

# CHILDREN: The Future And The Present

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## INTRODUCTION

I believe that when Jesus Christ said to His disciples to let the children come to Him, He meant more than just their salvation. He intended for children to be active participants in the kingdom's work, not merely its beneficiaries.

There are numerous instances in the Bible where God used young children in the ministry. For instance, Eli began serving in the temple at around 3 to 4 years old and formally received his calling at about 12 years old. Another example is the boy who offered Jesus loaves, and fish, which Jesus then used to feed the multitudes. That young boy evidently participated in that miraculous work for the kingdom. Jesus Christ, our Lord, also exemplified this. At just 12 years of age, he was already in the temple, engaging with the teachers of the law, demonstrating his capacity as a child to do the ministry of the Word. These examples are enlightening and inspiring, showing that we can start engaging or empowering children in kingdom work from an early age.

## CHALLENGE THE CONVENTIONAL APPROACH

The conventional approach in many Christian communities has been to regard children as the 'future of the church.' This perception fosters an environment where the spiritual and ministerial contributions of children are often overlooked, undervalued, or postponed until adulthood, or adolescence, at least. It implies a waiting period, a sort of spiritual incubation, where children are to be prepared, molded, and educated until they mature into their 'real' roles within the church. Such a viewpoint, albeit well-intentioned, inadvertently relegates children to the periphery of church life and ministry.

However, a growing number of churches are embracing a more inclusive and active role for children in their congregations. This evolving mindset recognizes that children are not merely on a trajectory towards future usefulness but are capable and valuable members of the church in the present. It acknowledges that children, with their unique perspectives, talents, spiritual insights, and influence over the adults, especially their parents, can significantly contribute to the life and ministry of the church.

By viewing children as an asset rather than a burden, these churches are tapping into a vibrant source of energy, creativity, and faith. Children, in their simplicity and earnestness, bring a refreshing and often profound understanding of faith, which can

inspire and rejuvenate the entire congregation. They embody a purity of heart and a willingness to learn and serve, qualities that are essential for any thriving ministry.

The involvement of children in various ministries within the church is not only beneficial for the church community but is also crucial for the children themselves. Active participation in ministry allows children to develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and purpose within their faith community. It empowers them to realize that they are not just passive observers but active participants in their spiritual journey and in the life of their church.

Furthermore, involving children in ministry challenges and reshapes the adult congregation's understanding of faith, service, and community. It encourages a more holistic, intergenerational approach to worship and ministry, fostering a deeper sense of unity and mutual respect among all age groups. The active participation of children in ministries serves as a vivid reminder that the church is a diverse body, where every member, regardless of age, has a vital role to play.

## WHY DON'T MANY CHURCHES UTILIZE CHILDREN FOR THE MINISTRY?

If that is how churches should involve children in ministry, then why don't many actually empower them? A prevalent view among many churches is that children's ministry is seen more as a liability than an asset. This is often because they don't see immediate results from prioritizing it.

This perspective, where children are seen more as a liability than an asset, impacts how churches prioritize funding for children's ministry. According to a 2021 report, there is a notable lower prioritization of children's ministry compared to adult ministry.<sup>1</sup> The 4/14 Movement also highlights that the average church allocates only about 3% of its resources to children's ministry.<sup>2</sup> This ties in with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Applying its principle in this context, it reflects what many churches truly value. If they invest little in children's ministry, it indicates that their heart is not fully committed to it, which is unfortunate. This trend is evident in the way the church's allocation of resources to children's ministry is disproportionately low, revealing that

1. Dr. Lawson Murray, *Developing a New Plan for Children's Ministry*, November 9, 2021, <https://childrensministrybasics.com/2021/11/09/new-plan-for-childrens-ministry>

2. <https://414movement.com>

many churches do not value children's ministry as much as adult ministry.

Even when many churches do spend in children's ministry, they often see it as an investment for the future of the ministry. The idea is that once these children grow up, they can start contributing to the ministry's work, allowing the church to reap what has been sown over the years. They perceive the return on investment as low because it requires waiting several years before seeing any tangible results. This mindset needs to be corrected. Again, I would like to reiterate that children represent not only the future but also the present of church ministry.

### **WHAT THEN SHOULD CHURCHES DO TO UTILIZE THE CHILDREN FOR MINISTRY?**

#### ***EMBRACE***

Churches should embrace the truth that children are not only the future but also the present. Given the Biblical references mentioned above in the introduction, church leaders need to embrace the whole counsel of the Word of God. Church leaders should also learn from and be inspired by those churches that utilize their young talents as a workforce for the Kingdom.

In my nearly 20 years of full-time ministry, I have seen enough to confidently say that young children can indeed be an integral part of church ministry. Churches that embrace this truth have greatly benefited from it. For instance, my goddaughter, (we call her 'Baby Sai') a member of the praise and worship team at her local church, exemplifies this. At the tender age of five, she skillfully plays the drums, not only on special occasions but also during regular Sunday services. While many churches struggle with a shortage of committed workers, that small church in Santiago, Isabela, Philippines has cleverly utilized this young, talented girl, allowing her to use her gift for the kingdom.

Even our own children, John David and Philip Josh, aged 13 and 11 respectively, take part in church work. While they may not be as musically inclined as Baby Sai, they still participate and contribute to the ministry. They are responsible for preparing the sanctuary, sweeping the floor, and arranging chairs. Although many may see this as an insignificant contribution, we view it as an important role in the Kingdom.

As I am invited to speak at church anniversaries, workers' retreats, and leadership conferences, I am continually amazed and increasingly convinced by what I see: young children can indeed play a significant role in church ministry. Church leaders must embrace that truth.

#### ***EDUCATE***

Young Children must learn the fundamental doctrines of Biblical Christianity that will serve as the foundation for their service. Children's

Ministry should extend beyond mere storytelling, memorization of verses, coloring, and other typical Sunday School activities. The truth is that children can already grasp fundamental Christian doctrines if teachers are creative in offering avenues for learning these truths in an exciting and engaging manner.

This idea and practice align with the objectives of the 4/14 Movement, which seeks to nurture a child's awareness of God within the developmental window between the ages of 4 and 14, extending up to 18 years. The Movement believes that this period is critical for spiritual development and aims to awaken a generation to a life with Jesus, with the idea that a child's relationship with God can transform their lives, communities, and the wider world.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from teaching children fundamental doctrines, they also need to be taught about the principles and practices of ministry. Because we aspire to involve children in the ministry, they also need to be oriented about ministry principles and practices, just as we do with adults.

### **WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT THE MINISTRY?**

Children need to develop proper ministry worldviews and perspectives. To lay a solid foundation for their Christian work, it's crucial to teach them about the principle of stewardship. This includes understanding that everything they have – their time, treasures, talents, and even their bodies, the temples of the Holy Spirit and are gifts from God, meant to be used exclusively for His glory.

Additionally, the principle of accountability is vital. They should learn that God will hold them accountable for all He has given them, and in time, they will give an account to Him. It's important for children to learn this from a very young age to develop a sense of responsibility.

Another key principle is that of interdependence. As Christians, they should neither be wholly dependent on others nor entirely independent. Instead, they should learn to be interdependent, understanding mutual dependence within the Christian community.

The principle of excellence is also crucial, as they are serving the Almighty God. They should strive to give their best for the glory of the King they serve, aiming to be the best version of themselves every day, without comparing themselves to others.

Furthermore, young children should understand that church leadership is synonymous with servanthood. Higher positions in the church should be viewed not as greater rights but as greater responsibilities. They should also recognize that ministry is a privilege granted to a select few. Once they perceive ministry as a privilege, they will value it more and not take it for granted.

These are just some of the lessons we need to impart to our children regarding the principles and practices

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3. Ibid.

of ministry. There's much more to discuss, but the point is the necessity of teaching young children these concepts. Churches should be more intentional in conveying these truths to children, not just to adults.

I believe we should start integrating these ministry lessons into children's camps, which will serve as an act of commissioning them for church ministries.

### ENGAGE

While it is essential to educate children about fundamental doctrines and ministry principles and practices, failing to engage them in actual work can lead to stagnation and significant frustration on their part. Therefore, churches need to engage the children in age-appropriate works in the church.

As I have observed, many Christian leaders believe they must wait until children reach their teenage years before involving them in ministry work. However, the truth is that children can participate in age-appropriate ministry activities as soon as they learn to speak and follow instructions. They can be involved in welcoming or ushering, distributing Gospel tracts, serving communion elements, serving as Scripture readers, and even in music-related tasks as early as 5 to 7 years old, provided they are capable.

It will be beneficial to provide children with a clear ministry description when engaging them in age-appropriate works or ministries, just as we do with adults. Even if they are still exploring which ministry to engage in, understanding their responsibilities is crucial. Defining the scope and tenure of these responsibilities can be very helpful. For instance, they could be assigned to a task for the next one to three months, giving them a sense of vision, direction, and motivation.

Additionally, as we engage them, providing feedback and evaluation is important. With a clear understanding of what is expected, we should periodically offer feedback on their performance. This role, ideally performed by older mentors, is not only for correction but also for motivation. We need to be more intentional in offering praise and appreciation for their efforts. By doing this deliberately, we encourage them to feel more integrated into the work of the Lord.

Letting them know that they are making a significant contribution to the ministry, no matter how small it may seem, is essential. It will inspire and motivate them to do more for the Lord.

### EMPOWER

Another area of ministry work that many churches often overlook for children is the task of witnessing for Christ and making disciples. Again, I must emphasize that the Great Commission is not exclusively given to adults. I firmly believe that the Lord Jesus Christ intended this mission for children as well. Church leaders need to empower children to witness for Christ and to make disciples of all nations.

When I was pastoring a church in Butuan City

in Mindanao, we conducted a training session on evangelism. To my surprise, an 11-year-old boy, named Matrick, attended. We had announced the event during a Sunday service, and Matrick, having told his father he wanted to attend, did just that. Honestly, I didn't expect much from him at first, thinking he was just a kid. However, I was pleasantly proven wrong. The following Sunday, Matrick excitedly reported that he had shared his testimony with many of his classmates, eventually leading them in a prayer of acceptance. When I asked the group who else had applied what they learned from the training, Matrick was the only one who raised his hand. This experience was my first encounter that convinced me of the potential young children have to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission.

### CONCLUSION

As Christian leaders, it is our responsibility to assess the level of engagement of young children in ministry. We must enable them to participate in this glorious work in the Kingdom. Since they are still young and unable to do it on their own, they need our assistance. Thus, our responsibility is significant. May we all, from this day forward, view children not only as the future but also as an integral part of the present church ministry.

Isn't it wonderful to envision a time when we all see God face to face, and the most anticipated words from the Lord Jesus Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"<sup>4</sup> are spoken not only to adults but to young children as well? I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ would love to speak those words equally to both adults and children.

The Lord Jesus Christ, said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."<sup>5</sup> So, let's welcome the children into this journey.

4. Matt 25:21 (NIV)

5. Matthew 19:14 (NIV)



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