them at all. So I do think it’s wise if we can have those, you know we said “Plunder the Egyptians” whatever the world has to offer the [221] for evil if we can pray [223] in a godly way use it for good and so we’ve just found that Halloween can be like the best opportunity we have to have folks in our neighborhoods go to our people and ask them for something.

Bob: So what I’m is fun [226] positive, age appropriate kind of events—those are the kind of events that are most helpful. Let’s move on. I did say events were a one-time thing, but let’s talk about something that may be a little more on-going if your congregation currently does this. Are you using children’s worship, and what does that look like in your church? Just tell me about what that looks like in your church.

Man: Just where they have their own worship time together?

Bob: Well, there’s different ways in which churches do children’s worship. How does your church do children’s worship?

Man: Well they’re set up on their own. We just do first and second grade. We believe third graders need to start learning how to do adult corporate worship together. So they have their own children’s church room.

Bob: For just the first and second grade?

Man: First and second graders. We’ve got it at 9:30 and 11, We have worship leaders and they do skits, and stuff like that. They sing songs, they take up offering. There’s an order of worship just like there is in adult worship. It’s a fun-type format, a great time, but also through the drama time, the skits, and stuff like that they’re getting something out of it.

And they're learning then as well how to...it's a good 2 year transition for them to go into worship the way everything's done.

Bob: So that's how you see it—as a transition into worship?

Man: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Bob: So children's worship is a transition. Okay. Great. Thanks. Others?

Man: We do children's church. We've been for years at the churches I've been at...I'm a real believer in it and at our church we, our ministry and elementary ministry is kindergarten through 5th grade so we do two hours of it—two per hour. We have a k and 1st grade one that's called King's Town, and they're in a building, we have two children's buildings a younger one and older one. They have their Sunday School classes all around it, but they also have their own worship room for k and 1st grade. Then 2nd through 5th grade one is called Rocket Town. And it's a little more edgy in its theme and everything. But, and, same kind of thing I mean. It's a lot of real loud rowdy interactive music with multi-media up on the screen for words and lyrics and videos, and we have a time machine and pull Bible characters out and things like that, and, you know, lot of game show style games at the beginning to get the crowd involved and stuff like that. We've got guys that write, you know, PowerPoint games and things like that and put them up on the screen and we do a lot of the elements that are in a regular worship services. A time of offering that the kids lead; a lot of times we have a skit team and a puppet team made up of kids that we've trained and that do a very good job. They're not just observers; they get to be participants. And, even in the younger age group in K and 1st grade they get to do a lot of games and activities as well up on stage things that they pull them up to do and then, you know, we do teaching series with them. They get a kid's message that's supplement by video, by object lessons, costumes, pulling kids up on stage to act things out, multi-media that they can take notes to and stuff like that especially in the older one. And we do a Gospel presentation—not in the younger one—but a Gospel presentation and an invitation in the older one 2nd through 5th grade about once a month, once every four or five weeks, and give those kids a chance to respond. We write our own curriculum for all that. We don't use any published curriculum. We decide what we feel like what they need and what we need to be teaching them and what we need to give them response to of what's going on in the world and we write our own stuff.

Bob: Who does your writing?

Man: I've got a couple of folks that write the K and 1st grade Kings Town series material, and I write the 2nd through 5th grade stuff because I'm the primary teacher in that one.

Bob: Rob, you said something that just kind of struck me “participatory.” How is participatory in children's worship? Was that intentional from the beginning or how did that develop?

Rob: It was just, when I came it was just, that's just the way we do children's church. That's the way I've always done it, you know, calling kids up on stage for games, for using them for hand motions for songs, it's not something that we worked into, it's just something that this is the way we do it, and we just kind of have always used children to

involve them in worship. I like the word “interactive.” They’re not just rote spectators, they’re involved worshipers.

Bob: I see Jerilyn nodding her head vigorously there. Would you like to add?

Jerilyn: I just, they are going to, if they are involved they are going to be participating in worship, and I think we just have kids worship, we didn’t begin it for a very good reason, we didn’t have any more room in our worship center, and so they said you need to pull about 100 kids out at 8:30 and 11:10. Not necessarily...

Bob: So it was a pragmatic decision in the beginning.

Jerilyn: It was. It was a necessity to start that with our older children. We had K, 1st and 2nd, and then 3rd, 4th, and 5th and we do both of them at both times at 8:30 and then 11:10. I just think that if we’re going to reach them where we are we’ve got to realize that they do respond to what they are accustomed to. They do want to be heard; they do want to participate. And I think it’s very important for us to realize that if they’re sitting there dead silent and they never raise their hand and they never interact, you probably lost them a long time ago. And their mind is somewhere totally out somewhere else. And we do some elements of games of activities and getting them involved—but also we always want to make sure that we have kids worship. We don’t have a kids playtime with a Bible story attached on there. And sometimes as parents come in their POWs—that’s parents of the week—as they come in some of them are really surprised because they go, “Ahhh, well, I feel like I went to church. We really worshiped.”

Man: We hear that a lot too. We have parents that skip of big church [310] and say, “Man I enjoy this more than regular worship” you know.

Jerilyn: And I think sometimes we do sell kids short in that the Holy Spirit will speak to them; the Holy Spirit draws them. It’s our job to put the message out there, but the Holy Spirit is the one that does the work. And I think sometimes we do sell kids short saying well we can only do, you know, a lot of very upbeat action oriented songs. We do need to do those, but my leaders call that “settling the crowd,” come in and settle the crowd. And we’ll come in and do very upbeat, excited, you know, to get everyone involved, but then we pray and the Holy Spirit comes down and there are times where they do very worshipful things. So I think that it’s always important for us to realize that just as both those elements are very important in our worship as adults, those elements are also extremely important in our worship with kids.

Bob: Great.

Man: Ours is very similar. We have a, I’m the children’s minister and my wife is the preschool director, we have a preschool children’s church for 4 and 5 year olds. We do two of those on Sunday morning—two different hours for worship service. And then we have a children’s church for, technically its 1st through 6th, but the, you know the 5th and 6th graders don’t really participate in that very much. But it is, we use *Child Evangelism Fellowship* curriculum which is very strong. I mean I’ve not seen anybody else’s curriculum as far as children go that is better evangelistically. The weeks I do it’s not very edgy at all. It’s not very high tech. It doesn’t have any bells or whistles so you have

to create all of that yourself if you want to use their stuff, but it's very strong evangelistically and Biblically.

Man: Do you do that yourself?

Man: Do what?

Man: The material. You're talking about it being evangelistic.

Man: No. Well *Child Evangelism Fellowship* is who produces the curriculum. And that's the name of an organization.

Man: Okay. I missed that.

Man: We use their curriculum and then we just have to add all the bells and whistles ourselves because it just doesn't come with any, it's very dry—but solid as a rock.

Jerilyn: Yeah; I'd say it's very solid.

Woman: Do you use that with your preschoolers also?

Woman: No actually we are using *Sunlight* curriculum with our preschoolers—*Gospel Light*, I'm sorry. Sunlight's a Bible school program, isn't it—but we have used the Jesus series—Jesus is God's Son—we teach that through the fall, there's four different book series. And my teachers then dress that up. You know, the directors have a thing this year they have used the Avalon song "Testified Love" and every week they've taught the children the motions to this song. So it's just been an incredible, you know they just wanted a thread to weave through the whole year. They're being creative, but that's what we give them as a base. They use that as their jumping off point.

Woman: Can I ask a question? Is there anybody here that has a kids worship material that you don't have to add to, that you don't have to develop yourself, or you don't have to write yourself?

Generally: Have not seen anything like that.

Man: I know that new G-Force material is designed to be children's church and/or Sunday school that Fellowship has put out. But even then after looking at it, to me I don't think they're completely ringing the bell either, yet. I mean there's stuff that you have to tweak or leave out—which is fine—because they've got, you know, like arts and crafts times and small group times, and things like that, which that's not worship. If you're going to a worship service with kids do a worship service, don't do a second Sunday school. And teach them a corporate worship environment. But yet, it's probably, talking about edginess and multi-media and crowd involvement, things like that, aside from leaving those elements out, theirs is probably the closest I've seen to that, you know. 'Cause a lot of the other publishing, most of what I've seen over the years, the reason we ended up writing our own is (1) we just felt convicted and convinced of what we felt like our kids needed to be getting, you know, and what we wanted to teach them. We developed a plan for that, and yet, also I've never really found, like you're saying, I've never really found a curriculum out there that's a children's church curriculum that's nothing more than a glorified Sunday school, you know, a lot of Gospel Lights, David C.

Cook's junior church and children's' church stuff used to be. So, by necessity you almost end up, like you're saying, adapting or writing your own.

Bob: Help me understand. What would you consider the difference between worship and Sunday school. You said it's nothing more than glorified Sunday school, I believe were your words—what makes it different?

Man: To me, since I've said it I'm the one going to defend my statement, since I'm the one that threw that on the table. Is that, the way I tell people, when I try to describe it to parents when they come and they see these two elements on Sunday morning, we try to encourage them to get their kids involved in both. We try to tell folks that in Sunday school they get a small, intimate, interactive, you know, they're going to get into the word of God in a small group intimate, interactive environment with a teacher and kids, getting into God's word; into the word of God. In worship we want to help them create an environment where they experience the God of the word. That's kind of the catch phrase we use. [388] experience God in a worship environment. So, one is an intense, small-group Bible study, the other one, you know, they're getting a message, but it's all in the context of helping them experience God in a worship setting, in a corporate worship setting.

Woman: Do you have a copy write on your...

Man: On my phrase?

Woman: No, on your...

Man: One thing I want to add...

Woman: She wants your curriculum.

Man: One thing I want to add to what's already been said: one thing we do, and we have a smaller congregation, I think, than some of the churches represented here; but we leave our children in the—the term Big Church—for a period of time up until the time where we take the offering, then, or our welcome time where there's a little bit of confusion, then we dismiss them. The reason we do that we do our baptisms at the beginning of the worship service so they can see the people being baptized. And also, we are giving personal testimonies as being part of the worship service and they get to hear that prior to going to their children's church. So we've seen that as another very evangelistic tool. They start asking "When can I be baptized."

Woman: We've moved our baptisms to nighttime. Years ago they used to do morning baptisms and now we've, because there's so many, also, we can't get them into the morning service, but...

Man: But that puts a question in their little minds and little hears about, you know, what is this baptism thing, and then it gives you an opportunity again to come back and explain what baptism is and there's some confusion factors there. I have a little 6-year old that stays with me and my wife as much as he goes home, and I know after we went out to eat after church I mean that was his whole thought process while we was out to eat it was like "When can I be baptized?" and, hone, when you get to a point when you understand what baptizing is, and he says, and I've got one of these little prisms where

Jesus is reaching down with a scared hand and he's taking the hand, a hold of man and pull him up to heaven, he says "How about when Jesus takes my hand—can I be baptized then?" "Well that's part of it, sugar." But he's not understanding. He goes quiet about 2 minutes, I mean silence. Then he throws both of his hands up—this is a 6-year old now—he said, "I don't have any idea how to be saved." But the thought process is their, you know, and it's a time to and a lot of it's just because of the baptismal time. I know that part of my salvation experience is like every time I went to the church they was having communion, you know, and those type things that children needs to participate in and sometimes we're not careful in our children's church environment we'll miss out on some of those things.

Bob: So what you're saying with yours is that the children get to see the adults participate and then they go to participate instead of keeping them completely separate. And then yours is a transition....

Man: And we might be able to do that because of our congregation size compared to some of the larger congregations.

Woman: I think it always need to be an option. I learned to worship by sitting with my parents in worship and by watching that modeled. With so many families that have been unchurched, a lot of times for 2 and 3 generations now, what we find is that the adults don't know how to worship. So that's another reason that I want to make sure if they don't have their children with them...if their children were with them in worship they might not be seeing that modeled anyway, so I want to make sure that we're very intentional teaching our children how to worship. But I think family worship is an incredible thing so we always give them that option. If I ever have somebody that says "You know, we really, we think it's important for us to worship as a family," I go, "Praise God. That is important to worship as a family."

Man: We do a Gospel presentation and invitation probably 3 out of 4 Sundays in our older children's church—we call it Kid Zone. Probably 3 out of 4 Sundays, and many months 4 out of 4 which again is part of the nature of that Child Evangelism Fellowship material. If you've seen children's curriculum, a lot of times it's written with Bible stories or, and then kind of off to the side "If you want to present the Gospel, here's a way to do it." You know, I've seen a lot of children's curriculum written that way. You know Child Evangelism Fellowship material is basically the opposite. I mean it is built into every single lesson. And there are some series, some lessons you get that are about Christian growth, but even with those, they'll have the invitation and the Gospel message in it, so we do that a lot. We've seen a lot of, we've probably been doing this method about 3 years now and seen a lot more children responding and salvations and subsequent baptisms since we've gone to this style. But again, the downside is we have to add all of the bells and whistles.

Woman: We also stop during the summertime to encourage family worship. We stop when the kids are out of school in May and that gives our team time to reconstruct for the fall and so during the summer months we encourage, and we spend the month of May in the preschool children's church teaching the children how to worship. Here are the different components of big church worship that you're going to see, here's how you act, and here's what you do during the song time. Here's what you do when there's offering

and you can participate... we just go through the mechanics. Do not get up to go to the restroom... that's not what you do during church. I mean that's dumb to have to say, but we have a whole generation of people who think that it's okay to get up in the middle of whatever is going on and leave. And so we talk to the kids about that's very distracting because God may be speaking to someone beside you and when you get up and walk out, so we spend time talking about something that simple—go to the restroom before you go in. You can last this one hour—that's a way to honor God. (Everyone laughs)

Man: Don't bring your Sprite into worship.

Woman continues: But I also encourage parents... I send a little note home to the parents to encourage them this is something we do with our own children and because I read this book *Parenting in the Pew* and can't remember who the writer, Ruth Bell Graham wrote the foreword said she wished she had it for her children so we had done that with our kids and we would just give them little treats for hearing some word in the pastor's sermon. You know we would take in a little bag of dry cereal and then as they heard the pastor say "Jesus" they would be able to eat one of those... so that makes them be an active listener to the worship service. And so my children loved that. So I started sharing that with other parents and that's one of the things we do in the month that leads up to them worshiping with their families. We bring that and we do that with them when we teach our lessons they get to eat...

Man: For younger children that's a great way to get them to understand, "Oh, I'm supposed to be listening to this guy not just drawing or playing."

Woman continues: Right. So that's what we try to train. And then when they move into Doug's group, he gives them ways to take notes in summer worship and gives them books that go along with what Pastor Mike is teaching and we give them visual cues, "Now you will see after the singing you will see Pastor Mike take his Bible, walk up—that's your cue to get your food out." So we go that mechanical with our kids so that they can enjoy the worship experience.

Bob: That's great comments and good participation. We want to thank you for that. We want to look at another topic and these are all fairly related. We heard earlier that a lot of churches, their Sunday school leaders are trained in evangelism—very simple evangelism—and they're geared toward counseling with the children and sharing the Gospel with the children, they know how to do that. First of all let's talk about the adults working with the children. What kind of training do they get, I know we just briefly touched on that, what does it entail, is there a particular curriculum, what do you use...

Man: Training curriculum?

Bob: Yeah for helping the adults share with children. Like, such as Sunday school teachers or even parents for that matter. What does your church do?

Man: Ours is self written. I've never found a teacher training curriculum that I thought was worth using all of it. Again, a piece of this and a piece of that.

Bob: Even for the evangelistic, for helping them share...

Woman: We've tried to get ours to go to Child Evangelism Fellowship trainings. We've had them at our church. We, that's the one closest to a full program that we have found. You know, we...

Man: But even then, because it's so dry...

Woman: We still have to subsidize.

Man: ...we take a bulk of that, a sprinkle there other stuff.

Bob: (name) What do you use? You do it, but it doesn't sound like it's very [529]

Woman: It's something that I've written and used. It's a very simple process, and we do go over it...I go over it with them at least one time in person at one of our meetings that we have every 8 weeks. But, also, and y'all may think this sounds silly, but this is the only way that I've found that I can make sure that every teacher, especially if they come in during the year or if they're maybe just a helper or whatever, I actually have it on CD. I just had somebody in our church record it. We put it on a CD so that they can listen to it in their car or whatever, and we also have it on video. And I feel like it's the goofiest thing in the world to have to give something that I've done with my teachers and hand it to somebody and say, "Just listen to this at your leisure. Maybe it will be helpful to you." But that way I can make sure that they at least have the basics of the tools that they need in order to be able to lead a child to Christ if they're not comfortable. We have a church of very young believers, and so a lot of times that thought is totally overwhelming to them, and so we just make it as simple as possible. And, you know the Gospel message is so simple. That I think if we boil it all down and say "Share what Christ has done in your heart, and then take them through these scriptures and use this little diagram..." We have certain key buzzwords that we use that I say with kids that will help them so much. Don't say that the wages of sin is death—they don't know what wages are. Say there's a special punishment—do you know what a punishment is? Every kid knows what punishment is. So, I try to give them those as a tool but it's just something that we've developed and written and then we make sure they get it one on one but also they have it handed to them so they can always go back to it. And then we just have little pamphlets that we give them also that has the same scriptures that they can use.

Bob: Okay. So what I'm hearing is the tools, for the training tools were [563] in-house kind of, there's a mentoring process that goes on, and then a resource—the CD—[566]. Everybody pretty well in agreement that that's what you do? You don't have any particular...

Man: For the most part. We use these right here. This is what we train our teachers with right here; Awana and Sunday school teachers. I've just found as far as, this little piece right here is probably as close as I've found to being able to dialog-wise get a teacher to be able to take a child through it, teach a parent how to take a child through it. I've had a parent tell me before when I've just given it to them, "That's one of the best things I've ever had for answering questions and systematically taking kids through the Gospel and seeing that they're ready and if they are, moving on with them." We train our Awana leaders and Sunday school teachers twice a year before the new Sunday school year begins and in January in a big winter rally. Everybody that works in the elementary

ministry is expected to be trained in children's decision counseling and we use the tracts here but like you guys are saying, when it comes to actually training them, I've got my own training materials that I've learned from pulling from stuff I like some CEF stuff—there's stuff I don't like; there's SBC stuff I like, stuff I don't like, you know from all of them, Gospel Light, and basically develop my own training outline and things like that. How do you know when a child's ready, what to look for what to use with them, how to, different questions and illustrations you can use along the way; how to know when they're not ready and their really what we call a first step and if they are ready help them make that decision and then the whole process like I said earlier of our follow up, our new Christians class and things like that even before baptism. So, we use these tracts, but we write our own training stuff for Sunday school, Awana, and even Vacation Bible School and camp people. And then, I have parents that we take through training also that are allowed to come to those. We invite parents too, so that they can know how to dialog with their kids at home or in the neighborhood, things like that.

Bob: That's a good segue because wanted to look at...we've talked about adult teachers, but parents...how do you get parents involved in sharing Christ with their own children? What do you do in your church for that?

Man: We're like Rob. We use this, but we also came up with discipleship manual. One's for 1st and 2nd grade the other one's for 3rd through 5th grade. It's got coloring sheets in there. For the 3rd through 5th it goes into more wordsearch, crossword kind of fun games for them whereas 1st and 2nd is more coloring and easier kind of wordsearch games for them that relates to salvation, baptism, Bible study, prayer, worship. It goes through the whole thing. 1st and 2nd grade's about 32 pages and it's about 50 pages for the 3rd through 5th grade and at the very back of it it's got what we believe as a church and the last page is like a permission slip that the parents have to sign that 'cause once the kid makes a decision we don't just go ahead and dunk him in the water and that's it. They've got to go through this manual with the parents, and then like I said the last page is like a permission slip so the parents have got to sign that slip saying that they've gone through that booklet or that manual with the child and that they understand the decision that they've made and they believe that the decision that they made was real and now they're allowing them to get baptized. So if they come to the baptism room that same night and those parents don't have that slip, they don't go through.

Bob: So the parents are involved working through this booklet with the child...

Man: Yeah. And they may not be the one that led them to Christ, but they're the ones that'll help like in that first step once they make that decision to help them grow in their walk.

Man: So you don't use that in the new Christians class. You do that, when they make a decision you just give that to the parent and they go through it with them.

Man continues: Yeah. And we also have a four-week new Christians class that we do with them too, that they go through with a teacher. It's a small group; we have no more than 10 kids. We don't put 1st through 5th graders, we kind of split them up, either 1st and 2nd or 1st through 3rd, and then 3rd through 5th. We just kind of keep it like that so there's not that big diversity. But they have that, so the parents don't feel like they're left out...

Woman: What time do you do, I mean, where do you fit that into your schedule that new Christians class?

Man continues: We have one at 11 o'clock so we try not to get where they miss Sunday school but sometimes it happens that way. So they'll just miss four weeks of Sunday school. But we do that at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning. We're about to go to where we do one at 9:30 and one at 11 so we don't miss Sunday school.

Man: And you say that is mandatory...you do not baptize them unless they have...

Man continues: If the parents don't come to the baptism room that Sunday night without that permission slip, then they can't be baptized. Too often they do...okay great. The kid made a decision let's get him baptized. Then the kid gets to be 25 years old and realize he never made that decision. So we want to make sure the parents really go through the kit...that includes them in the process too. They just don't feel their on the outside looking in. It's really cool. It's kind of funny. Our pastor saying...during a sermon he was talking to the parents and he said don't let a staff member or somebody else at the church rob you of leading your kid to Christ. There's too many times, you know, where parents will say, "Well, I think Jimmy is ready to make a decision. I'm gonna kind of come and have him talk to you." Well, he'll talk to me about everything under the sun, and then I'll get to that point and boy he'll clam up and here's mom or dad saying...well, I'm like, well that's great but I need to hear it from him. This allows them to then, with the tract we use right here in addition to that discipleship manual for them to go through and figure out did he really understand what he was doing or did he just see his buddy get baptized and that's what he wanted to do.

Woman: And did you produce this discipleship manual or is this...

Man continues: Yeah. We did it ourselves.

Bob: That sounds like a very interesting way to get the parents involved in evangelizing their own children. What do some of you do to help get parents involved in evangelizing children?

Man: Go back to Awana again. You know Awana is built around children learning the Bible verses and things of that nature [672] evangelism [676] evangelistic just for that process they're involved...

Bob: The parents are involved?

Man: yeah. They're involved with the children in the process of them learning their Bible verses and things of that nature.

Woman: We have kind of two different populations of parents. We do have those opportunities, as a matter of fact we say "You are your child's greatest spiritual hero, our teachers want to be your sidekicks." That's one of the things we say. We want to be the Robin, but you're the Batman. And so we try to get that idea across and we have discipleship classes—How to share Christ with your child—to help answer those questions and we always have permission from the parents before we even talk to a child about baptism. We call the parents, and if the child has prayed to receive Christ or shown great spiritual interest, we call the parent and talk with them. Unfortunately, we have

some children who we would never get the kind of involvement that we would like. Their parents may not know Christ. And a lot of times they'll say, "Well, if that's what they want to do and it's okay with [697] then yeah, that's fine."

Man: That's all the way up through what age would you talk with a parent before you...6th grade or...

Woman continues: Oh yeah. Before we would baptize a child. Now we will talk with them. We'll lead them to Christ...

Man: And then it's talking to the parents after...

Woman continues: And telling them this is... "To let you know we are so excited for you because did Johnny tell you that he actually came to a point in his life..." and there have been several times that we have had the opportunity to share Christ really with the first time in a way that the parent could understand it. Whether they were from a different denominational background or whatever, they had never really understood what that meant. I wish that we could have more parent involvement, but for some of our kids I'm afraid that's not possible.

Bob: So the [716] there is the fact that you do have some parental involvement but then you have some children that the parents are uninvolved in the life of the church themselves, and so that's always a challenge. Anyone else have a way to confront that challenge?

Man: Well, I mean like you guys have said. We have ways that we engage the parents and involve them in the process, but a lot of this is post-evangelism. I mean, you're asking, "How do we involve parents and get them to evangelize their own children?" I just say, we don't have an effective way of doing that. I mean, certainly not as a children's ministry. As a church, I mean like you said, our pastor talk to our congregation and encourage them in that way, but short of those sorts of things, we certainly don't have an effective way to get parents to evangelize their children. We have tools just like all of you guys have talked about where we involve the parents the child prayed to receive Christ in Sunday school, or began to ask some questions about that. We have material that we send to parents...

Woman: That's what I was going to say, also...

Man continues: We have some material that we will send to parents with a letter saying "Hey, your child's been asking a lot of questions here's some stuff that we really think would help you to guide them through this process." But I mean I wouldn't say, "Boy now that's a tool that really gets parents involved in evangelism."

Bob: Basically you're just trying to encourage their involvement.

Woman: Right. And then when they come to us and say, "He's asking a lot of questions, will you talk to him..."

Bob: So they abdicate their responsibility?

Woman: Exactly. Because the issue is when it's believing parents they so desperately want their children to come to Christ that they need an objective observer to say, "You're

not pushing.” Yeah. They don’t want to push. They don’t want them to just come to Christ to please themselves. So they always come and say, “Would you talk to them and see what...” And so we have a book that he has pulled together from several sources...

Man: It’s just like we’ve talked about, it’s just pulling together the *When Can I* book, I think that’s LifeWay, and there’s another LifeWay book *Now that I’m a Christian* and just taking several of those and taking...

Woman: He’s just made a little pamphlet. It’s not very thick. It’s maybe five pages and when they stop us and say “They’re asking questions, what can you help us with?” we have that to send and say...and they really appreciate being able...because then the parents can do the thing themselves, then they can do it; that kind of enables them. You know, that little booklet.

Man: I think Doug’s right. I think there’s been a gap because most of what you said you hit it. Most of what we have, most of the material we use, the letters, the processes, new Christians class counseling, is all post-conversion. I think where we’ve missed the boat is in training and equipping parents to be the soul-winners and the evangelists in their household. And like you were saying, largely when we do encounter pre-conversion opportunities with parents, it’s either parents that are believers that are so excited that need to slow themselves down and get a second opinion, you know, and can you help us make sure; or parents by the droves that seem to be coming back to churches that have left the church them with their parents, they’re truly the real post-Christian generation but are realizing the mess out there in the world and they’re coming back not so much for themselves but for their kids, so they have no knowledge: “I don’t know what to do here. He’s starting to ask questions about stuff that I have no clue about.” You know it’s interesting talk about using this book right here, there’ve been times I’ve put this booklet right here in the hands of lost parents and said as they’re asking questions about baptism and asking questions about who Jesus is and what he did for us, why don’t you just night by night take him a little bit at a time through this. Over the years I’ve had lost parents come back and said, “I trusted Christ with that little book you gave me for my kid.” And that’s a neat thing right there when that happens. That’s cool.

Bob: So parental involvement is a big issue...

Man: But somehow I think the gap is like we’re saying all right, equipping parents-- material or a process or some way of those of us in children’s ministry connecting up with parents out there, Christian or non-Christian, for the sake of their children and really for the sake of their families. There’s nothing out there really that trains and equips parents on how to lead their kids to Christ. At least not that we’ve seen that we all really can say, “That’s the lynch pin, that’s the key. We’ve found it.”

Woman: When I teach the four or five week study, it’s something that I’ve had to write...well we just had it as one of our discipleship training options and the child training...

Man: Maybe on a Wednesday night or Sunday night whenever you do your church training, offering a course “How to lead your child to Christ.”

End Tape Side A

Begin Tape Side B

Woman: Frankly, I think we're as lost as a goose in [1]. You know, they don't have a relationship with the lord and they're floundering so much in their Biblical background that they don't know. And I had one lady say "This has been the hardest to talk about with my son. I think it's as hard to talk with him about this as it is to talk with him about sex." I mean it's like a taboo subject. They're so afraid they're going to say something wrong. that's going to have... And I'm like, "It's not rocket science."

Man: They need equipping just like our Sunday school and Awanas leaders do

Man: We do. Our pastor is not in favor of a mandatory process, you have to have done this before you can be baptized, but he's very much in favor of "We should educate them. That is a great thing. I want you to be doing that. But I just don't believe we ought to make it a mandatory thing." What we have tried to do is create some sort of a magnet that would make them want to do that. And it's a very touchy-feely thing, but it has worked beautifully for us. We have just a stairway in the church coming down toward the sanctuary and we have created a wall of handprints. Every time a child comes to me and meets with me and tells me about praying to receive Christ, we put their handprint on the wall with paint. They just think that is the neatest thing in the world. Now what that does is we offer a meeting with me to counsel about salvation, about baptism; we encourage that. If a parent says no, and it happens sometimes, and it happened more often when we first started. Ahhh, [17], she knows what she's doing; he knows what he's doing, nah, we're ready. We're just ready to be baptized. Now, so then, we started, created this handprint on the wall thing which makes the children, so if that child goes ahead and gets baptized and doesn't come to me and talk to me, well, you know, they don't get to put their handprint on the wall.

Woman: It's amazing. You would think this was...

Man continues: Now the child says, "No. I want to talk to him before we get baptized. I want to put my handprint on the wall." Now, so. I think it's just like you talked about it. It's like a second medical opinion type thing. So many parents just they just want, you know, "I want it so bad. I want someone who's a little more objective; just make sure just sit down and talk with them and make sure." And so that's something we offer. And a parent has to be involved in that. That's one of the rules. One of your parents have to be, love to have both of them here, but one of them has to be here for this. But here again, it's post-conversion. It's not really involving them in the evangelism of their own child.

Man: I wonder if they are bringing their child to you because they haven't prayed with them yet, and their wanting you to take them through the Gospel.

Woman: That's also where he hears all the skinny on all the church members He said now, do you understand sin? Have you ever sinned? "Well, I haven't, but you should hear the way my mom talks to my dad." They're on the hot seat and dad is loving it.

Woman: A lot of times kids want to be sure. A lot of times the kids will say, "I think maybe I did, but I'm not sure." And so one thing we always try to do is say, "Do you want to be sure? You can leave here today having heard from Christ and know that you

know that you know.” And you know maybe 2 years ago at VBS they did pray to receive Christ, but they’re not sure.

Man: Kids are so emotionally driven that sometimes that comes down to being discerning and careful, also, because you know during Starlight Crusade had a little 5th grade boy that’s in my children’s ministry ever since he, you know the whole time, and the same thing. Trusted Christ as his Savior two years ago at a Vacation Bible School, and as a 3rd grader I mean just really seemed to understand it, have a real simple but hard conviction of it. Came to see me on the Starlight kids night, you know, just lower lip quivering saying, “Mr. Rob I’m just, I don’t know, I don’t know now; I’m not sure, I don’t feel like maybe I am; I’m not sure.” So I sat down with him, dialogued with him, and took him back through the Gospel, you know, and took him back through a lot of what we call the diagnostic questions trying to really help and discern what he did understand, what he understood at that age group and trying to go back in time with him. And finally determined, you know, we don’t need to pray this again. You did trust Christ as your Savior at 3rd grade. And here’s another thing that’s lacking is a lot of assurance of salvation—verses and stuff like that. There’s a ton of stuff in the New Testament about assurance of salvation that never makes it into a children’s tract. Finally did in these right here back a few years ago, you know. Hebrews 7:25, Colossians 3:3. I mean passages like that that are just, you know, “Those that the Father gives me are mine no one can ever snatch them out of my hand.” in the book of Matthew. So I took little [48: child’s name] back through all that, you know those passages, and when he left he was like “Man, I’m never doubting my salvation again.” And because he needed to hear that. So it all really comes down to, I think, not any kind of canned presentation, it really comes down to individually having the tools to dialog with the child. Parents need that, workers need that, we need that.

Bob: You know we talked about the workers needing that and the parents needing that, what about the children? Children sharing with other children. Does that happen? And if so, what does that look like?

Man: We’ve taught our kids how to use this right here. When they produced this right here...

Bob: And that’s what? Just go ahead and share that....

Man: *Important Question for an Important Person.* We taught our kids, we did it two summers ago across a 12 week series in the summertime in Rocket Town specifically, and taught them how to be soul winners with that tract right there. And I’m doing it again this summer in a different series called *In His Steps* that I’m writing. You know, walking with Jesus. And part of it’s going to be, you know the theme is going to be: everybody Jesus touched, he changed them; and everybody he changed, went and told somebody else. So, we’re going to make soul winners out of them again this summer, and we’re going to, you know, we’re going to teach them...because kids, the neat thing about kids and conversion is if you teach a child that he needs to be a soul winner and how to be a soul winner, their not like teenagers, they don’t care—they’re going to go do it. I used to be a youth pastor. It’s like pulling teeth to get kids, teenagers, to share their faith on their campus with their friends, except for a select few. But kids, man, they don’t care. They’ll go do it. And if you train a child how to be a soul winner when they’re a kid, they’re just

going to grow up the rest of their years thinking, “Dude, that’s just what you do. That’s just part of being a Christian” you know, “That’s the Christian life,” and that’s what we want ingrained in about a young age.

Man: When do you program that? I mean, do you do that like on a Wednesday night, or...

Man: Kind of like what Ronnie was saying, during the school year with Awana, you know, one of the big things with Awana is getting to not only come and do their verse and things like that, but bring your friends because then they’ll be bringing them under the teaching of the word. Every event we do we’re trying to get our kids, like with Starlight Crusade kids night, you know we did a big signature contest and a big inviting contest trying to get them to invite as many friends as possible. But actually teaching kids how to be soul winners, we usually do that as a summer emphasis every year or every other year. You know, and it’s

Man: [74] type event, or...

Man: No; actually do it across the summer. We try to make it a campaign. At least that’s what I’ve done. I’ve usually tried to use either Sunday school material and write it in or like what we’ve been doing with children’s church, that becomes a summer series where every week through the Bible stories, the lessons, things like that, we’re always coming back to, “Now who’re you going to tell this week and how are you going to tell them?” and just kind of make it an ongoing thing. And like I say, that’s our theme for this summer: Everybody he touched he changed, and everybody he changed told somebody else. That’s kind of the *In His Steps* kind of thing.

Woman: I was just going to say that is not in a lot of our children’s resources.

Man: Teaching kids to be soul winners?

Woman: Teaching kids to be soul winners, teaching kids that they can flat have a dynamic, growing relationship with Christ. When the, after they accept Christ, making them assured of their salvation so that it’s settled. We get them with their tools. A lot of time it’s, “Okay; you prayed to receive Christ, that’s great, go.” And you know you still, I think that follow up with them and saying, “Yes, you should share your faith. This is a part of your discipleship.” And I think sometimes we sell our kids so, so short. Just in the matter of them being able to hear from the Holy Spirit. The Lord opening those opportunities. Them being allowed to experience God in their everyday lives. They have purpose driven lives, too. I just think often in the things that I find that I put my hands on, they’re selling the kids that do know the Lord short by what is offered to them. Even in just a form of kids’ worship to say, “Guys you may be here this morning because you’re mom brought you and that’s okay and you can sit here and have a great time. Everybody in here is going to have a great time. But if you want to you can stop and you can actually experience the living God during this time that we have together. Now, you’re going to have to have enough self control to sit quietly and listen, but God will speak to you.” And I just think that so often we don’t focus them towards that of the Spirit leading them to share Christ, of God giving them those opportunities, and God called them at that age because they will have opportunities to talk to kids. And I’ll tell them, “You know, you

are the coolest 5th grade boy I've ever seen. You've got athletic ability, you're going to come in contact with kids that you can reach for Christ—I will never be able, you know as a 30-something year-old old lady, to lead to Christ.” And so I do think that that's something if we had more tools.

Man: Kids are capable of so much more. If we ground them early not only in salvation, assurance of salvation, [105] with Christ and how to be a personal soul winner, you know, it needs to become lifestyle that's discipleship. The best evidence of a Christian is another Christian. And if you teach a child how to sow the seed, you know, they'll be a sower the rest of their life.

Bob: [name?] you're nodding your head. Does your church do anything to encourage children...

Man: Our Sunday school teachers go through the [109] every so often through this tract; as a matter of fact I got a call from a lady 2 weeks ago oldest daughter is 4th grade, she led her 1st grade daughter to the Lord using the stripes (?) in her bedroom one night. I have other stories of kids that could take this on the bus and they started asking other kids, “You know Jesus?” and they start opening this thing up... a kid did it on a playground—led a friend of hers to the Lord out on the playground. They were sitting there in front of the sandbox, 5th grade girl led another 5th grade girl to the Lord using this thing, took it to school with her.

Bob: Obviously they get to share those stories. Do they get to share them in the worship or...

Man: Yeah. We find out from parents that they share them in Sunday school, um, I relate them back to our Sunday school teachers at teacher training time; they were at children's camp. We have like 250, 300 kids that we take and they're able to share in front of all those people. But probably 35-40% of kids we take are visitors. They don't go to our church. So these other kids are able to hear how they go to their own school yards and are able to share Christ right there.

Bob: Others. How do you encourage or give to the children after they have accepted Christ to share Christ? Anybody do anything creative in that area?

Man: Nothing other than what's been mentioned. I don't do anything different than what these guys have said.

Bob: Let's press on because we keep bringing up topics that, actually, we do want to explore. The term discipleship came up. Not only the salvation of the child but also a lot of you were talking about assurance, making sure the child has that assurance, and that's part of the, to me anyway, the discipleship process. What does the discipleship process look like in your church for a child? Jerilyn I think you even said a lot of times we get the child to the point where they accept Christ then we just say, “go.” Well, what happens after “go”? What happens after “go” in your church?

Man: well, I would say most of [134], using the term discipleship as training a child, that happens in Sunday school more than any other area. I believe that Sunday school is more of that than Awana is. We use Awana and it's great, certainly in the memorization of

God's word, I mean there's discipling going on. I think for us in our programming, it's Sunday school that drives discipleship for our children.

Bob: Okay. So a lot of it's happening in the Sunday school. Any other place else where it might be happening?

Man: To a degree in children's church with the series that we teach and the topical approach that we take helping(?) tie it to the year, also.

Woman: I think our children's camp, too is very intense and very methodical in what we bring to the kids, because that's our core.

Men: We teach a series at camp also, I mean they're getting steak for a week at kids camp.

Woman: Exactly. That's what ours is structured as.

Woman: Well, it's like them being at church every time the doors are open for six months. That's the opportunity you have when you take them to camp. [147] hours everyday they spend. Our Wednesday nights are our discipleship time for our kids.

Bob: And what does that look like?

Woman: Most recently we've been using Saddlebacks' *Break In, Break Out, Break Through* materials a four-year cycle, and it goes through all the basics of the faith, basically. They each have their own little notebooks. It's small group. It's usually not more than 20 in a group and they actually work through that manual in a year and it goes through things like "What is the Bible?" "Who is Jesus?" "What is baptism?" all of those types of things. "How the Bible is arranged." It's also very heavy, thought, on the life application side.

Bob: [156]

Woman: I think kids especially today, you know if you hear them complaining about something at school, it's because why do I care what the major crop of Brazil is? When am I going to use that? So there's always a tie-in. There's always a key concept, there's always something in their verse that they can go and use that week; that they can apply that week. And so we've just found that as a part of our discipleship is training them to go live it. Not just learn it, but learn it, and then live it and apply it.

Bob: Okay. That's a little bit of what I was hearing. Let me just summarize again. A lot of discipleship what I'm hearing is about learning activities, Sunday school, this Wednesday night, but that's kind of leading into life application also, you know, how to live that out. What about discipleship as involvement within the church. We alluded to that with children sharing their faith as a way they can be active participants, but what about active participants in the church? How does that discipleship component play out? Or does it?

Men: ...involving them in Sunday morning, Sunday night-type big worship stuff, or what are you...

Bob: I don't want to lead it too much

Man: Taking a role...

Bob Taking a role. How do children take roles? How do children take roles of involvement in the church?

Woman: We have a First Impressions Team. And so, some of our children, if they have a heart for that, and especially of your kids are the go-getters, they can be a part of our FIT team which is the First Impressions Team.

Bob: And they do what?

Woman: Those are the kids that stand, we have to have an adult that oversees them, but they have (and I lost my coordinator for it so hopefully this year we'll be able to get another one back on board, now one of our regular coordinators has to oversee it) but we have an adult that oversees them, but it's our older children basically 4th and 5th graders so that when a new family comes in to our fellowship for Bible study or kids worship or whatever, they can actually have a boy or girl that's within three or four years of their age to introduce themselves and to go with them to the location where they need to be and they're part of the FIT team and they go through a training and they have a little T-shirt (they'll do anything for a T-shirt).

Bob: Okay. That's obviously one way in which they're involved in church—other ways...

Man: We've got two things that we've done for years. Two ways that kids can serve even just right in our Sunday school ministry and now some of our Awana leaders are starting to do them too, called Care Kids and Prayer Pals. Care Kids is basically, and these are ideas years ago that came from Sunday school teachers and we just went children ministry-wide with them. Care Kids are basically our version of adult outreach leaders. These are kids that have about anywhere from six to eight names on the role of other kids that've either visited or they're just inactives—they're names on a role that we've never seen—and these kids are given a certain block of these on every role in a class and given the responsibility of a couple time a month calling and writing cards to those kids to try to involve them and then on Sunday [196] FIT thing, they've got a badge that says "I'm Care Kid" that's got their name on it, and they're the class greeter. They're not just sitting back with their buddies in class, they're waiting by the door with the teacher waiting for new faces. And we do a once-a-month outreach night where they just, we get them all together, feed them pizza and lemonade, and cookies and then do a little bit of training on phone conversations, how to write letters and cards, making visits for the 4th and 5th graders and their teachers and just really try to mass do that. Kid Prayer Pals is similar but a little bit different. These are kids that each class uses that are like the children's ministry version of prayer group leaders in a Sunday school class. Small group, you know, like the little whatever you call them...you know what I'm saying...the people that care for each other. These kids that are Prayer Pals may not be as outgoing and energetic as the other ones, but they'll have five or six names of fellow active classmates, and they have a little book of them, too. They just keep a log of what's going on in their life, send a card on their birthday, call them from time to time and just say "Hey. Is there something I can pray for you about? How's your grandma doing? I remember I prayed for her last month. How'd her surgery go?" and things like that. Care Kids connects kids

to the children's ministry. Where [210] connects them if they've been lost, Prayer Pals keeps them connected by 'cause once a kid starts coming and staying involved, or course you know, it's still nice to get calls and cards and things like that and it's a way of keeping them connected to each other. So we use both of those primarily in 2nd through 5th grades. Mostly the older grades, the higher up grades they go the more active they are because the more responsibility they can take alongside their teacher. It help the teachers plus it involves these kids in ministry.

Man: Now would the teacher, every year when you would promote Sunday school, the teacher would kind of look for that [over talking] and say, "Hey would you like to..."

Man: And they have really the option of not necessarily picking kids and then using the same kids all year long; some of them about mid-year will swap out and let other kids step in as Prayer Pals and Care Kids, you know. 'Cause everybody wants to do it, you know. [219] if the teachers are doing it right.

Bob: [220-221] Everybody...children...ongoing...discipleship being involved in the life of the church. Any others? Let's move on. [225] Jerilyn, you shared this about the different types of communities in which, you know, the kids in church come from. You know, some churches primarily reach children of parents already involved in church whereas others tend to reach out more into the community and involve more children from outside the church, so there's those two sides. They overlap, they're not a dichotomy, they overlap. Primarily though, primarily in your church where would you say the children in your church is reaching are coming from—the community or within the church itself?

Tom: Community.

Bob: You're reaching out to the community. How do you do that? I mean how do you focus your reach out to the community?

Tom: Really our recreation ministry is what's really been feeling our church. We've had a huge amount of families join just because they're coming to play ball at our church. There's a little building where our youth meet...they think that's North Metro and then they get in on the campus then we're all back in the back, and they're like, "man, I didn't know y'all were this big back here." So we're just getting an inordinate number of folks that are joining just coming because they're playing ball. It's amazing.

Bob: So recreation is a big out reach tool...

Tom: It's not just a ball league, because they do devotions after every practice with them and at the end the kids hear the Gospel [243] by the coach. And then we have a big awards night that's mainly for the parents, it's fun for the kids, but the Gospel presentation is targeted at the parents. We're seeing parents because their kids came to play ball. We're seeing not only kids get saved but moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles getting saved because they came to this one awards night with their kid's ball league or something, so it's really been cool.

Bob: Good. Ronnie, what would your church primarily draw from?

Ronnie: I really don't know.

Bob: Okay. That's fair enough.

Ronnie: You know, I don't, there's nothing that's really in place. I think there's spurts of excitement and children will go out and share with other kids at school, but you know I don't know of anything other than what we've already talked about as far as you know, kids inviting other kids to like Vacation Bible School. We really don't have a children's recreation-type process in place.

Man: Bob, can you repeat the question? I was capturing a thought...

Bob: Yeah. What Ronnie and I were just talking about...the question is primarily, you know, churches tend to primarily draw from the community of they tend to primarily draw from children of parents already involved in then church, and which one best characterizes your congregation and also why is that and Tom just shared with us that they reach out really to the community and primarily do that through recreation and even get parents involved through that. And Ronnie was sharing, not really which way, but you did mention events.

Man: Yeah. I mentioned earlier, you know, the Easter celebration. It's a fairly small community, but we'll draw 6-700 people, you know, annually to that type of thing. And not only do we just have the dramas I mentioned earlier and the Easter egg hunt, but we'll put on all our ministries. We'll have tables set up as far as the different ministries...the children's church, we have a puppet type scene that will take place so people as they stroll by and as their on these moonwalks and different other activities they also see the ministries that we have and of course we specifically and people at tables where they can explain the type things, and that's helped be a drawing card as far as...

Bob: So, but the event, you're relying more on events at your church, but those events are geared toward community...

Man: Community rather than within.

Bob: Okay.

Man: I mean that's where your outreach tool is, you know. That's the way I see it. Reaching out to those that hadn't been touched. Course, then you got, you know, it's really not children we kind of [286] but we've got it set up as far as our teachers, as far as our care groups and things of that nature reaching out and insuring that in-reach you might say touching the kids that's already there. But as far as children, you know, we really don't have that in place in fact I'm writing that down as one of my ideas to take back to do some things like that.

Bob: I want to take a personal prerogative here as moderator, because I think this is an interesting discussion. I know we have larger churches and I think you said your church was a smaller congregations. Do the smaller congregations rely more on events rather than maybe some ongoing things? And how does that maybe impact whether you reach within the church or within the community itself?

Woman: God just opened a door where we go pick up about 25 children on Wednesday night. It's Hispanic children...and they come to our church and we feed them a free meal, and they get to come. We have a leader that shares with them each week and they meet in

groups and it's just been wonderful to watch those children grow. Some of them have accepted Christ already and the plan, we're praying about a playground, so now God has answered the prayer to give us the funds to have a playground. But our intent is to have like a soccer field and then invite their families to come—because they love soccer—so we're trying to find ways that they can come and each month they have a super Sunday and we go to the homes and visit those families and bring them on Sunday morning. We take the vans—and we're buying a van, also. So pray that God also provides the funds for that because it's growing. Those children love to hear. They don't have, their families aren't coming right now, but we want to find ways to reach them and bring them, too.

Bob: How have you advertised that?

Woman: We just went to homes, Heather Hancock just had a heart for Hispanic children and she had done some Backyard Bible clubs in their neighborhood, so a couple of the girls that she knew, they remembered her so she just went to them and talked and started finding out that they did want to come to church. So we opened the doors and it's just been wonderful.

Bob: So you relied on events. With Backyard Bible clubs...

Woman: That's how it began. She was not in our church at that time, and then she was invited to come and start that ministry within our church. It's just been awesome how God has worked...and our children are just right there, you know, it's all the same. It's really neat.

Man: Hebron's in a unique situation because our pastor, Larry Wynn, has been the pastor for 26 years. 26 years he's been the pastor. And he's always been a guy that has been out there in the community. I mean involved in the schools, involved in community events, involved in local businesses and things like that, and anybody that comes on staff we all have to be the same way, and the whole church has really kind of adopted this church-without-walls concept. And, you know, we want to be, and Hebron is a unique critter up there in our part of Gwinnett County because of the fact it's not just another church on the corner. When people think of Dacula, Georgia, they think [236] big Hebron church up there, you know. And, I mean, Hebron is just all over the place. I mean people that are in the school system and local business and politics are Hebron members—we're all over the map. And I think the church today largely across America is largely viewed as irrelevant because we're a church still within the walls. We put cute little phrases on our signs out front—clever little phrase—and we expect them to come visit us, you know, instead of getting out there where they are and being involved where they are in their lives and going where they are and doing things out there among them, and eventually connecting them hopefully through a relationship with Christ and growth and things like that with the life of our church, but... He said once in a sermon about a year ago, he said God's called us to be a lighthouse to this community and a greenhouse for believers once we get them here. A lighthouse and a greenhouse. And I know for myself I'm on the elementary schools all the time. I'm on a first name basis with about 7 or 8 principals at elementary schools; and the ones I'm not on, my associates are on other ones. I mean we're on a total, I mean between all my children's stuff, we're on a total of about 12 elementary schools on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. And you talk about being community oriented—that's where we need to be. Instead of expecting people to come to our events

or we sit in our offices and make our plans. I mean, it's okay—it's important, it's wonderful to ongoing Awana's and children's church, camps and VBS, programs and events, but man I think what lends credibility to those is when the body of Christ, and when we train our children to be this way, too—get outside the walls. That's when the church will really be relevant in the world again.

Woman: They'd BE the church.

Man: Right. We are the church. The church is not the walls. Being the church, that's the phrase. But we are the church out there, not just when we're in the confines of our wall and our property.

Bob: Since we are talking about children's evangelism this morning, you know usually the vision for really reaching children, you know those come from scripture, but you know, some person within the congregation really picks that up and goes with it, you know. It could be pastor, it could be someone else in the congregation that really has a heart ministry—I think we've heard both sides of that. In your congregation, who would it be? Would it be the pastor? or would it be someone that's really driven that in your congregation?

Man: I would say that with us, I'll just start with me. It's the children's ministry but fortunately, Larry is a big advocate of our preschool and children's ministries. When he first came to Hebron years ago he was a part-time children's pastor, so he understands the children's ministry and we get a lot of advocacy from him. And I think like Ronnie was saying earlier, you know, you can have, be pushed and have the greatest children's ministry, most out-reach oriented children's ministry in the world, but if your pastor is not the big focal and vocal point...

Bob: I see a lot of vigorous head-nodding here agreeing with that....

Woman: We tend to follow by example, so that when they are leading, we will follow and be leaders ourselves.

Man: I think every pastor in America needs to read George Barna's newest book *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* and also Josh McDowell's book *Beyond Belief*, I mean those are two big guys, big guns in Christian...in the Christian arena, that are coming around to children's ministry now.

Woman: Bill Hybel said, I got the opportunity I usually get to choose one really great training event that I get to go to a year. One good one. I got the opportunity to go to Willow Creek and hear him. Bill Hybel, he said, "If I was starting a church and I was starting over, and I had one thing, I had one card to play, I had one area that I could put resources and money that would be the growth engine of the church, I would put it in children's ministry." And I think if we could...

Woman: Did you weep at his feet?

Laughter

Woman: There was like 3 or 4,000 children's ministers there and everybody went—ahhhh. It was incredible. He wrote the forward of George Barna's book. And so, you

know I think if we can share that, that that is where it's at and I think for the first time in history we can have an 8-year old that decides whether or not his parents go to church. I mean no adult hopefully in their right mind wants to go to Chucky Cheese, but adults go to Chucky Cheese all the time. And why? Because their kids drive them crazy to go. I have no more evidence of God's spirit at work than when parents get out of corporate worship and their standing at the door waiting for us to finish with kids worship because of our prayer time and their kids don't want to leave. They see their parents at the door and don't want to leave. It mean's God's spirit is at work. And so I think if we can, it does come from the top down and we just lost our senior pastor he went to another ministry about 6 or 8 weeks ago, and I'm praying, he really had a heart he said if we're really going to reach young families, if we're going to reach these people, they expect us to be Le Petit Academy, they expect us to be Primrose with their preschoolers. They expect their children, their children don't want to go, they're not going to make them go. And so

Man: It's a different day.

Woman: That's right. I had a grandfather stop me in the hall a couple of weeks ago, had brought a granddaughter and that is everywhere now—all the grandparents are raising grandchildren—and he was coming in and saying, you know, "We go to this church, but she just hates it. We're not members here, we're just visiting; can you just show me...." And so I got the opportunity to show him our children's church and just kind of showcase that for him and tell him, "This is what we do and this is not just a playtime. We're teaching her how to worship," and she's screamed bloody murder when he picked her up. She wouldn't go home. And he said, "We'll be back."

Bob: What I'm hearing, though, is senior pastor is pretty key to really getting that vision out there for the church.

Man: If he doesn't catch the vision, it's not going to carry through the congregation. And so many of them—I can say this because I'm a pastor—so many of them are still old school.

Bob: What do you mean by that?

Man: What I mean by that is most pastors out there still, you know, they think about what she said of what you said, they think children's and preschool ministries are the child care until they get to the real ministry: student ministry. And I used to be a youth pastor. I know that mentality. But what most of them need to wake up, what most of them have not woken up and realized is what we're saying here is that when you look at the culture, and the enemy is leveling his guns at those age groups now, and you look at what's going on, the lack of what's going on in the body of Christ when it comes to children's ministry, if pastors don't hurry up and catch it, we could lose a generation. You know, because we're still doing it, we're still doing it old school.

Woman: We could lose it permanently.

Man: Yeah. Josh McDowell even said that. He says we're at most two generations away from looking like the Church of England if we don't do something with our children now. And I even had a youth pastor tell me once, this blew me away, old youth pastor buddy of

mine about five years ago said, he said, “Man, I look at the culture now, for teenagers I’m waging a war behind enemy lines. I’m not only trying to reach kids out of an already godless, jaded culture, but trying to reclaim Christian kids that have gotten messed up in it. You guys in children’s ministry are on the frontlines of the war now. That’s where the battle lines are.” I was like, “Man you’re right.”

Man: Church budgets and church staffs don’t show it, though

Man: You’re right.

Bob: Why is that?

Man: 8 out of 10, because of the fact that they’ve missed it. 8 out of 10 dollars in a church budget are still spent on adult ministries and adult-related ministries, and youth ministry to a degree—yet 4 out of 10, according to Barna, on any given Sunday or Wednesday, are 12 years old and younger that are in attendance. There’s a serious problem there.

Bob: And how does that change?

Man: Revival. People that understand children’s ministry, being passionate about it, and pastors catching it.

Man: I’ve been trying to figure that out. I’m fairly new at this. I was a packaging engineer for 15 years and the Lord called me into the ministry so I’ve been doing children’s ministry for 4 years—love it, wouldn’t do anything different—but quite frankly I don’t know the answer to that. It seems obvious, even if you look, I mean I don’t know if any of you guys have ever done any kind of demographic survey of your communities, I mean good gracious our prospects are in that young parenting age; that’s the people who are going to come. And you know, studies tell you, mama’s who decides whether they come back and why does mama decide? Because that’s what the baby said.

Man: It’s got to be a culture change.

Man: Where does the money come? From the children? Money comes through adults. The adults are saying: I’m giving my money. Yeah, they love their children, but we’re selfish.

Man: I think it’s like that. I think it’s the old high school football mentality.

Man: Exactly right.

Man: That’s where the money comes from so that’s where

Woman: So women’s softball is out on the edge.

Woman: I think too, making, and this is where pastors are so key and people that are, that do have that interaction with the adults, you know there are people on our leadership council that I never see. Never see them. For months I never see them. Because I’m involved in the children’s ministry area every time and they don’t have a child in my ministry area and so I’ve had to be very intentional in allowing them to see updates and courtesy copying them on memos saying, “Praise God, did you hear what happened last

week?” You know, thank you so much for fixing the air conditioning problem because it was 90 degrees and we had 126 kids in there—and you start passing out and you start saying thank you, thank you for that because you took care of that for us and because you helped us with that, you know, 4 kids last week during that service prayed to receive Christ. Letting them know and getting the word out and then if your leadership will go for it, make the adults uncomfortable.

Laughter

Man: I really do. I didn't grow up in church. I don't speak the church language very well. I'm a business man, and that's exactly what I see, I always just say I think it's the high school football mentality. The high school football team is who brings in the money so that's where we're going to invest the money. I think it's the adults who give the money so that's where we're going to invest the money. I don't know that. I'm not at the mega-metro pastors conference. I don't know what they're talking about. I love my pastor. I love my church. I can't, we're not, this is not slamming on them at all, but rarely does my pastor come back from a mega metro pastors event with dynamic children's ministry idea. You know, I just don't think that's what they talk about.

General jabber

Woman: But you know here's the key, and I really do think we're in the midst of change where we are because of these demographics that he's brought continually to the forefront. We have changed, we do something, we started doing Global Focus about 5 years ago—5 years ago, 6?—and we do a huge missions conference at our church. So we've taken that and kind of used it as a springboard. We talk now about Jerusalem missionaries being the people who leave the Sunday school class to go work in children's ministry—that you never see again. You know—wonder what happened... Because what would happened is a class might adopt a missionary and that missionary might be in Nairobi and they would know more about that family than the couple that teaches their 2-year old, or the couple that teaches their 5-year old or their first grader, so that program has brought our fellowship a long way in understanding what it is we do in children's ministry because what we have for it, we have 4 days a year that we call Jerusalem Missionary Sundays. And what happens on that day is somebody in your adult Sunday school class—you're the teacher, you have to find 2 people to go into a certain class, and those 2 teachers will come to your class to talk to your class to talk about what their ministry has meant to them. And then we've got adults going into the children's ministry and the preschool ministry that have never been over there before, you know, just for a day to see what we do. And it's changing the mindset. It's changing the idea of us as a foreign country, and we're doing this altogether. And the way we can build your adult class is if we've go four solid people from your group to come and teach our 2-year olds and go and visit those moms and dads and bring them in—that's how we grow our church.

Man: I also think part of it is the out-of-sight out-of-mind thing. I mean, because we are children's ministry, we're not up front in the church much—Sunday morning, Sunday night—and it is a fact, if you're out-of-sight you tend to be out-of-mind.

Woman: Unless there's a problem.

Bob: We need to wrap up. We can continue this discussion at lunch, I hope you can stay for lunch. But as we wrap up, just in one sentence—real brief sentence—what’s one thing that we can learn to help us to be more effective in children’s evangelism? What is that one thing? Think about that for just a second. One thing, brief sentence, that could help us be more effective in children’s evangelism. Tom, let’s start with you.

Tom: Thanks. I think it’s just being intentional.

Bob: Be intentional. name...

Woman : I wrote down exactly the same word right there before you said anything. Being intentional and knowing that it can and does happen and we need to encourage it.

Bob: name...

Man: The word vision comes to mind. I think based on what we see in the culture and what we see within the church, I think it’s time that we catch a vision for the desperate times and the desperate need for aggressive, intentional children’s ministry. Not only capture that vision and get a God-given vision for the future of the body of Christ, but effective means of communicating that vision. I think it’s all about vision—without vision the people perish.

Bob: Doug

Doug: Well, being an engineer, I have to be real practical. To me it’s processes. I mean you’ve got to be intentional, you’ve got to have vision, but just the things we’ve talked about. It happens on different levels. It happens when you equip children and send them out with a tool to make it happen. It happens when you (556—someone coughing) you create a process and a tool to make it happen. Getting into a school. I think when a church has the venue to get into this school and begin to see children and impact children...it’s not going to happen as long as we sit back and we wait for them to come to us. It’ll happen through attrition. I’m going to have a child who’s going to have a child and they’re going to be in church. And so we can just wait and get those. But it really happens when we get out and have a process and a way to make it happen. We’re into that school, we see those children, we have this soccer feel—man let’s do something with this community to get these kids up here so that we can have a shot at them. So it’s creating the processes to get you the shots. If you don’t get open you can’t shoot the ball.

Woman: Exactly. I think the strategies we’ve talked about today—I love something Jerilyn said—plundering the Egyptians. We’ve got to become more intentional about taking whatever we can from the world that is drawing our kids and using that to bring them to Christ. Because you know we’ve got to be intentional and strategic in looking for those things.

Woman: I would just say whatever it takes. Being intentional, prayer, pray for salvation, I think sometimes we get so busy in the doing and making sure things are going the way they should [576] talking to myself...

Bob: we’ve got to do but we’ve got to...

Woman continues: We've got to do what it takes and it involves sacrifice.

Bob: name???

Man: Don't fear being evangelistic with children.

Bob: well I do want to thank you for your time today. We were a very energized group, I love those kind of groups. You shared a wealth of information. I know it's going to be helpful for Skip. It's going to be helpful for this agency. And ultimately it will be helpful for the churches as they seek to reach children. Not for the church's sake, but for the kingdom's sake. Skip has some final words, and we do want to serve you lunch. We hope you can stay for lunch. And again, thank you for your time today and thank you for your participation.

Skip: This whole focus group came about as a result, I don't know if you're aware of it, but we have a few markers as Southern Baptists to look at trends that are happening. One of those markers is baptisms, baptisms of children between the ages of 9 and 11 are at a 30 year low and continue to drop and drop and drop and drop. And we're trying to figure out what's going on, and so we called this group (with the help of Bob and Phil) just to study, just to look at what's happening in churches because you guys are effective at reaching and baptizing children. It's very difficult—some of you know me—it's very difficult to sit here and be quiet. They instructed me not to say a word. But I think as children's ministers and leaders, one of the things we have to decide are we going to be about just saying we want people come to church or we want people to become, be the church. There's a big difference there. For so long we set as our standard of success the number of people we have coming to church and that has proved to me over the 30-year trends that that's not working. So Bob and Phil are going to take this information. They're going to put together a survey and they're going to send out a survey based on your comments today, and I don't know—will this group receive the survey also?

Bob: Possibly

Skip: Possibly, and we're going to do some more in-depth, statistical research and we will be sure that you're informed of what the results are. It's going to take us, take them awhile. [621] They've been very gracious to set this up and you've been very gracious for coming because I know that some of you came a long way just to be here and we appreciate that. I have a couple more gifts for you. We have for you the official NAMB—North American Mission Board—mug, I want you to be sure to get one of those. I want you to just pick one up as you leave. We have one for everybody. And we also have Dr. Reccord and Randy Singer, their new book. That's the president and vice president, executive vice president and president of the North American Mission Board this is an excellent book, excellent book. I'm about half way through it now I just keep reading it and re-reading it it's so good and they've even been so nice as to autograph each copy. So, I'm going to leave them here and let you pick one up. So, help yourself. Let me have a word of prayer, and then we will take you downstairs. Can everybody stay for lunch? Has anybody got to leave? Lunch will be served downstairs in our cafeteria—we'll take you down there. We have a room off to the side where we can continue discussing. I have a few things I'd like to say also. But let's have a word of prayer....