

# Children's ministry

*"Let the little children come to me"*

Children are important to Jesus. He takes time for them and wants us to do that too.

In the Old Testament we are already encouraged to spend a lot of time and energy into children:

"The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deut. 6:4-7)

Not the adults, but the children of Israel went into the Promised Land, because they had got to know God from a young age. They stayed dedicated to God their entire life.

God is always encouraging us to tell our children about Him and to teach them everything there is to know. To set the right example, so that the children will follow this.

Children are a gift from God, a special big responsibility.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

And: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven...And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:1-6).

## **Top priority**

Research has shown that the choice for Jesus is usually made before a person is 12 years old and that the moral basis is for the large part set at age 9, hereon will be build further after that. The faith of a person is established before he becomes a teenager; then he has formed an opinion about God, the Bible, the devil, eternal life, Jesus, salvation, etcetera.

What you believe when you're 13, is in most cases what you believe for the rest of your life.

This is in accordance with what God says in the Bible about children, and the encouragements to tell children about Him as much as possible.

As it turned out, people who are now active in the church, or are church leaders, were in most cases also active in the church as a child.

The parents have the biggest influence on the faith of the child.

When both parents and the church are working together, the result for the child is the best.

So: helping children believe is a **very high priority**; both in the church and at home!!

What can we do for our children, for the children in our church and for the children in our neighbourhood?

## **Bless children with love**

Love is the most important thing in the interaction with children. How can you express this?

There are 5 "love languages for children":

- Physical contact (appropriate to children)
- Words of affirmation (specific)
- Gifts (small)
- Acts of service, helping them
- Quality time

Children have different “love languages”, so in the church it’s best to just use them all.

### **Faith development**

Important in the faith development of children is “doing”, so let them help actively in the church.

Possibilities to do this: in the musical worship: singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument.

In teaching: a play, reading from the Bible, giving a testimony, praying.

In the organisation of the church service: welcoming people, collecting the offerings, passing around bread and wine, doing announcements, helping with audio-visual things (sound, sheets etc.).

Children can also help elderly and handicapped, do something for smaller children, help with the children’s ministry as they get older, etcetera. Be creative, surely there are a lot more ideas to come up with. Take children seriously as fellow-believers (in development), and let them do things that show their faith, when they want to.

### **Teaching**

In teaching children it’s about the essence of the gospel: repentance of sin, forgiveness by God, by grace, Jesus’ offer on the cross for you, His death and resurrection, baptism, Christian life, and receiving eternal life. Don’t think that children are too young for this; it’s very possible to explain this on their level.

Use the Bible stories from the Old Testament and the stories about Jesus to pass on these core topics, and connect to their daily life.

Children are able to make a real choice for Jesus; be open to that and encourage them.

### **Careful**

Of course you have to be careful with children. Don’t pressure them to accept Jesus.

Make sure that parents/caretakers are totally informed about your teaching to the children, and that they agree with it.

And children can only be baptised when the parent(s) give their consent and are present at the baptism.

### **Child work**

It’s important that as many church members as possible help with the children’s ministry in the church service, and that all church members realise that this is one of the most important tasks we have as a congregation.

This prevents it from getting too hard for a few volunteers, because working with children is intensive and asks a lot of energy.

The form you choose is depending on the size of the congregation, the number of children, the possibilities in the building, the age groups and the number of child workers.

Possibilities are:

1. Let all the children make something during the sermon, according to their age, about the theme of the service/children's Bible story, while they stay in the church service and give them something to eat/drink.
2. Give the children during the sermon a Bible lesson in another room, with an arts and crafts project, according to their age, with something to eat/drink.
3. Organise a separate service for children including worship (music), prayer, Biblical education, arts and crafts, something to eat/drink, for each age group or with age groups combined.
4. Design a separate baby and toddler room, where the little ones can play and sleep supervised, with nice Christian songs or Biblical games for example.
5. Hold a service for children for the entire congregation instead of a normal service once in a while

Which form you might choose; each has its pros and cons. Letting children stay in the service increases the involvement with each other, but it can get very noisy, and you don't get the chance to talk to the children about God and their faith in Him. Giving children their own service in separate rooms, offers a lot of possibilities for teaching, worshipping, learning children to pray etcetera, and gives more peace in the service, but it asks more of the child workers, and it decreases the involvement with the other members of the congregation. Sometimes you don't have much choice, because the building isn't suitable for multiple groups, or because the members of the congregation still need growth and training to do child work in separate rooms.

You can also combine or vary forms, depending on how the congregation and the children develop, and what is the right choice for that time.

Most important is the focus on the goal: loving children, and bringing them to Jesus; to faith, a choice for Him, to follow Him. You can do this, no matter what choice you make.

See for materials, books and websites for child work programs the other articles in this course file.

#### **Questions:**

- ⊙ Are children important to you already? How can you grow in this?
- ⊙ What kind of child work could be suitable for your congregation? Why?
- ⊙ Could you do something for children in your hometown as a congregation?
- ⊙ How can children participate/help in your congregation?
- ⊙ Do you spend time with children yourself: before and after the service, in activities outside of the church, inviting them to your house etcetera? Do you enter into a relationship with them? Do you feel responsible for them?
- ⊙ What could you do to help children to come to faith in Jesus?
- ⊙ How can you support parents?

#### **Practice:**

- ⊙ In the next weeks spent time with the children in your congregation (or with children in your family/neighbourhood, if there aren't children in the church – yet.)
- ⊙ Discuss with your minister possibilities to set up/improve child work.
- ⊙ Find out what children in your congregation could do.

#### **Further study:**

- ⊙ In the course file you find articles for deepening, and references to books.

- There are also Christian child work organisations specified. They give directed courses and workshops to train you for child work, and they have different materials.