



---

## HELPING CHURCH LEADERS MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

---

Number 59 November 25, 1996

© Leadership Network

### **“CHILDREN...TODAY’S CHURCH, AS WELL AS TOMORROW’S”**

Perhaps it is because they are largely unseen in most sanctuaries... or they are small in voice and stature...or they are viewed only through the lens of the church of tomorrow. Whatever the reason, few realize that children constitute one-half or more of a church’s attendance on a given Sunday in today’s growing congregations. In many large churches, it is not uncommon for there to be multiple hundreds, and in some cases an excess of a thousand or more infants, toddlers, and children who gather for Christian learning and nurture. In congregations that are reaching young adults with families, an effective children’s ministry is often the “front door” to the church and the single most important reason parents choose to join a particular church. Yet the growing significance of ministry to children and their parents is often not reflected in a church’s budget priorities, staffing and facilities. Ten days ago, more than ninety Children’s Ministers from large congregations across the country met in a Leadership Network forum to discuss issues, resources, changes and opportunities facing children’s ministry in the 21st century church. The following are some of the highlights of their discussion.

#### **Changes in Children’s Ministry in the Last Five Years**

Family issues include the changing family structure, parents taking less responsibility for their children and even less for their spiritual formation, the inconsistency of ministering to children of divorce every other Sunday at best or often one Sunday a month, and an increasing ministry to parents as well as children. The number of children with emotional and physical special needs is skyrocketing due to fetal drug and alcohol abuse. Cultural changes include the reality of church being in “competition” with other community activities such as sports (leisure as religion) for the time and participation of children and parents and the consumer mentality of church attendance which encourages “church hopping” and the resulting difficulty of establishing relationships with children and parents.

A major change is related to the increasing legal implications of children’s ministry...the screening of workers, both paid and volunteer, safety issues, and compliance with local, state, and federal laws. There has also been a shift to more interactive and participatory learning for children and an increasing sensitivity and awareness to the different learning styles of children. In large congregations with multiple children’s staff, both paid and volunteer, the role of the Children’s Minister is becoming more administrative and less directly connected to children, much to the regret of many Children’s Ministers.

#### **Hot Issues in Contemporary Children’s Ministry**

Security and litigation are increasingly important and consuming more time on the part of the Children’s Minister. Parents want a Children’s Ministry that is safe, child friendly, and biblical. Neighborhoods are changing and raising new issues of ministry to children and families outside the church walls and into the community. New training methods for teachers and volunteers are needed that allow for the time pressures of today. Many are using audio and video tapes that can be taken home. The team approach to ministry and small groups for children that allow greater relationship building and mentoring are important new developments. Finally, most curriculum is not written for churches with large numbers of children so more and more Children’s Ministers are writing their own or forming volunteer teams to write new material.

**Copies of the complete Children’s Ministry Forum Notes will be available December 15th  
for \$10 a set by contacting Leadership Network at 1-800-765-5323.**

---

**If you encounter any problem with the transmission of NetFax, please call 1-800-621-8268**

A SERVICE OF



LEADERSHIP NETWORK

P. O. BOX 9100 · TYLER, TEXAS 75711-9100  
PHONE: 1-800-765-5323 OR (903) 561-0437 · FAX: (903) 561-9361

<http://www.leadnet.org/>