

St. Mary's Seminary and University

“Out of the Mouths of Babes”

Revitalizing Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church's Children's Ministry

A Thesis Submitted to
the Ecumenical Institute of Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

by
Joyce Vance

Baltimore, Maryland
May 2023

Contents

1. <i>Introduction</i>	1
2. <i>Literature Review</i>	13
3. <i>Description of Project Design and Execution</i>	48
4. <i>Description of Project Results & Evaluation</i>	61
5. <i>Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research</i>	73
6. <i>Bibliography</i>	80
7. <i>Consent Form - Appendix A</i>	83
8. <i>Assent Form – Appendix B</i>	84
9. <i>Overall Responses of Children – Appendix C</i>	85
10. <i>Responses By Age – Appendix D</i>	86
11. <i>Responses By Gender – Appendix E</i>	87
12. <i>Responses, Children vs. Adults – Appendix F</i>	88
13. <i>Responses By Parent Domicile – Appendix G</i>	89
14. <i>The Last Two Parent/Children Questions – Appendix H</i>	91
15. <i>Survey Questions Asked Only of Parents – Appendix I</i>	98
16. <i>Children's Ministry Manual – Appendix J</i>	109

Chapter 1

Introduction

Preface

I have served in numerous capacities at various churches: as an usher, choir member, Assistant Chair of the Trustee Board, Assistant Sunday School Superintendent, Director of Children's Church School, Director of Vacation Bible School, Director of Visitation, Christian Education Board member, and Children's Church School teacher. I was ordained in September 2019 and am currently an associate minister and Director of Ministry Development at Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church.

As Assistant Sunday School Superintendent, I coordinated classes for children and adults, assigned teachers, and selected teaching material. As Director of Children's Ministry, I developed a Children's Church School Program and Vacation Bible Camp. I was responsible for selecting and training teachers, selecting teaching materials, coordinating class schedules, coordinating menus with the Culinary Ministry, and managing registration. As Director of Ministry Development, I ensure that children receive every opportunity to participate in the worship service, fellowship, outreach, and other activities. Children, like adults, have spiritual gifts, skills, and talents that the church needs, and the church is responsible for discipling children.

Educationally, I earned a Master of Arts in Church Ministries from St. Mary's Seminary & University Ecumenical Institute in 2016, a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Arlington Bible College in 2005, a Master of Business Administration in 1996, and a Bachelor of Science in 1990 from University of Baltimore.

Professionally, I retired in 2017 with forty years in the banking industry. One of the roles

I fulfilled was Internal Management Consultant. In that role, I managed various projects, including creating surveys; interviewing employees; collecting, compiling, analyzing, and interpreting survey results; and making recommendations to management based on those results.

The experience I gained in my roles at various churches and my banking career, and my passion for seeing children thrive in ministry, prepared me to revitalize the Children's Ministry at Greater.

My Hypothesis

To keep children engaged in church, we must ask them which church-related activities they want to do when they come to church and then engage them in those activities.

My Ministry Context

Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church (hereafter Greater) is an urban African American ministry that has existed for forty-one years. There are approximately two thousand five hundred members and about two to two hundred fifty in attendance each week. **The leadership team comprises the pastor, deacons, ministers, trustees, directors, ministry leaders, and assistant ministry leaders.**

The Children's Ministry at Greater currently consists of Sunday School, which is presently virtual. The teachers use a Sunday School curriculum, published by Urban Ministries, Inc., geared for various age groups.

Greater is located in the southern portion of the 21213 zip code in Baltimore City. Approximately twenty schools are in the 21213 zip code for elementary school-age children. As of March 18, 2023, a total of thirty thousand three hundred ninety-one residents lived in the 21213 zip code.¹ Eighteen percent of the residents in the 21213 zip code attend public school, which

¹ <http://www.mapszipcode.com/maryland/baltimore/21213/demographics>, accessed 3/18/23.

means there are nearly six thousand elementary school-age children in the community where we worship and serve². Currently, twenty-one elementary school-age children attend the church, or fewer than one percent of the nearly six thousand school-age children in the zip code. Greater revitalized the Children's Ministry so that there would be ministry activities for the children who currently attend and families looking for a church with activities for the entire family.

Project Objective

My objective was to determine what makes a children's ministry interesting and spiritually enriching so children will want to attend church and participate more fully in the church's life. As the Director of Ministry Development, I am responsible for providing leadership development and training for the leadership team and providing oversight and leadership for all the ministries. Consequently, as the researcher, I have the autonomy to make the necessary decisions about revitalizing our Children's Ministry.

Children's ministry is not just about building programs for children to have fun or so their parents can attend worship service without being interrupted by their children. Csinos and Beckwith note that ministry is about helping people develop and live healthy, flourishing lives. It does not matter how many or how few children attend; the church is responsible for providing opportunities for children to minister. Csinos and Beckwith also point out that churches must minister to children and provide opportunities for children to minister to other children and adults.³ These authors indicate that one of the primary reasons for having a children's ministry is "to nurture the spiritual formation of children, to help them live in the way of Jesus, to support them on the journey of being disciples of Christ."⁴ Csinos and Beckwith state that "when the church sees

² Ibid.

³ David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith. *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 36.

⁴ Ibid., 37.

children as legitimate members contributing to its life, it broadens its view of the community to include others often marginalized because of age."⁵

Potts writes that a children's ministry should offer children and their families something meaningful, purposeful, enriching, and an opportunity to "deepen their relationship with God as well as the church community."⁶ Because children are "naturally energetic, enthusiastic, and full of wonder," they do not hesitate to ask tough questions, which initiates difficult and inspiring discussions.⁷ Potts believes children can minister to our congregation's sick, lonely, grieving, and "marginalized" with proper training and guidance.⁸ Children make us laugh because they are humorous and remind us of ourselves and how we could be if we were not saddled with life's issues.⁹ For that reason, Potts points out that children are valuable to the church and future church leaders.

Identification of topic

The Issue

Several years ago, the leaders at Greater combined the children and young adult ministries because of limited resources. One of the concerns the pastor, parents, and church leaders have now is that the children's attendance has declined. Another concern is that children and young adults should not be combined because each group has unique spiritual growth needs. Accordingly, the church is in the process of revitalizing its Children's Ministry. My ministry research project focused on which activities directly related to the worship service would encourage elementary school-age children to participate more fully in the church's life.

⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁶ Colette Potts, *Love First: A Children's Ministry for the Whole Church* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2018), 44.

⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 82

While addressing this issue, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, which caused the country to be on "lock-down." Churches had to close their doors, and pastors and church leaders had to figure out other ways of conducting worship services, Bible Study, and meetings. One of the resources available at this time is an app called Zoom, a communications platform that allows users to connect via video, audio, phone, and chat. Zoom was instrumental in helping my church conduct meetings, leadership workshops, and leadership conferences. Our fellowship ministries also used Zoom for their monthly fellowship gatherings and events.

Why It Is Relevant

A children's ministry allows children to participate actively in the church. The church is responsible for providing opportunities for children to be ministered to and opportunities for them to minister to others. According to a recent Gallup survey, parents want to attend a church with activities for the entire family and seek churches with spiritual programs geared toward children.¹⁰

What Stimulated My Interest

As Director of Ministry Development, my job is to ensure that children receive every opportunity to participate as much as possible. While evaluating all the ministries at my church, I realized that children could and should benefit from being fully engaged in the church's life. I was concerned that we were losing the children to activities outside the church because they were not given opportunities to engage in the church fully.

¹⁰ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>, accessed 3/18/23.

Elements of Scripture that inform this topic

Every ministry should be based on Scripture. When looking at a children's ministry, it is crucial to consider what God says about the role of children so that such a ministry aligns with how God sees children. For example, two passages that support the Children's Ministry at Greater include Proverbs 22:6 and Mark 9:33-37.

Proverbs 22:6

"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." (NRSV)

The Book of Proverbs is an collection of instructive poetry.¹¹ The authorship of the Book of Proverbs has traditionally been attributed to Solomon, as were Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, however, the credit is an "honorary" one, which makes sense in light of his fabled wisdom (1 Kings 3-4).¹² "The sages who first began to write and collect these sayings were court and temple-based men who served as counselors, bureaucrats, and teachers during the Divided Monarchy."¹³ However, the final stages of composition and editing took place at a later date, most likely in the late Persian or Hellenistic period (fifth-third century BCE), by scribes and teachers associated with the Jerusalem temple.¹⁴ Proverbs 1-9 consists primarily of lengthy "wisdom poems," which celebrate the virtues Woman Wisdom, and ten instructions.¹⁵ Chapters 10-30 consists of constructed, two-line creative proverbs of the sages, which are simple observations, but consist of short moral lessons.¹⁶ "The biblical proverbs are ageless and are comparable or closely

¹¹ Dianne Bergant, "The Book of Proverbs," in *The Catholic Study Bible*, eds. Donald Senior, Mary Ann Getty, Carroll Stuhlmueller, John J. Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 254.

¹² Claudia V. Camp and Carole R. Fontaine. "Proverbs," in *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, eds. Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, Jouette M. Bassler, Werner E. Lemke, Susan Niditch, Eileen M. Schuller (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1989), 849.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 850.

¹⁶ Ibid., 851.

identical to proverbs in ancient Near Eastern collections and modern Africa.¹⁷ Similarly, when comparing all the literary forms found in the Old Testament, there is no similarity that is greater than that between the book of Proverbs and the instructional materials of ancient Egypt.¹⁸ "Although one can affirm that God's providential work in the world enables individuals from other cultures to discover true things about life and ethics, this merely overlaps with the fuller revelation of 'the good life' that is oriented around God."¹⁹ In addition to the name of God occurring one hundred thirty-three times in the book of Proverbs, the book also contains many proverbs that reflect moral standards, cultural values, and religious observances of ancient Israel seen in other Old Testament books.²⁰

Proverbs 22:6 stresses the importance of parents providing instruction in the home for their children. According to ancient wisdom about children, to "train" a child means to "dedicate" the child, which is a religious duty and not one of "economic" training.²¹ To train children in the right way means ensuring that the training is appropriate for the child's level of learning rather than requiring the child to learn at a level that is not attainable. The training is meant to be such that it helps the child to grow into adulthood. In other words, the training prepares the child for life.²²

"This passage expresses one of the strong points of the Hebrew sages, viz., their insistence on the child's moral training by the parents."²³ The training must begin early in the child's life when

¹⁷ Richard L. Schultz, "Proverbs," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, eds. J., Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 459.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Charles G. Martin, "Proverbs," in *New International Bible Commentary: Based on the NIV*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 679.

²² Ibid.

²³ Rolland W. Schloerb. "Proverbs," in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, In Twelve Volumes, Volume IV, eds. George Arthur Buttrick, Walter Russel Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, Noland B. Harmon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 907.

the child's mind is impressionable.²⁴ The training aims to steer the child's heart from "folly."²⁵

Along with parents, the church is also responsible for training children. The primary responsibility belongs to the parents, of course, but the Christian community supports the parents in the child's spiritual transformation. Proverbs 22:6 supports my plan to revitalize the Children's Ministry at my church. Elementary-age children are at the age of faith development when they are very open to hearing about God and serving him — because at this age — they learn by doing. This age is a perfect one for Children's Ministry leaders to build on what parents have taught their children by reinforcing teaching about God and his love for them. Training children involves providing teaching opportunities to them and opportunities for them to put what they learn into action. That is why allowing children to serve during the worship service is so crucial because it will enable them to experience God's love through others and by serving others.

Mark 9:33-37

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (NRSV)

The Gospel of Mark was written anonymously, but it is attested by some second-century church writers such as Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and others that John Mark was the author and was written while he was in Rome.²⁶ John Mark lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary, during the early church period. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Milton P. Horne, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Proverbs-Ecclesiastes* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1984), 269.

²⁶ Stephen S. Short, "Mark," in *New International Bible Commentary: Based on the NIV*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 1156.

journey (Acts 13:4-13) and served with Barnabas in Cyprus (Acts 15:39), after which he went to Rome (Col. 4:10; Phm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13).²⁷ Mark's Gospel was written for Gentiles, demonstrated by how the author carefully explained Jewish customs and terms.²⁸ Because there is no evidence that Mark experienced or was an eyewitness to what he wrote about regarding Jesus' life, Augustine thought he produced his Gospel by shortening the more extensive record of Matthew, which was the view until the nineteenth century.²⁹ However, it is now believed that Mark's Gospel was the earliest and was used as a source for Matthew and Luke.³⁰ Mark's Gospel, concise and action-packed, is the shortest of the Gospels, with its thesis that Jesus is the Son of God.³¹

In the passage preceding Mark 9:33-37, Jesus was teaching his disciples about his death and resurrection, but the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus what he meant. In this passage, important for my project, the disciples kept silent when Jesus asked them what they were discussing.³² They kept quiet, not because they were afraid to ask Jesus about his passion prediction, but because they were discussing who among them was the greatest.³³ Their embarrassed silence demonstrates that they knew Jesus would not be pleased with their conversation and motives. Jesus was preparing them for his death, and the disciples were preoccupied with who would be the greatest among themselves.³⁴ Jesus sat down and called his disciples to him so that he could provide some instructions. He taught that whoever wants to be

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 1157.

³² Craig A. Evans. *Word Biblical Commentary, Mark 8:27-16:20*, Volume 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 60.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 61.

first must be willing to be the servant of them all.³⁵ To be "first," in the Jewish culture of that period, referred to rulers, aristocrats, ruling priests, and other persons of authority and influence (cf. Luke 19:47; Acts 25:2; 28:17).³⁶ Thus, to be "last," referred to someone who was a servant or to have no rank, authority, or privilege.³⁷ Jesus took a child and placed the child in the midst of them. "Jesus' symbolic gesture takes the conversation in a different direction from 9:33-35 — from the servant to those being served."³⁸ A child symbolized low social status and legal rights in the first century Palestinian society. Children depended on others for nurture and protection, and no one expected to gain anything from society by being kind to children.³⁹ When Jesus brought a child into the midst of the disciples, he displayed his acceptance of children and demonstrated that they deserved respect and care.⁴⁰ In other words, his words matched his actions.

What would it mean today if society received children in Jesus' name? How often are children not received in Jesus' name in the church today but instead received in a grudgingly or tolerated way?⁴¹

Mark 9:33-37 stresses the importance of seeing children as role models *in and of themselves*. It is essential for today's church leaders, Children's Ministry leaders, and parents to remember Jesus' words and example, and realize that children serve as our role models — in certain ways — just as adults serve as their role models in other ways. We are responsible for ensuring that children are allowed to be active participants in the church — both for their sakes and for ours;

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 0220), 285.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Halford E. Luccock and Frederick C. Grant. "Mark," in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, In Twelve Volumes, Volume VII, eds. George Arthur Buttrick, Walter Russel Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, Noland B. Harmon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951),787.

hence, children being encouraged to serve is not a nicety but a necessity. Most importantly, we can learn from them. Sadly, based on my experience, some adults consider children an interruption when they are allowed to serve during worship. The adults would rather have the children leave the sanctuary so that they can participate in the service without interruptions or distractions from children. But children need to see the adults model good behavior, and the adults must provide children with opportunities to gain experience on serving God publicly. In addition, adults need to witness the faith that children manifest. If children are required to leave the entire worship service, they may not have the opportunity to see the love of God demonstrated through serving others. Serving God is about serving others, and alongside adults, children must be allowed to serve. Again, most importantly, adults in the church need to see the children in their midst not merely as recipients of ministry but also as doers of it. Adults need to witness that greatness that Jesus spoke about.

Identification of project

What I did

My ministry project included children ages five to twelve who attend the church. I met with parents and children to let them know I would conduct a study to revitalize our Children's Ministry, and I explained that their feedback would be valuable to the process.

After I conducted all the interviews, the information was reviewed, clarified, analyzed, and interpreted. I used an Excel spreadsheet to compare the information by select groups. I asked the children what they would like to do in church, and I selected two activities with the highest number of responses to start our Children's Ministry. I set up a thirty-day pilot program, and follow-up interviews were conducted with parents, children, and minister leaders to determine satisfaction

and necessary interventions. At the end of the pilot, I prepared a Children's Ministry Manual to be used by the Children's Ministry volunteers.

What I learned

I learned which activities children wanted to participate in when they came to church because I believe that children have definite ideas about how to contribute to the church's life. They also have ideas to help our Children's Ministry leaders develop ministry-related activities that encourage children to participate in church.

An Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, I evaluate literature that researched children's ministry, its impact on children's spiritual growth and development, and its effect on adults and the Christian community. The literature I used included books, journals, and online sources.

In Chapter 3, I provide detailed information about the execution of the project. I outline the steps I took to involve parents and children, explain my project design and the rationale behind my decisions, and discuss the process I used to collect data. I also describe any adjustments I made to my original plans.

In Chapter 4, I provide data and describe my data analysis. I discuss how I reported the results and explain the coding, interpretation methods, and analysis results. I also explain the evaluation process and how I assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the collected data, the methods used for analysis, and any significant data flaws.

In Chapter 5, I summarize and assess the project results, note the study's limitations, identify any further questions raised by the results, and point out areas for further research.

Finally, the appendixes contain the Consent and Assent Forms, data not included in Chapter 4, and the Children's Ministry Manual.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Before reviewing the studies conducted on children's ministry, discussing the developmental stages of elementary school-age children would be beneficial. Children's ministry leaders need to understand the developmental stages of elementary school-age children to help them be active participants in the church's life. Pertinent to this project are James Fowler's Mythic-Literal stage, which includes children ages seven to twelve; Erik Erikson's Inferiority vs. Industry stage, which includes children ages seven to eleven; and Jean Piaget's Concrete Operational stage, which includes children seven to eleven.

James Fowler was an American theologian who was a Theology and Human Development Professor at Emory University. He directed Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics. Fowler notes that elementary school-age children are at what he calls the Mythic-Literal Faith stage. They start to work out the difference between confirmed facts and things that might be fictional or hearsay.⁴² At this age, children's sources of spiritual influence start to expand beyond parents and other reliable adults to others in their community, such as children's ministry volunteers, teachers, and friends. At this stage, Fowler notes, "Children think in concrete and literal ways."⁴³ Faith becomes the stories told, and the rituals practiced.⁴⁴ Later in this stage, children begin to have the capacity to understand that others might have different beliefs than them. Children have a sense of give-and-take in the universe's workings (e.g., doing good will result in

⁴² Fowler, James W., and Mary Lynn Dell. "Stages of Faith From Infancy Through Adolescence: Reflections on three decades of faith development theory." *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (2006): 34-45.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

good things happening, and doing bad will result in bad things happening).⁴⁵ Religious images are often taken literally, which leads to confusion. If promises do not take place in the world, then a child at this stage might feel cheated or disappointed in God.⁴⁶

Erik Erikson was a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on the psychological development of human beings.⁴⁷ According to Erikson, a child learns new skills during the Industry vs. Inferiority stage.⁴⁸ When they productively navigate this stage, they feel helpful and develop a sense of self-worth. However, they may develop an understanding of worthlessness or inferiority if they are not supported in learning new skills.⁴⁹ During this stage of development, children are learning various emotional and social skills; because of that, parents and children's ministry volunteers must support them as they encounter new tasks and attempt to find their way. For children to feel productive, they must feel competent, and they may feel inadequate or not measure up without the opportunities to develop new skills.⁵⁰ Greater's Children's Ministry will provide children with opportunities to learn to participate in activities they want to do and pair them with adults who will train them as they serve.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist known for his work on child cognitive development. Piaget placed great importance on the education of children.⁵¹ While thinking becomes much more logical during the Concrete Operational stage, it can also be inflexible.⁵² Children at this point in development tend to need help with non-concrete and theoretical concepts.⁵³ During this stage,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erik-erikson.html>, accessed 5/3/23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ William Huitt and John Hummel. "Piaget's theory of cognitive development." *Educational Psychology Interactive* 3, no. 2 (2003): 1.

⁵² Ibid., 2

⁵³ Ibid.

children also become less selfish and begin to think about other people's thoughts and feelings.⁵⁴ Children in the Concrete Operational stage also start to understand that their thoughts are unique and that not everyone else necessarily shares their views, positions, and ideas.⁵⁵ In addition to the activities that provide opportunities for children to minister to others, the Children's Ministry also includes Sunday School, which provides instructional opportunities that will allow children to learn what it means to serve others and be served by others.

These theorists offer a rationale for getting children involved in ministry. They discuss the importance of children having opportunities to learn new skills and help others. They share how children perceive fairness and justice and what it means to do good instead of evil. When children are given opportunities to develop new skills, it helps them to feel good about themselves, encouraging them to want to do more. Children's ministry leaders, church leaders, and parents must ensure that children can participate in the entire life of the church to have opportunities to use their spiritual gifts and talents. With these theorists in mind, we move to the children's role in the Christian community.

Children's Role in the Christian Community

Cornelia Horn, assistant professor of Early Christianity at Saint Louis University, and John Martens, associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, tell the story of children through the first six centuries of the Christian era, focusing on the life, experiences, and perceptions of children within the Christian community. They define many of the most important themes that reflect the concerns and realities of life related to children in the early Christian world.

Although the social history of children in the early church is their primary focus, some of the fundamental ways the early Christians grasped their relationship with God and one another

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

was as children of God.⁵⁶ Children were required to be obedient because it was essential to the family's life. It was reflected in some early Christian sources, such as Didache 4.9 and Barnabas 19.5, which admonished parents to teach children to fear God during their childhood.⁵⁷ These authors note that according to the Gospel of Mark, parents and children shared Jesus' ministry. It was not unusual for Jesus to heal children for the parent who requested their child's healing. For example, Mark describes four instances where Jesus healed the paralytic child (2:1-10), Jairus' daughter (5:21-43), the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (7:24-30), and the epileptic child (9:14-29). Parents sought to see Jesus for their sick children in each healing case.⁵⁸

As a result of the community and family displacement caused by a family's commitment to the "new way," life in the first generations of Christians provided opportunities for children to participate in worship.⁵⁹ Children were present when the early Christians shared what they had, including meals (Acts 2:44-46). Children were part of the community, home life, and place of worship.⁶⁰ It is safe to assume that children were present in most, if not all, Christian communities.⁶¹ Despite Jesus' teaching about children, it was challenging to accept children as the models of discipleship at the time. Instead, they blended silently into the background. More than likely, preaching was geared toward adults in the church.⁶² Horn and Martens contend that children played a visible and audible role in worship services in the early church, accomplishing several official functions. Children sang in choirs, read, and participated in prayer. There is evidence that children served as rectors.⁶³ The work of Horn and Martens illustrates the inclusion of children in

⁵⁶ Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens. *"let the little children come to me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 2009), 41.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 92-93.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 99-100.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 113.

⁶³ Ibid., 296-297.

the earliest Christian gatherings. Until about seven years ago, the children at Greater participated more fully in the church. They sang in the choir, served as ushers, read Scripture aloud, prayed aloud, and did liturgical dance. Things changed when the children and young adults were combined into one ministry. The children's participation gradually decreased as the young adults' involvement increased. Eventually, the children became an afterthought. Horn and Martens work reassures me that it is extremely important that the Children's Ministry needs to be revitalized so that the children can participate more fully in the life of our church.

Ivy Beckwith, Ph.D. in Education from Trinity International University, believes that there is an increasing awareness in our churches that something needs to change to meet the spiritual needs of children in our rapidly evolving postmillennial culture.⁶⁴ Most importantly, churches need to reconsider their existing activities and methods of ministry to children. At the end of the 20th century, consumption of goods and services influenced churches to believe theme park children's programs provided opportunities to increase adult attendance.⁶⁵ Consequently, church leaders overlooked and lost the perspective of what it means to spiritually develop children, help them know and love God, and live the way Jesus lived.⁶⁶ She mentions that some parents do not like it when children participate in worship services, so they refuse to attend church on those Sundays.⁶⁷ Some parents at Greater would prefer that children be removed during worship so they are not interrupted. We used to have a Children's Church program, which involved removing children from the sanctuary during the service. But that was discontinued several years ago. But as Beckwith states, one church is not like another church. How one church develops its children's

⁶⁴ Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 163.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 164.

ministry will not necessarily work for another church.⁶⁸ We have since learned that it is essential that the church not only disciple children but also allow them to use their spiritual gifts and talents in the church by ministering to others.

As developing churches expand their concept of caring for children's souls, their plans and improvements will grow out of the viewpoint of each precise and unusual church. According to Beckwith, churches cannot purchase a kit from the Christian bookstore to develop a children's ministry.⁶⁹ She described children's ministry as broken when church leaders and senior pastors see children's ministry primarily as a promotion tool. She notes that leaders fall into this trap when they underestimate God, when children are not involved in worship services, and when leaders use programs and curricula to teach children about God through costly play areas and attract children to God through unconventional means.⁷⁰ Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, she says, the church is broken when the church tells parents that its programs can spiritually nurture their children better than they can.⁷¹ Beckwith notes that church programs cannot nurture children's spirituality but rather people living in an intergenerational Christian community do so.⁷² To revitalize Greater's Children's Ministry, we want to ensure that children and adults are provided opportunities to participate in the worship service and other related activities together. Greater intends to provide the children with discipleship opportunities and opportunities for them to do ministry.

Scottie May, associate professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College, and her associates outline the children's role in the church. They review how the "new-form" of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 283.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

the church ministered to children and their families. "New-form churches are alternative forms of church that seem to be reacting against what the leaders perceive as inadequate traditional evangelical or mainstream ministries."⁷³ These authors noted that the Book of Deuteronomy instructs the people of God to teach children to love, obey, and fear God in their settings to gather with one another to learn about God (Deut. 6:1-3;11:18-21; 31:12-13).⁷⁴ Other passages illustrate how children were present with the entire community when they assembled to hear from God, cry out to God, and rejoice together (2 Chr, 20:13; Ezra 10:1, Neh. 12:13).⁷⁵ These passages demonstrate that children were a vital part of the community. Being among the people of God was an essential part of the spiritual conversion and nurture of the children. Jesus viewed children favorably by embracing them and telling the adults to become like them for their spiritual well-being. The authors wrote, "It is as if the text is saying that it is not truly a faith community if the children are not present."⁷⁶ There was a wide variety of ministry activities among new-form churches. Some had deliberate, uniform methods to cultivate the spiritual nurturing of children and parents. Several churches included full integration, while age groups separated others. Some churches had a wide range of structures for corporate worship.⁷⁷ While Greater is a traditional urban African American church, the pastor and church leaders aim to ensure that our Children's Ministry remains relevant and that children are provided opportunities to provide feedback as the Children's Ministry continues to be developed and expanded. The study of May and associates was not intended to be conclusive but rather an exploratory survey; consequently, it did not provide conclusions about new-form churches' ministry with children. As a result, unanswered questions

⁷³ Scottie May, Katie Stemp, Grant Burns. "Children's Place in the New Forms of Church: An Exploratory Survey of Their Ministry with Children and Families." *Christian Education Journal Series 3*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (November 2011): 279, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131100800204>, accessed 3/26/23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 281.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 282.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 288.

remain: Is children's participation in church, as outlined in the Old and New Testaments, applicable today? "What relevance does Jesus' view of children have for today's new-form and more traditional churches?"⁷⁸ Also, what lasting impressions, if there are any, could church activities have on children?⁷⁹ My study aimed to ascertain the role of children in worship settings, as viewed by the children and their parents, so that their involvement becomes a vital part of the church. The point is well taken that children's ministry is not about advertisement and entertainment to add to the membership but rather about providing opportunities for children to grow spiritually and get to know God. That is the basis for revitalizing the Children's Ministry, so we can nurture children's spirituality and help them develop relationships with God.

Mimi Larson is a visiting assistant professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College and works with Faith Formation Ministries in the Christian Reformed Church-North America. She examines how children's significant growth, development, and family ministries have contributed to the movement from a narrow and simplistic view of children to a deeper understanding of children's spirituality and faith development. Larson explores ways to integrate children as total participants in the church. She explores the following questions: What are the best ways to engage children in church? Are how we engage children in church beneficial to how we value them? Do our methods generate a higher or lower view of children? Who has the primary responsibility for nurturing children's spirituality?⁸⁰ Children possess the potential to be developed spiritually when they are in a loving and planned environment, both at home and in church. They can learn about Jesus and what it means to follow him.⁸¹ What does it mean for us

⁷⁸ Ibid., 293.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mimi L. Larson, "The Child in our Midst: The Shifting Trends in Ministry with Children and Families over the Past Forty Years," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (December 2020), 434–448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320943902>, accessed 3/26/23.

⁸¹ Ibid., 435.

to value the child in our midst? Larson notes that the church devotes much time and effort to teaching and evangelizing children. Despite that, children maintain a backseat status regarding their spiritual development. Research shows that even with the shifts and changes in ministry trends, congregations do not have a high view of children within the local church and are more likely to be ambivalent and indifferent to children.⁸² One of the most currently debated topics within the local church amongst ministry leaders and pastors is whether children should remain in the worship service or go to their designated setting.⁸³ The question that church leaders need to ask is, how can a church demonstrate that it values children when children are asked to leave the worship service, it being one of the essential parts of the church's activities?⁸⁴ Larson's study has helped me to answer with a resounding no that children should not be removed from the worship service. They are an integral part of the church and should be treated as such.

Traditionally, ministry with children has undergone many changes over the last forty years. These changes include how families and churches disciple and teach children in Christian education, the effect of changing philosophy in understanding children and in ministry practice, and the growing need for professional children's ministry workers.⁸⁵ Over the same time frame, the approaches used to teach children in the church have changed considerably from a content-focused approach that relied heavily on direct instruction to a process or journey experience that is more common and nurturing for children's spiritual growth and development.⁸⁶ Greater is in the process of expanding children's role in the church. We want to ensure that children participate in every aspect of the church that is age appropriate. We believe that that is the best way to ensure

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 436.

that children are adequately taught how to follow Jesus and that their spiritual gifts and talents are nurtured. While developmental psychologists significantly understand a person's emotional growth and cognitive learning, they do not specifically address a child's spiritual formation.⁸⁷ Church leaders usually approach conversations regarding children in the church from a growth perspective rather than a theological perspective, which is evident in research that, for example, questions when it is developmentally age appropriate for children to participate in Holy Communion.⁸⁸ Numerous concepts and movements within the church have designed ministry with children. Christian educators have set the pace in thinking about church structure because they linked it to growing people into becoming followers of Christ.⁸⁹ Larson wonders, as practical ministry becomes a more substantial influence in churches, what positions should scholars and practitioners understand so they can be better prepared to equip children and families?⁹⁰ The church needs a different outlook as its members work with children, one that engages and educates them and lets them have a voice in the church and how things are done.⁹¹ Larson's study reinforces that pastors and church leaders must seriously consider children when discussing and planning for the church's present and future. Children need to be included in meetings and discussions about the church because they can help adults have a better perspective on children in ministry.

Colette Potts, the former Director of Children's Ministries at Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church, outlines a process for creating a children's ministry that involves the whole church. The Bible calls us to love one another, which the church teaches; however, Potts discusses the importance of demonstrating how to put love into action for children and adults. Some churches

⁸⁷ Ibid., 437.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 440.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 442.

wrestle with the question, how do we minister to young adults with children?⁹² No matter how busy young families are, they make time to do what interests them.⁹³ So, maybe, it is not that they are too busy to attend church, but maybe it is because the church is not offering them what interests them.⁹⁴ The church should be offering children a safe place where they are loved; where they feel included, no matter what; and where their presence matters, even at a young age.⁹⁵ Potts notes that our churches are holy spaces, and we treat them accordingly. Therefore, we, in turn, expect our churches to give us something in return; for example, when we come to church, we expect to feel welcomed and loved. Potts writes, "I am constantly asking myself, do children feel loved in this space?"⁹⁶ She says the correct response should be yes because if we feel welcomed, we must also feel loved. However, the fundamental reason children must feel loved is to encourage them to love, and it is easier to love others when we feel loved by others.

A children's ministry has to offer children more than Sunday School. It should also allow children to participate in the church's life to develop a meaningful relationship with God and others.⁹⁷ Potts' study helps me to have a clear understanding of church leaders' roles in ensuring that children are welcomed and that they feel welcome when they come to church. One way Greater can do that is by having a Children's Ministry that provides them with the same opportunities as adults, a ministry that ministers to them and allows them to minister to others. Christianity results from Jesus' insistence that God loves us and that we are all called to love and care for one another, especially the little ones, which is what children and families have always needed and what the church is responsible for providing.⁹⁸ The church should not only see children

⁹² Colette Potts, *Love First: A Children's Ministry for the Whole Church*. (New York: Church Publishing, 2018), 2.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 46.

as little people who need to be ministered to or are waiting to become adults before they mature spiritually. Neither should they be treated as instruments to protect the church from declining membership. Children are to be seen as valuable church members with something to offer everyone. Church leaders must always consider what gifts it offers children and what gifts children provide the church. One of the greatest gifts we can give children is recognizing them as full church members and committing to treating them that way.⁹⁹ My project sought to do that.

The Church's Role in Children's Socialization

Robert Crosby, Erin Smith, and Thomas Frederick, professors of Psychology at California Baptist University, tried to determine the church's role in developing children's socialization to help them grow spiritually. They evaluated how the church can develop activities to reinforce the value children add to the church. They outlined the elements that promote children to feel loved and valued and the church's role in creating a worship environment that supports them to grow spiritually. Crosby et al. note that school-age children must have loving and supportive relationships inside and outside the home to develop appropriately.¹⁰⁰ They further note that children can receive social support from teachers, classmates, and close friends.¹⁰¹ The authors state, however, the local church, while it has not been fully studied, may be a major source of support for school-aged children, especially given the challenges of other institutions to fully address the children's social needs.¹⁰² Since churches have the resources to offer children lasting helpful adult and friend interactions, they stimulate behaviors intended to promote others. Churches can maintain individual shared associations over an extended period.¹⁰³ In addition, these

⁹⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁰ Robert G. Crosby, III, Erin I. Smith, and Thomas V. Frederick. "The Kid-Friendly Church: What Makes Children Feel Loved, Valued, and Part of a Supportive Church Community." *Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 82, no. 1 (2015): 87, <https://www.academia.edu/28663407>, accessed 3/26/23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

relationships are one of the main ways the church influences its spiritual mission of converting its members to become followers of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, being embraced and received into fellowship increases self-esteem, permitting the believer to move toward God more closely.¹⁰⁵ When the church is a source of belonging and understanding, as described in 1 Peter, the Christian is formed in Christ through membership. Thus, positive church relationships may provide children with a path to spiritual conversion and the psychosocial benefits associated with other support sources."¹⁰⁶ The children Crosby et al. interviewed described receiving love and care from adults and peers, mainly within the children's ministry. Most of the loving and caring they received were actions prompted by individuals who worked with the children's ministry. Therefore, children more than likely demonstrated their spiritual gifts within the context of the children's ministry.¹⁰⁷ Greater's Children's Ministry is being revitalized to include activities allowing children to be developed into followers of Christ. The ministry will consist of activities for children to learn about God and how he requires them to live, as well as activities that will allow them to demonstrate what they learn by serving others and by being served by others.

Wendy Haight looked at children's ministry through an African-American lens and wrote that understanding children's development within an African-American community is necessary to create a relevant children's ministry. She provides a nuanced description of children's experiences within an African-American Christian community by examining the patterns of socially mixing with others and participation. Her study focused on Sunday School as a primary source for developing children socially and spiritually. In addition to children's participation in worship, Greater's Children's Ministry revitalization will include Sunday School as one of the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 98–99.

methods used to disciple children. Haight's first goal was to describe African-American adults' socialization viewpoints and customs differently.¹⁰⁸ The second goal was to help the reader understand children's growth within the African-American community.¹⁰⁹ The third goal was to provide a more distinct description of children's experiences in the church.¹¹⁰ These goals are pertinent because they help pastors and church leaders understand the significance of Sunday School and its impact on children's social and spiritual development. Sunday School must be a part of the children's ministry. Haight writes, "The development of psychological resiliency in children probably occurs through the dialectical processes of socialization and acquisition."¹¹¹ Socialization is the process adults use to create patterns that provide structure for children's social environment, and acquisition is the process children use to interpret, respond to, and ultimately embrace, reject, or elaborate upon the social patterns to which they are exposed.¹¹² Children make the necessary adjustments to their understanding and behavior based on the adults' socialization practices.

An example is when the Sunday School teachers shared how they influenced the children's lives and how the interaction with them improved their understanding of Scripture.¹¹³ Haight notes that scholars of Black history and culture have argued, for the most part, that spiritual belief systems are ways that many African-Americans protect themselves. Religious belief exercises, commonly known as accepted cultural values, are strategies for dealing with adversity and a vehicle of socialization for African-Americans from the time of slavery.¹¹⁴ Despite its significance, the African-American church has not generally explored its role in the development of children.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Wendy L. Haight, *African-American Children at Church: A Sociocultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Within the African-American church, Sunday School provides a significant environment for children's socialization¹¹⁶ and may be a critical context for developing resiliency.¹¹⁷

Nurturing Children's Spirituality

When children have someone to listen to them, who hears, acknowledges, and encourages their childhood experiences with God, it creates a spiritual impression that shapes their lives.¹¹⁸ Lacy Borgo, a teacher of Children's Spirituality and Spiritual Direction, explores ways to increase the capacity to engage children in spiritual conversation. She states, "Children's spiritual formation is the process of living in relationship with the triune God."¹¹⁹ When children have the listening ear of an adult, such attention acknowledges and encourages their experiences with God. It helps to develop a spiritual impression that shapes the lives of children as they journey through life with God, parents, teachers, congregations, and others.¹²⁰ Spiritual conversation helps children to become resilient. When children have learned to listen to their inner life and the life in the church, they develop a moral compass to guide them when they face temptations, trials, and tribulations.¹²¹ Borgo suggests that children suffer spiritual deficiency when not part of a listening community.¹²² In addition to spiritual conversations benefiting children, they help adults who listen to them. When adults provide a listening ear to children, such attention can shape their behavior at home, church, school, and the world.¹²³ Borgo outlines elements of spiritual formation. She describes the first element as "God's self."¹²⁴ She states that God constantly and continuously invites people into

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁸ Lacy F. Borgo, *Spiritual Conversations With Children: Listening to God Together* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 24.

a relationship with him.¹²⁵ The next element Borgo describes as "Relationships in human living."¹²⁶ Borgo indicates that spiritual sounds occur every day of a child's life. The child's life is full of inquisitiveness, playfulness, and new experiences, and boundaries of connections and separations are what God seeks to share with the child.¹²⁷ An essential part of the child's spiritual transformation is to be in relationships with adults, which helps shape the child's beliefs about God.

The next element Borgo says is "Pain in human living."¹²⁸ Borgo indicates that when children suffer from being hurt or wounded, they also encounter God. The life of Jesus is the next element, which suggests that through how he lived, Jesus modeled how to be a part of the community and live in the loving community.¹²⁹ The final element discussed by Borgo is "Spiritual Practices."¹³⁰ Jesus demonstrated how to handle other forms of knowledge through his demonstrations of prayer, quiet time, observance, and others.¹³¹ These intentional practices lead to a deeper relationship with God and others.¹³² Borgo's point about children being involved with adults to nurture their developing spirituality is well-taken and will be factored in as Greater's Children's Ministry is revitalized. When children are provided opportunities to share their ideas and give feedback on what is meaningful to them, it will help them grow spiritually.

Kevin Lawson, professor of Christian Education and Director of Ph.D. and EdD programs in Educational Studies at Talbot School of Theology of Biola University, explores children's spirituality from the children's perspective. He answers the following three questions: how do

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

children experience God in the environment they grow up in?¹³³ what does God do to draw children to himself, and how does he help them grow in their relationships with him?¹³⁴ how can adults care for children to help support their spiritual growth and develop their relationship with God through Jesus Christ?¹³⁵ These are essential questions for Greater's church leaders to consider when exploring the best ways to nurture the spiritual formation of children. Lawson uses the following definition of children's spirituality as the focus, "Children's spirituality is the child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship."¹³⁶ For children to learn to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, they need daily practice to live out their faith. In addition to living out their faith at home, children must have opportunities to live out their faith in the church.¹³⁷ Lawson notes that some individuals believe that developing children's spirituality is primarily the responsibility of parents. They must be convinced that parents and congregations must work together to cultivate children's spiritual development. However, family faith practices and church participation complement one another because they are not mutually exclusive.¹³⁸ He points out that families provide individualized experiences for children to develop their spiritual growth, while congregations offer a broader and more diverse experience for children to experience God.¹³⁹ Children need the security of a loving church family to travel with on their spiritual journey and

¹³³ Kevin E. Lawson, ed. *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 3 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), xi.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹³⁷ Karen Marie Yust. "Being Faithful Together," in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 3, ed. Kevin F. Lawson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 224.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

the task of walking with various worshippers to help ensure their spiritual formation.¹⁴⁰ We need sincere mixed generational learning events and practices that build learning communities of mixed ages capable of studying, worshipping, and praying together.¹⁴¹ Lawson quoted John Roberto, who served on the leadership team of Vibrant Faith Ministries and founded the Center for Ministry Development: "In a culture increasingly segregated by ages, generations, or developmental tasks, congregational gatherings may be some of the few or only opportunities for the generations to be with and learn from one another."¹⁴² Lawson also quoted Anne Streaty Wimberly, Executive Director of Youth Hope-Builders Academy and Professor Emerita of Christian Education, Interdenominational Theological Center: "Congregational worship is a prime location of communal faith-sharing, and it is here that religious leaders can best model effective inter-generational approaches to faith formation."¹⁴³ Wimberly lists the preached Word, prayer, and music as the main activities that are significant instructive paths of worship.¹⁴⁴ This work supports revitalizing the Children's Ministry at Greater because it reinforces the fact that the Children's Ministry is essential to the church. The church must provide opportunities for children to learn how to develop their relationships with God. Children must participate in the church's life through prayer, Scripture reading, singing, dancing (liturgy), greeting others, assisting other worshippers to their seats, and other related activities. In addition, children need opportunities to interact with other children and adults in the Christian community. Children are part of the Christian community and must have opportunities to thrive and grow spiritually. Revitalizing the Children's Ministry expands upon Lawson's study by seeking to learn which activities children would like to participate

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

in when they attend church. Adults can decide which activities they want to participate in during worship; children should have the same opportunity.

Lawson and Scottie May explore ways to encourage children's spirituality in the church, and they also look at nurturing children's spirituality within an intergenerational church environment. They note a study by Dana Kennamer Hood, director of nationally recognized teacher education program at Abilene Christian University, regarding children's perception of God, "drawing on the contextual perspective as a theoretical framework."¹⁴⁵ Hood used six kindergarten children from the same church to conduct the study. Hood conducted interviews and made observations using the children's religious setting and sought to include an in-depth view of context that was missing from research previously conducted.¹⁴⁶ Her findings supported the assertion that we cannot ignore the environment in understanding children's religious concepts.¹⁴⁷ Hood pointed out that children do not docilely absorb information about God; instead, they must actively participate in their families and the church.¹⁴⁸ Children bring their developmental levels, personalities, interests, and concerns, and each child's distinctive approach shapes their understanding and relationship with God.

The study helps shape my knowledge of church leaders' responsibility to ensure that children are active participants in the church and the significance of providing a space for children's spirituality to be nurtured. Lawson and May also noted a study entitled "Children in Congregations" by Joyce Ann Mercer, associate professor of Practical Theology and Christian

¹⁴⁵ Dana Kennamer Hood. "Six Children Seeking God: Exploring Childhood Spiritual Development in Context," in *Children's Spirituality, Second Edition: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Application*, eds. Kevin Lawson and Scottie May (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 231–232..

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 238.

Education at San Francisco Theological Seminary, and associates."¹⁴⁹ The researchers advocate that congregational practices shape and critique the congregation's life in addition to their potentially transformative impact on individuals.¹⁵⁰ They explored three questions: "How does the congregation's educational ministry structure contribute to children's faith development? How is the mission and identity of a community impacted by children?"¹⁵¹ What worship practices engage the spiritual thoughts of children?"¹⁵² Several themes emerged as they reflected on and analyzed congregational practices with children. First, many church practices with children consider children's developmental tendencies toward impulsive behavior and their physical attributes. In some cases, the practices positively involved impulse behavior through body movement.¹⁵³ In other cases, these practices consider children's impulse behavior and involvement, allowing them to choose how to participate in the church's activities from various acceptable involvement methods.¹⁵⁴

Second, a critical element in the vitality of the church's practices with children is their commitment of essential resources, space, people, finances, and programs, to a wide range of children's ministry activities.¹⁵⁵ Third, irregularity appears to be the standard for church activities with children. The three congregations studied have plenty of energy and intensity in one area of their practices with children, only to miss other noticeable opportunities for vibrant ministry with children elsewhere in church life.¹⁵⁶ The study aligns with my research, but my study went further

¹⁴⁹ Joyce Ann Mercer, Deborah L. Matthews, and Scott Walz. "Children in Congregations: Congregations as Contexts for Children's Spiritual Growth," in *Children's Spirituality*, eds. Kevin E. Lawson and Scottie May (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 249-264.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

by interviewing children to learn which activities they want to participate in when they come to church. Children must be allowed to participate in meaningful activities to have consistency in children's participation.

Mimi Larson and Robert Keeley, the latter a professor of Education at Calvin University and visiting professor of Discipleship and Faith Formation at Calvin Theological Seminary, discuss the transition that has taken place in children's evangelical spiritual formation and outline a comparison of five theological views and ministry practices.¹⁵⁷ Churches of all denominations have posed theological questions about how to minister effectively to children over the last one-hundred years.¹⁵⁸ Larson and Keeley note that there are several questions that churches have wrestled with during this time: When children are born and as they grow, what are the spiritual conditions?¹⁵⁹ What is the process for them to relate to God during their early years?¹⁶⁰ What methods or techniques should church leaders use to include children's participation in the church?¹⁶¹ At what ages should children be allowed to participate in sacraments or ordinances, and how does the church define their participation?¹⁶² What is the best way to raise children so they will have a meaningful relationship with God and grow into spiritual maturity?¹⁶³ What are the church and parents' roles in ensuring children's spiritual education and development?¹⁶⁴ How can church leaders, parents, and other community members work together to ensure children's well-being?¹⁶⁵ Larson and Keeley say that the lack or absence of historical and theological teachings

¹⁵⁷ Kevin E. Lawson and Adam Harwood. "Comparing Five Theological Views and Ministry Practices," in *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality: New Direction for Education, Ministry, and Discipleship*, eds. Mimi L. Larson and Robert J. Keeley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 39.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

about children in modern theology explains why many churches have struggled to create, maintain, or sustain children's ministry.¹⁶⁶ They sought to address this struggle through a writing project on "theologies of childhood" and the church's ministries that emerge from these shifting views.¹⁶⁷ They challenged everyone who cares about the spiritual life of children to think through this four-fold vision for prioritizing ministry for children: "1) ministry to parents and other caregivers for children, 2) ministry by the church to children, 3) ministry together with children, and 4) ministry by children to others."¹⁶⁸ Larson and Keeley note that all four of these aspects of ministry are needed to inspire children to recognize, love, and obey God, facilitating their growth into adolescence and adulthood, becoming people who value their relationship with God and walk in obedience to him.¹⁶⁹ For the most part, church leaders understand the significance of discipling children; it is just that most have not figured out the most effective way. I enlisted children and parents in revitalizing our Children's Ministry. Before revitalizing our Children's Ministry, I dialogued with the children and parents to get their input. One of the primary steps is to ask children what they would like to do rather than assuming what they would like to do. Lawson and Keeley helped me to focus on the pertinent aspects of revitalizing or developing a children's ministry.

George Barna, the founder of The Barna Group, a market research firm specializing in studying Americans' religious beliefs and behavior and the intersection of faith and culture, evaluated ways the church can be instrumental in children's spiritual growth, exploring ways the church can successfully assess its role in helping children become "spiritual champions."¹⁷⁰ Barna

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 50–51.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷⁰ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Book, 2003), 103.

noted that one of the most exciting aspects of his research regarding children's ministry is how various churches worked with parents during the process.¹⁷¹ He also indicated that evaluating the results doing the study was more difficult than anticipated because a) practically every church has a children's ministry, b) parents represent a large percentage of the church, and c) almost every church interviewed reported that the children's ministry is a critical part of the church.¹⁷² But, when Barna thoroughly evaluated the responses, he found that most churches were just going through the motions of children's ministry.¹⁷³ Barna's research into churches that help children to become spiritual champions possessed five categories of activities: 1) recognition of the spiritual development of children and how they were ministered to, 2) the resources that were made available to the children's ministry, 3) approaches that encourage the anticipated results, 4) the results of the ministry, and 5) the workers or volunteers who were recruited to work with children.¹⁷⁴ Barna found that the standard attributes for churches with children's ministries is a strong foundation for the ministry, including an attitude that penetrates every part of the church's activities. He also found that churches with these characteristics had the best children's ministries.¹⁷⁵ Based on Barna's research and findings, my ministry project is necessary and critical to the spiritual transformation of children at Greater. Barna's study guided my study to ensure that the foundation supports facilitating spiritual change for children and, at the same time, supports the parents in their endeavor to help their children to grow to spiritual maturity. The most effective churches, Barna noted, recognize that the primary objective is to facilitate transformation. They cannot obtain it no matter which programs or activities they implement because only God can

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 104.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 105.

bring about lasting change.¹⁷⁶ Barna noted that one of the critical elements of the ministry viewpoint is to recognize that the children's spiritual development is primarily the parents' responsibility and that the church's responsibility is to support parents in the spiritual development of their children.¹⁷⁷

Barna's point is well taken. At Greater, the Children's Ministry Manual includes the Children's Ministry Vision, which states that the Children's Ministry exists to help parents guide their children by providing loving, safe, and caring interaction with them, teaching children the Gospel, and teaching them the character of God for God to be worshipped and glorified. While parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual development of their children, the church is mainly accountable for the spiritual growth of children when they attend church. The church and parents are responsible for ensuring children's spirituality is nurtured so they can develop a meaningful relationship with God.

Robert Crosby and Erin Smith, assistant professors of Psychology at the University of California at Riverside, say that the church's impact on children's behavior in the community and the church's role in supporting what the parents teach at home are essential to their spiritual development.¹⁷⁸ They evaluate the extent to which community support at church determines children's behavior intended for the good of others outside of family practices and the impact religion has on the interactions between family practices, church support, and behavior intended for the good of others.¹⁷⁹ Although it would be helpful for church leaders to know how the church provides developmental benefits for young children, it is unknown if the church's support *directly*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 105–106.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷⁸ Robert G. Crosby, III and Erin I. Smith. "Church Support as a Predictor of Children's Spirituality and Prosocial Behavior." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 4 (Winter, 2015): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711504300402>, accessed 3/27/23.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 244.

benefits younger children's moral and spiritual development.¹⁸⁰ It is possible that family religious practices coupled with church support impact children's good behavior indirectly by fostering their spirituality.¹⁸¹ It is also likely that, in addition to parents, church support encourages children's spiritual development because their confession to God is developed and sustained through mutual spiritual support within the church community.¹⁸² Those relationships influence children's perception of God.¹⁸³ A study on the relationship between the church's support and spirituality in elementary-age children has not occurred.¹⁸⁴ However, recognized support from God may freely impact behavior by reinforcing religious norms, providing accountability for kind behaviors and discouraging harmful ones.¹⁸⁵ Crosby and Smith hypothesize that receiving support from church will determine children's good behavior independent of family religious practices.¹⁸⁶ They used data from a nonprofit organization specializing in developing religious instruction for children.¹⁸⁷ Their findings were consistent with prior results, which found positive associations between church support and well-being measures among young children.¹⁸⁸ Their findings suggest that for children who feel a substantial degree of belonging, the church may provide a direct source of social control and support, which is significantly reflected in their personal behaviors and values.¹⁸⁹ Crosby and Smith say children who see God as loving may respond to his love by obeying the biblical lessons because of their devotion to God.¹⁹⁰ "Children who receive from their church the provision of love, empathy, caring, trust, a sense of community, and the feeling of the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 243.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 261.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

family are more likely to internalize the church's values regarding good behavior.”¹⁹¹ When planning how to revitalize Greater’s Children’s Ministry, Crosby and Smith’s study was instrumental in factoring in ways to ensure that children feel connected to our church family and ways the church could support them in their spiritual growth and development.

Heather Ingersoll, academic dean at the Ambrose School, explored ways the church can help children to discover, develop, and share their spirituality. She examined the underlying theories that foster environments among Christian churches where adult faith and the resulting power adults hold inhibit children's ability to have spiritual and faithful beliefs and understanding. The more research on children's spirituality, the more researchers learn that Christian churches in the United States generally fail to provide sufficient space for children to explore, develop, and share their spirituality.¹⁹² This could cause children to turn away from and separate from their spirituality when they grow up, and it also robs the church of the chance to grow and flourish from children's unique experiences with God.¹⁹³ Researchers have learned that when children are involved in their spiritual growth, as opposed to being inactive participants, they can receive knowledge about God.¹⁹⁴ The four barriers to creating an all-inclusive environment for the nurture of children's spirituality are: "1) ennoblement (privilege) of adult faith, 2) reliance on content acquisition, 3) token opportunities for children's participation, 4) and adultism."¹⁹⁵

The ennoblement of adult faith is when adults think that a child's faith does not develop until they reach adolescence or adulthood.¹⁹⁶ Reliance on content acquisition refers to the idea that

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Heather Nicole Ingersoll, "Making room: a place for children's spirituality in the Christian church." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19, no. 3-4 (Aug-Nov 2014), 164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.979774>, accessed 3/27/23.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 165.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 166.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 167.

children can only be filled with knowledge about God but cannot develop faith in him.¹⁹⁷ Children are seen as docile participants of educational programs that churches offer rather than practicing participants in the overall structure of the church.¹⁹⁸ Ingersoll suggests that the focus on growing religious knowledge may suppress children's innate ability for spiritual knowing and being. Token opportunities for participation describe when children have a voice but not a chance to express meaningful opinions.¹⁹⁹ The entertainment-based program is what some researchers compare to "Chuck E. Cheese" or a "McDonald's playhouse."²⁰⁰ It is the idea that children should have the most fun at church.²⁰¹ Children's church is a famous method churches use to engage children in worship, separate from adult worship.²⁰² This model emphasizes children worshipping with other children in their age group, and it frees up the adults to worship with other adults without the presence of children.²⁰³ Adultism is a final obstacle to emerging practices to foster children's spiritual growth, as reflected in the church's attention to adults' needs. This barrier is the most restrictive of all the obstacles because the emphasis is on the needs of adults.²⁰⁴ Ingersoll notes that children in worship have the most positive influence on nurturing children's spirituality. A significant amount of literature supports children in worship; however, the trend in Christian communities continues to take children out of worship services.²⁰⁵ Ingersoll's study addressed the challenges of children in the Christian community, which helped guide me as I proceeded to revitalize our Children's Ministry. Her study also helped guide me in my thought process as I worked to ensure that children would have an opportunity to use their spiritual gifts by ministering

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 169.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 170.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

to others, participating in the worship service, and having a space to experience worship with others.

Discipling Children

A study conducted by Valeria Bell et al., all of Awana (an international evangelical Christian nonprofit organization in child and youth discipleship), highlights honest, robust questions about the church's future and children's involvement. They suggest timely conversations must occur with pastors and children's ministry leaders due to a constantly changing environment and programs.²⁰⁶ The church has barely accessed the potential that children have and has neglected to see children as God sees them. God created children to be missionaries, evangelists, entrepreneurs for the kingdom of God, and influencers of their generation. Vital child discipleship is the process of committing time and making space for children to get to know Jesus, learn the Word, and apply the Word to their daily lives, and as a result, make a difference in the lives of others.²⁰⁷ The way to implement a strong child discipleship program is to start with the "Why."²⁰⁸ One must first ask the question: Why do we minister to children?²⁰⁹ Why do we need a children's ministry in the first place? The answer to those questions is that we want to see children learn who Jesus is, and we want them to grow in their relationship with Jesus.²¹⁰ The next step is to develop a child-focused viewpoint because sometimes, we create programs that overtake our mission and vision for the children's ministry.²¹¹ If we are not careful, we will focus too much on doing programs rather than discipling children.²¹² The third step is to match the ministry with the current

²⁰⁶ Valeria Bell, Matt Markins, Chris Marchand, and Mike Handler. *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church* (Chicago: Awana Clubs International, 2019), 18.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 140.

culture to shift away from the past. We will get caught up in looking backward as opposed to looking forward. It is necessary to keep up with the times to create and maintain a thriving children's ministry.

Step four is to inspire fully engaged child discipleship makers. Our culture's drastic changes have caused widespread isolation in our country.²¹³ Consequently, the changes have had a negative result for children. It is critical to engage workers who are wholly committed to discipling children.²¹⁴ Bell et al. state one loving, caring adult engaged in a child's life can dramatically increase a child's long-term potential for success."²¹⁵ The authors' fifth step is to ensure that discipleship occurs for every child based on their unique path.²¹⁶ In other words, ministry leaders should get to know the children by name. Ministry leaders should get to know their hearts, pain, and struggles and believe in their potential to be followers of Jesus.²¹⁷ The authors argue that children need to be part of the church's life because children have so many needs that a church can meet.²¹⁸ While the authors do not specifically address how churches can create or revitalize children's ministry, they outline the importance of churches discipling children. They do a good job building the foundation for churches to justify having a children's ministry. They emphasize that having a children's ministry is not an option but a mandate from God. While they do not highlight the benefits children provide to the church, they do outline the significance that a children's ministry can make in the lives of children and the church.

The study and findings align with my ministry project because the results confirm a need for children's ministry. Churches must intentionally create and provide a space and opportunities

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 143.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 145.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 148.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 107.

for children to interact with adults, while being discipled and to disciple others. Children are the church's future leaders; consequently, they need to be trained to participate fully in the church's life while they are children. They must see adults praying, reading Scripture, welcoming others to church, and other related activities. One of the best ways to learn about the activities children would like to participate in when they come to church is by asking them. The church leaders need to let the children have a voice, and that is precisely what revitalizing the Children's Ministry at Greater aims to accomplish.

Anthony Adawu, PhD. in Philosophy at Saint Thomas University, evaluates children in their ministry context, invites them to provide input, and attempts to learn how children see the world and God. Adawu answers the following questions: 1) "What does it mean to do theology with children?" 2) "What is the nature and mission of such theology?" Furthermore, 3) "What methodology does one employ in this endeavor?" Adawu does this from a practical theological perspective.²¹⁹ Doing theology with children involves recognizing children in the church, giving them a voice, listening to their concerns, dreams, and struggles, and learning to see the world and God through their eyes.²²⁰ Doctrines of child development examine different understandings of children and child development, the church and adults' responsibilities for children, and children's common concerns with adults across religions.²²¹ Doctrines of child development have also focused on the different understandings of children's spiritual growth and the need to listen to them as they grow.²²² Exploring the history and methods of children's theology requires its focus must address children's tangible experiences and needs, and allow them to participate in the church and

²¹⁹ Anthony Adawu, "Doing theology with children through multimodal narrativity." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (Summer, 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5494>, accessed 3/27/23.

²²⁰ Ibid., 2.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

use their spiritual gifts and talents.²²³ First, theology with children is to travel with them to understand their faith in God and its impact on their lives.²²⁴ Doing theology with children, therefore, allows children to be in the presence of others with whom they can discover their faith, including their family members, friends, church members, schools, and people trained to teach Scripture.²²⁵ Second, to do theology with children is to see the mysteries of God through their eyes. It involves seeing, listening, speaking, and acting with children about the church's traditions and how it interacts with the world.²²⁶ Children push the boundaries of theology and free us to accept its challenges while at the same time enjoying its fruits.²²⁷ To do theology with children is to have a deeper appreciation of the mysteries of God and all that it means for God's creation.²²⁸ Finally, insightful faith should help children identify their spiritual gifts and learn how to use them in church as well as for the benefit of others.²²⁹ Practical theology is a theology that we can see.²³⁰ It allows adults to see children as they are. Like adults, children experience joy, pain, suffering, and hope.²³¹ This study makes excellent points about the importance of children participating in the church's life, and getting the children's input, which helps guide me as I revitalize our Children's Ministry by ensuring that children provide their feedback during the preliminary planning process. This study confirms that allowing children a voice regarding what keeps them engaged in ministry is essential.

Making Lifelong Disciples

Dan Lovaglia, of Awana (an international evangelical Christian nonprofit organization in

²²³ Ibid.
²²⁴ Ibid., 3.
²²⁵ Ibid.
²²⁶ Ibid., 4.
²²⁷ Ibid.
²²⁸ Ibid.
²²⁹ Ibid.
²³⁰ Ibid., 5
²³¹ Ibid.

child and youth discipleship), notes that research over the past decade has revealed a lack of long-term growth in the Christian community as children progress through children's ministries into adulthood. He presents three required commitments for interactive children's ministry, and the first is to be consistent in a church community.²³² The principle here is to be utterly devoted to being authentic and reliable in the church.²³³ The children's ministry leader's example has an impact on the children. Jesus demonstrates that by calling his followers out of insincerity into humbleness. Before that can take place, people have to be in the right relationship with God and be in a committed relationship with other people. The church is needed to help people become lifelong followers of Jesus. Lovaglia notes that church leaders must be deliberate about why they do what they do.²³⁴ People must do what they say they are going to do.

The church and children's ministry can be impactful to children and families. Having a listening ear, observing, and engaging is essential so that what matters the most will propel the leader's vision, interactions, principles, and encounters. Children's ministry is a twenty-four/seven calling, but the leaders do not have to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The leaders of the children's ministry have to set distinct boundaries. It is challenging to set boundaries when we serve people because there are always needs to be met.²³⁵ When the relationship with God takes priority in the leader's life, the children's ministry leaders can be fully available for discipleship. Lovaglia's work outlines the importance of ministry leaders being intentional about why they do what they do concerning children's ministry. It is helpful because as I proceed with revitalizing our Children's Ministry, it will guide me in building the proper

²³² Dan Lovaglia, *Relational Children's Ministry: Turning Kid-Influencers Into Lifelong Disciple Makers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 215.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 217.

²³⁵ Ibid.

foundation and ensuring that exemplary volunteers are recruited to work with the children.

Children's Ministries

David Csinos, founder and president of Faith Forward, and Ivy Beckwith explore concerns about children and the church's learning and teaching activities. They discuss ways to engage the contemporary culture while maintaining faithfulness and commitment to follow Jesus. Senior pastors, executive pastors, and church leaders often see children's ministry as opportunities to increase church membership rather than as a place to disciple children.²³⁶ Some churches create children's programs to compete with neighboring churches for membership.²³⁷ "Children's ministry is not about school (e.g., Church School), nor is it about midweek clubs, Bible quizzing championships, vacation Bible school, Children's Church, the latest curricula, and church-based day camps."²³⁸ These are activities that some church leaders deem absolutely necessary for children's ministry. Still, it is essential to note that children's ministry is about ministering to children and providing opportunities for children to do ministry.²³⁹ Ministry exists to help people form, develop and live healthy, flourishing lives. Ministry is about ministering, and it is about action for the good of others.²⁴⁰ Children's ministry is not about building fun and entertaining programs for children so their parents can enjoy worship service without them.²⁴¹ It is not about increasing attendance at Sunday School, day camps, or weekly activities. Children's ministry's primary objective should always be ministering to children and preparing them to minister to others. Children's ministry is about preparing children for service to others, not programs.²⁴²

²³⁶ David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith. *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 28.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

However, even this simple notion can become problematic. In our modern consumer-driven society, church leaders, unfortunately, see children as consumers rather than ministry providers. However, children's ministry can become a ministry with children themselves providing experiences with the church that lead to a greater love of God and life as followers of Jesus.²⁴³ Children's ministry allows children to understand that there are not always answers to their questions. However, despite unanswered questions, they can still live the faith as disciples of Christ because the children's ministry's goal is to nurture the child's whole life and not classify the child's "church life" from the rest of the child's life.²⁴⁴ Children's ministry appreciates that children feel God's love when they are given opportunities to be a part of a Christian family that loves and values their participation. It recognizes that children see the reign of God by being a part of the community, not just by receiving instruction knowledge but also by acquiring experiential knowledge. It understands that children need to learn from adults and teach adults about life in God's kingdom.²⁴⁵ Csinos' work is beneficial in guiding me to ensure that the primary purpose of the Children's Ministry is for children to be ministered to and to minister to others.

Tina Houser, minister of Children at First Church of God, considered ways to develop children's ministries that would be conducive to the space the church has available and outlined the necessary steps to build a thriving children's ministry with a plan for preparing the site, laying the foundation, and "framing," which consists of publicity, welcoming, providing resources, parent involvement, celebration, creativity, to name a few.²⁴⁶ Children's ministry is essential because it is time to leave behind how it used to be. Children's ministry is *not* about childcare; it is about

²⁴³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Tina Houser, *Building Children's Ministry: A Practical Guide* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 141-196

influencing the lives of children so they will want to live godly lives.²⁴⁷ Children's Ministry is about developing followers of Christ from the time babies are born, rather than waiting until children become adults and having to tear down the wall and rebuild. Why is this important? Because God says so.²⁴⁸ Houser writes that the following steps are necessary to build a children's ministry: a statement of purpose, the vision, proper leadership, prayer along the way, determining God's expectations for the ministry, forming relationships, and securing support from the pastor and church leaders.²⁴⁹ An essential aspect of revitalizing a children's ministry involves those mentioned above. This work supports having a children's ministry and outlines the steps that church leaders must take to ensure that the children's ministry is designed to do what Jesus said, "Let the children come to me."

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Description of Project Design and Execution

Participants

I envisioned that the ministry project participants would be children ages five to twelve and their parents who attended the church. Although our church needs to revitalize ministries for children of all ages, I chose elementary school-age children to narrow the scope of my project because they represent the largest segment of my church's children population. By the end of the project, I interviewed eighteen children and fourteen parents.

Ministry Project Approval

I obtained the pastor's approval to proceed with the Children's Ministry project. My church has local autonomy, so there is no governing board, and the pastor has the authority to make the final decision.

I obtained permission to interview the children from the parents by providing a Consent Form (see Appendix A) requesting authorization for their children's participation. In addition, for the children whose parents consented, I asked them to indicate whether or not they would like to participate by completing an Assent Form (see Appendix B).

Children's Ministry Leaders

The ministries at my church are grouped by categories, including membership, maturity, missions, ministry, and membership. A ministry director manages each category, and the Children's Ministry reports to the ministry director who manages membership.

I worked with the ministry director to establish the criteria for selecting individuals to work with the Children's Ministry. The ministry director assigned the ministry leader who would select the rest of the team with the assistance of the ministry director. One of the requirements for

working with the Children's Ministry is a background check. When I talked to individuals who expressed a desire to work with the Children's Ministry, I informed them upfront that a background check would be required. If anyone objected to having a background check, that automatically disqualified him or her from working with the Children's Ministry. A background check is also required for individuals who work directly with the Children's Ministry, such as individuals from other ministries.

I created a Reportable Offense procedure, which requires ministry leaders to report Reportable Offenses to me, the Director of Ministry Development. If anything is reported, I would alert the pastor, and I would report offenses to the local department of social services or local law enforcement agency. The Reportable Offense procedure is described in the Children's Ministry Manual.

Ministry Project Announcement

During the Sunday morning worship service on October 31, 2022, an announcement was made to notify parents that we had an incredible opportunity to revitalize the Children's Ministry and wanted to get their and their children's participation. In the pastor's absence, the executive minister instructed them to provide me with their contact information, so I could reach out to them to schedule a meeting to explain the ministry project.

Parents' Meeting

I obtained the parents' contact information and invited them to attend a Zoom meeting to present my proposal to include the children's participation in the worship services. As previously mentioned, Zoom is a platform that allows participants to meet virtually. I preferred to meet with the parents face-to-face as a group when I talked to them about the study, because it would be more beneficial for them to see other parents face-to-face and for me to see their faces and read their

body language. It would also help them to hear other parents' questions. I selected a date to schedule a Zoom meeting with parents to explain the purpose of the study, how I planned to conduct it, and the age group to be involved in the Children's Ministry. I requested that they and their children participate, and I let them know that I would ask the children to assent to participate. I knew that children could not legally consent to participate, so I had the parents sign the Consent Form. However, for the children to exercise appropriate agency, I invited them to do so using the Assent Form, if their parents consented to permit their involvement. No child was approached whose parent had not agreed to their participation. I emailed Consent Forms to parents, handed them out in church after Sunday worship service, and requested that they be returned to me by email or in person.

Children's Meeting

I scheduled a Zoom date to conduct the meeting with the children. Their parents were in attendance. At the meeting, I explained why I wanted to do the study and how I planned to do it. I told them that I valued their input and asked their permission to allow me to ask them some questions. I let them know their parents had given me permission to talk to them, and I also wanted to see if they would like to share their ideas with me.

I explained the Assent Form (shared on the Zoom screen) to the children. The Assent Form had a smiley face, a frowny face, and a face with a question mark. I asked the children who agreed to participate to circle the smiley face. For the children who disagreed, I asked them to circle the frowny face. For the unsure children, I asked them to circle the face with the question mark. None of the children opted not to participate, and none of the children were unsure, so providing additional information was unnecessary.

I told them that I would email the Assent Form to their parents so they could sign them. I

let them know that once they had signed the Assent Form, I would ask their parents to email the signed Assent Form back to me, or they could give it to me at church.

Most of the Consent and Assent forms were returned to me via email; however, in some cases, I had to follow up numerous times. In certain instances, I conducted the interviews before receiving the Consent and Assent Forms; however, in each case, I received verbal approval or assent to proceed and documented those dates.

Anticipated Challenges

The challenges that I had anticipated were 1) getting the children to the church, 2) obtaining a sufficient number of children to participate, 3) obtaining the parents' consent for their children to participate, 4) obtaining the children's assent, and 5) selecting a day and time that would be convenient for the children and parents. The solution was to offer parents the option to be interviewed on Zoom or by phone, and the children to be interviewed by Zoom only.

My goal was to obtain a minimum of twenty-five children to participate, with an alternative plan to invite another urban church to participate in the study, if necessary. However, once the study was underway, and since the primary objective was to revitalize the Children's Ministry at *my* church, I decided to limit my study to the children at my church. Our church only has twenty-one children in the age group of interest. I interviewed eighteen of twenty-one children and fourteen parents. I coordinated convenient dates and times to conduct the interviews. I attempted to schedule interviews with the three children I did not interview, but due to personal problems that the parents were dealing with, the children were not available to be interviewed.

IRB Requirement

Because children are vulnerable, and I would be conducting one-on-one interviews with them, St. Mary's IRB (Institutional Review Board) required a second adult to be present as an

observer during all in-person or virtual meetings with children and advise them that the person was just there to help me. I used a second (unrelated adult) during four interviews of children. However, because it was challenging to coordinate dates and times with a second adult, parents, and children, and because of time constraints, I asked the parents to serve as the second adult observer when I interviewed the remaining fourteen children. I asked the parents not to prompt the children because I wanted them to think and speak for themselves. The parents complied with my request during the interview.

Survey Questions

Knowing the ministries that Greater already had in place, I wanted to learn if our children were interested in participating in any of them and, if so, which ones. I was also interested in whether they would identify the same ministries for other children as they would for themselves. Likewise, I was interested if parents would identify particular ministries as good ones in which their children (and other children) could participate at Greater and which ones they would deem not a good fit for both groups of children. Finally, I was also interested in any ideas that children and parents had for the Children's Ministry. For all questions, comparisons were made between the responses made by children and parents.

Children

Question 1 "Do you like coming to church?"

Purpose: To learn if the participants come to church because they have to or if they enjoy coming.

Question 2 "Which activities would you like to do when you come to church?"

The activities included those already in place for our worship services: helping people to their seats, singing in the choir, greeting people, reading Scripture out loud in front of the church, praying out loud in front of the church, and (liturgical) dancing with other children. My church has

a dance ministry that does liturgical dance, so the children are familiar with the type of dance to which I referred.

Purpose: To give the children an opportunity to decide which activities they would prefer.

Question 3 "Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?"

Purpose: To prompt the children to think about other children and which activities they might prefer and to see if the answers about other children differed from what they preferred for themselves.

Question 4 "Would you invite your friends to come to church?"

Purpose: To learn how the children I interviewed felt about other children attending church.

Question 5 "Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?"

Purpose: To prompt the children to think about their friends and which activities they might prefer and to see if the answers about their friends differed from what they preferred for themselves.

Parents

Question 1 "Do your children like coming to church?"

Purpose: To learn if the parents had a different perspective than the children.

Question 2 "In which activities would you like to see the church include children?"

Purpose: To prompt the parents to think about children and which activities they might like to do when they come to church and to see if parental impressions differed from those of their children.

Question 3 "Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church."

Purpose: To prompt the parents to think about other children and which activities they might like to do and to determine if their responses about other children differed from their responses about their own children.

Question 4 "Would you invite your friends' children to come to church?"

Purpose: To learn how the parents I interviewed felt about other children attending church.

Question 5 "Which activities do you think your friends' children would enjoy?"

Purpose: To prompt the parents to think about other children and which activities they might prefer and to see if the answers about other children differed from what they preferred for their children.

Asked of Both Parents and Children

Question 6 "If you were the pastor, what would you let children do when they come to church?"

Purpose: To learn what activities other than the ones surveyed were mentioned, to see if parental answers differed from that of the children.

Question 7 "Is there anything else you would like to share with me that would benefit the Children's Ministry?"

Purpose: To prompt both children and parents to think about other activities that would benefit the Children's Ministry.

Survey Questions Asked Only of Parents

Even when children wish to be involved at church, they can only do so if they are brought to church. The following questions explored parental perspectives on children in the Christian tradition, their own experiences of church when they were young children, and the role of Children's Ministry at Greater. Results are displayed in Appendix C.

A. What is your scriptural perspective of children in ministry? What Scripture supports your viewpoint?

Purpose: To see if parents thought the Bible supported children's involvement in ministry and to determine if the participants knew any passages addressing children.

B. Where do you see the Children's Ministry fitting into the overall structure of the church?

Purpose: To determine if the participants value a children's ministry as much as some of the other ministries in the church.

C. What do you like about bringing your children to church?

Purpose: To learn specifically what motivates parents to bring their children to church.

D. What other activities would you like to see children involved in the church?

Purpose: To see if the participants had suggestions the church could use to further enhance the Children's Ministry.

E. What don't you like about bringing your children to church?

Purpose: To learn what might impede parents from bringing their children to church and if the church could make improvements to ensure children are meaningful engaged.

F. How involved were you in church when you were a child?

Purpose: To see if the participants attended church as children and what they did at church.

G. What benefits did you receive as a result of your involvement?

Purpose: To see if the participants could tie their participation in church as children to their spiritual growth and relationship with God as adults.

Interviews

I conducted the interviews with the children via Zoom. I did not do phone interviews with the children, because I thought the children would feel more comfortable if they could see to whom

they spoke, and their responses would be more meaningful. I coordinated the dates and times with the parents and sent a Zoom link. I asked the children the survey questions and manually wrote the responses; I did not record the answers by audio or video because I did not want to make the children uncomfortable. Since the questions were straightforward, required yes or no responses, check marks, or fill-in-the-blanks, I could manually capture the necessary data effectively. I conducted interviews with the parents via Zoom similarly, or by telephone if they preferred. I told the children that I would not share their individual responses. As for the parents, responses were shared generally, but not specifically, for planning purposes.

The Planning Process

After the interviews, I created a Children's Ministry Planning Committee, which consists of the ministry director, ministry leader, and a young adult who serves on the Ministry Development team, to discuss plans to start our Children's Ministry pilot. At the meeting, we discussed the requirements for adults to participate in our Children's Ministry, such as background checks and interviews for the prospective ministry volunteers; coordinating with the parents to bring the children to church so they could participate; and determining the start date. Because it seemed that certain ministries were more attractive to the children, based on their responses, we decided that a meeting with the leaders of the selected ministries would be necessary to introduce the idea of having the children participate and discuss the coordination necessary to acclimate the children.

When the Children's Ministry Planning Committee met with the ministry leaders of the most requested ministries, the team decided that the children should wear white tops, black pants or skirts, and black or navy shoes. The objective was to make the process easy for the children and not require parents to spend money buying additional clothing. The team also discussed the process

for introducing the children to the ministries and how they would be assigned during the worship service. The decision was made to have the children at the church thirty minutes before the service, so we would have time to welcome them and assign them to the usher or greeter with whom they would serve. We also decided to make the process as seamless as possible for the parents by doing "on-the-job training" with the children so that the parents would not have to make an extra trip to church. I set the pilot start date for Sunday, January 22, 2023, and informed the parents.

Children's Ministry Announcement

I asked the church's Audio/Video team to prepare an announcement for in-person, Facebook, and YouTube worshippers that the Children's Ministry would officially begin on Sunday, January 22, 2023. The announcement also invited other families who were not active church members to participate, and my contact information was also provided.

An email was sent to the parents to inform them of the start date of the Children's Ministry, remind them about the uniform that the children would be wearing during the service, and advise them what time the children should arrive so they could be assigned and ready to serve.

A check-in meeting via Zoom was scheduled with the Children's Ministry Planning Committee to discuss the pilot protocol and ensure everything would be in place for the children on that date.

Execution of Ministry – Week 1

The ministry director instructed the parents to bring the children to the conference room at the back of the church, where they would be greeted, introduced to the ministry leaders, and provided a quick introduction. The Children's Ministry Planning Committee member called out the child's name and their assigned ministry. Afterward, the ministry leader escorted the children and provided an overview of what to expect.

Since this was the children's first actual experience, they served until the pastor began the sermon, after which they joined the adult(s) who brought them to church. We did not want to overwhelm the children and thought it more effective to gradually extend their time serving in the worship service.

The ministry director sent an email to the ministry leaders of the selected ministries to ensure the children could serve every Sunday. This email also stated that we would contact them for their weekly feedback to learn what worked well and what needed to be tweaked. In addition, the email assured the ministry leaders that we would remind the parents to have the children arrive to church on time the following Sunday. Still, before doing that, we wanted to ensure that their ministries could accommodate the children for the second week of the pilot.

Our eventual goal would be to create schedules for identifying which child(ren) will be assigned to each ministry every week. Doing so will give all the appropriate leaders an idea of which child(ren) will be on duty for that Sunday.

After week one of the pilot, the ministry director also sent an email to the parents thanking them for their support and letting them know that the children's experience participating in the worship service was positive. The parents were also informed that the goal of the Children's Ministry is to create space for the children to be active every Sunday and that we would check in with them and the children for the next several weeks to obtain feedback and make the necessary adjustments. We provided the following instructions to the parents:

- Please have the child(ren) at church by 9 a.m.
- The uniform is white tops, black pants/skirts, and black or navy shoes.
- We will return the children to their parent(s) once the sermonic song begins so they can get settled before the sermon starts.

- Notify us whether or not the children will serve the following Sunday.
- Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

Execution of Ministry – Subsequent Weeks

In the second week of the pilot, none of the children came prepared to participate in the worship service. Although the ministry director emailed the parents to remind them that children would be able to serve every Sunday, most of the parents said they did not know. There was a communication malfunction. We learned that receiving emails is not the parents preferred method of communication but that they prefer phone calls, text messages, and in-person conversations. The Children's Ministry Planning Committee decided that rather than relying solely on communicating via email or text, contacting the parents directly by phone or in person would be most effective. I spoke with the parents directly and instructed them on how to proceed. I told them the children could serve in the worship service every Sunday. By speaking to the parents directly, I learned that some children, due to co-parenting, would not be in church every Sunday. In those cases, the parents agreed to let us know when to expect their children.

During the third week of the pilot, the children arrived and were prepared to serve. We greeted them and gave them their assignments, and they were in place when the worship service began. After the service, I talked to some parents whose children were there but were not in uniform to participate in the worship service. I learned that some parents were still getting used to their children participating in the service but that they would do better as time progressed. I also learned that some parents are leaving the decision to participate to their children. In another case, I learned that the grandparent could not afford to purchase the requested attire; as a result, I gave her money to purchase the attire for her two granddaughters to ensure they would be able to participate.

At the end of the pilot, I interviewed parents and children to learn what they liked about their participation and how we might improve things going forward.

The Children's Ministry Planning Committee plans to prepare a schedule so that we can let the ministry leaders of the ministries know which children will serve each Sunday.

Children's Ministry Manual

As a result of the study, I prepared a Children's Ministry Manual to be used by the Children's Ministry volunteers. (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, I reviewed the responses to determine if follow-up questions or clarifications were necessary. The responses were straightforward, so requesting clarification or additional information was unnecessary.

Once I had no further questions and required no further clarification, I compared the information by developing Excel spreadsheets. The first column heading was the survey questions. I prepared an Excel spreadsheet to compare all the children's responses overall and responses by age group (ages 5-7, 8-10, 11-12) and gender; I compared the responses of children to those of their parents. I compared parental responses overall and by parental type (mother, father, grandmother) and domicile location (city, county). I compared and contrasted responses in each comparison to better understand the information and where there were differences. Next, I analyzed each children's group to determine what conclusions to draw and to formulate my findings. Based on the results and time constraints, I selected the two most commonly preferred activities, which were immediately feasible, and used them to start the Children's Ministry. The two activities I decided on were helping people to their seats (ushers) and greeting people (hospitality).

Chapter 4

Description of Project Results & Evaluation

Overall Responses of Children:

Eighteen Children; 9 girls, 9 boys; five 5 to 7 year olds, nine 8 to 10 year olds, three 11 to 12 year olds)

See Table 1, Appendix C, Table 2, Appendix D, and Table 3, Appendix E

N.B. Responses are provided overall and not by age because looking at responses by age group yields small numbers for each preferred activity, making it difficult to interpret results.

Question 1 "Do you like coming to church?"

Overall: Fifteen responded yes, two (one boy, one girl) responded no because there is nothing for them to do, and one nine-year-old boy responded that he did not know because it had been four years since he last attended. However, he said he wanted to participate in the worship service.

Conclusion

Overall, the children like to attend church. This does not vary by gender or age.

Question 2 "Which activities would you like to do when you come to church?"

Overall: The activities included helping people to their seats, singing in the choir, greeting people, reading Scripture aloud in front of the church, praying aloud in front of the church, and dancing with other children. My church has a dance ministry that does liturgical dance, so the children were familiar with the type of dance to which I referred.

Fourteen responded helping people to their seats and greeting people; thirteen responded dancing; twelve responded praying aloud; eleven responded singing; and ten responded reading Scripture aloud. Many children, regardless of age, did not want to pray aloud or read Scripture aloud.

Gender: Differences among girls and boys are not always consistent, although neither want to read Scripture aloud; see Appendix E, Table 3.

Conclusions

1. All the participants' responses indicated that they would like to participate in the worship service; however, helping people to their seats and dancing were the two most favored, and the two least favored were singing and reading Scripture aloud.
2. The least favored activity for the five to seven year olds is praying aloud, for the eight to ten year olds singing and reading Scripture aloud, and for the eleven to twelve year olds reading Scripture aloud. This is reasonable, since most young children in general are uncomfortable with speaking aloud in front of a large group of people, especially if most are adults.
3. Favored activities varied only slightly by gender:

Question 3 "Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?"

Overall: Sixteen responded dancing; fifteen responded greeting people; fourteen responded helping people to their seats; twelve responded singing; eleven responded reading Scripture aloud; and ten responded praying aloud. Across all ages, dancing, greeting people, and ushering were the most favored. For both girls and boys, dancing and greeting people were the most favored, followed by ushering.

Conclusions

1. The participants thought other children would like to participate in the worship service.
2. The two most favored activities were dancing and greeting people; the two least favored were reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud. This was also true by gender.

Question 4 "Would you invite your friends to come to church?"

All eighteen participants responded yes. Thus, there were no gender or age differences.

Question 5 "Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?"

Overall: Sixteen responded dancing, fourteen responded helping people to their seats and greeting people, thirteen responded praying aloud, twelve responded singing, and nine responded reading Scripture aloud. Across all ages, greeting people, and dancing were the most favored, and up to about age ten, helping people to their seats was also favored.

Conclusions

1. All the participants thought their friends would like to participate in the worship service; however, they thought their friends would favor dancing, and would not favor singing and reading Scripture aloud.
2. Age matters in which ministries children deem attractive; the least attractive ministries are those for which children would be ill-prepared.

Response Comparison, Children vs. Adults

Adults refer to mothers, fathers, and grandmothers.

(See Table 4, Appendix F)

Question 1

Parents "Do your children like coming to church?"

Children "Do you like coming to church?"

Fifteen children and twelve parents responded yes; two children and two parents responded no; and one boy, age ten, could not remember since he had not been in four years.

Conclusion

Overall, the children and adults agree that children like to attend church.

Question 2

Parents "What activities would you like to see the church include children?"

Children "What activities would you like to do when you come to church?"

Fourteen children and thirteen parents responded helping people to their seats; fourteen children and fourteen parents responded greeting people; thirteen children and fourteen parents responded dancing; twelve children and fourteen parents responded praying aloud; eleven children and fourteen parents responded singing, and ten children and twelve parents responded reading Scripture aloud.

Conclusions

1. Overall, the activities the children favored the most were helping people to their seats and greeting people; the least favored were singing and reading Scripture aloud.
2. The mothers favored all the activities.
3. The fathers' most favored activities were singing, greeting people, and praying aloud; the least favored were helping people to their seats, reading Scripture aloud, and dancing.
4. The grandmothers favored all the activities except reading Scripture aloud.
5. Adults and children differed on favored activities, with parents more likely to favor most activities. This underscores why it is so important to permit children to voice their preferences in terms of ministry participation and to honor those preferences.

Question 3 "What activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?"

Sixteen children and fourteen parents responded dancing; fifteen children and fourteen parents responded greeting people; fourteen children and thirteen parents responded helping people to their seats; twelve children and fourteen parents responded singing; eleven children and

eleven parents responded reading Scripture aloud; and ten children and nine parents responded praying aloud.

Conclusions

1. The activities the children most favored were dancing and greeting people; the least favored were reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.
2. The activities mothers most favored were singing, greeting people, and dancing; the least favored were helping people to their seats, reading Scripture aloud, and praying aloud.
3. The fathers and grandmothers favored all the activities except reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.
4. Although children and adults are more likely to agree when thinking about other children, children tend to be more realistic than adults about what other children would like to do.

Question 4

Parents "Would you invite your friends' children to church?"

Children "Would you invite your friends to church?"

Eighteen children responded yes; eleven parents responded yes, and three responded no. The parents responded that they would not invite their friends' children to church because they said there was nothing for them to do when they came to church.

Conclusion

1. All the children would invite their friends and most of the adults would invite their friends' children to church.

Question 5

Parents "Which activities would you tell your friends' children about your church that you think they would enjoy doing?"

Children "Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?"

Sixteen children and fourteen parents responded dancing; fourteen children and eleven parents responded helping people to their seats; fourteen children and eleven parents responded greeting people; thirteen children and seven parents responded praying aloud; twelve children and twelve parents responded singing; nine children and eight parents responded reading Scripture aloud.

Conclusions

1. The children's most favored activities were dancing, helping people to their seats, and greeting people; the least favored were reading Scripture aloud and singing.
2. The mothers favored all the activities except reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.
3. The fathers favored dancing, singing, and greeting people; the least favored were reading Scripture and praying aloud.
4. The grandmothers favored dancing, helping people to their seats, reading Scripture aloud, and singing; the least favored were greeting people and praying aloud.

Overall Conclusions

1. The children's two most preferred ministries overall are ushering and greeting people. These require friendliness but no special skills, making them a good start for Children's Ministry.
2. The children's least preferred ministry activities overall are those that require special skills (e.g., ability to read well, speak confidently in front of a large group of adults, sing well, and dance/move rhythmically in sync with others). This makes these ministries a) less

desirable for *all* children but b) very desirable for children possessing the skills in question.

This is an important point going forward as we expand the Children's Ministry at Greater.

Evaluation of the Pilot

Based on the responses of the children, we decided to start the pilot in January 2023. The first Sunday of the pilot went well. The children arrived as instructed and received their Ushers and Hospitality Ministry assignments. Each child was assigned to an adult with whom to serve. The children assigned to the Hospitality Ministry stood for forty-five minutes in the church's foyer greeting people as they entered the church. The Ministry Leader of the Hospitality Ministry suggested that forty-five minutes was too long for children to stand in one position. The children were fidgety because after greeting people when they entered the church, there was nothing else for them to do but stand.

The children who served on the Ushers Ministry were more active than those who served on the Hospitality Ministry because they could walk back and forth, escorting people to their seats, so being on the floor for forty-five minutes was not a problem. One of the boys (age 7) said he was tired and wanted to sit down. However, when the Children's Ministry Leader escorted him to his mother, his mother advised the ministry leader that her son would return to his position to complete his assignment, and he did after a short break. All the children who agreed to participate in the worship service attended except one boy (age 10). He indicated he was nervous and did not want to participate that Sunday. However, his grandmother was confident that her grandson would change his mind as time progressed.

The pilot's second Sunday did not go as well, due to miscommunication. The parents indicated they did not realize that children would be permitted to serve in the worship service every Sunday. Although the ministry director emailed the parents to confirm that the children would be

able to serve, the parents said they did not see it. We later realized that the best modes of communication for the parents are sending text messages, phone calls, and in person. Because of the many spam emails, the parents indicated that they do not regularly review emails. Consequently, it was too late to respond when they saw the email from the ministry director.

The third Sunday of the pilot went smoothly. The children arrived promptly and received their assignments. One little boy, age five, was so excited that when the pastor asked the members who needed offering envelopes to raise their hands so the ushers could assist them, he loudly exclaimed, "That would be me." The children who participated in the worship service indicated they liked participating and being treated like adults.

The pilot's fourth Sunday was filled with excitement because it was "Red Dress" Sunday, the second Sunday in February, when women, in particular, are encouraged to take good care of their hearts. In recognition of Red Dress Sunday, we wore red. So, in addition to the children wearing their white tops and black pants or skirts, they also wore a red ribbon. The children received their assignments as greeters and ushers and were assigned to an adult. They could also walk around with the adult ushers during the offering. The pastor acknowledged that the children were serving in the worship service and thanked them for participating. He encouraged the parents to support the Children's Ministry by allowing their children to participate. He also invited the children to take pictures with him after the worship service. Thirteen children participated.

Appreciation was expressed to the participants, both children and parents, for their participation. The ministry director and I contacted the parents, children, and ministry leaders to gauge the experience for all participants. I conducted weekly follow-up interviews with the children and parents for 30 days after the Children's Ministry had been set up, in order to determine satisfaction and if any changes could be made.

I submitted a request to the church's Audio/Visual and Creative Team to create graphics with pictures that were taken with the pastor and the children on the last day of the pilot to let all the children know that they are welcome to serve as ushers and greeters every Sunday and to encourage parents, grandparents and nurturing adults to support our Children's Ministry by ensuring that the children are in church on Sundays to serve.

Children's Ministry Pilot Feedback

After completing the pilot, I interviewed children and parents to ask if there was anything we could do to make the children's participation in the worship service more meaningful and beneficial for the children.

Children's Feedback

A five-year-old boy shared that he loves participating in the worship service because it makes him proud to stand with the adults to give out the offering envelopes and greet people. A ten-year-old girl shared that she loves standing in the foyer greeting people when they come to church. An eight-year-old girl shared that she enjoys serving as the adults do and want to attend church every Sunday to participate in the worship service.

A seven-year-old boy, who had not yet participated but saw other children minister, approached me and told me he wanted to help people to their seats. Unfortunately, his parents have not allowed him to participate thus far, which shows the importance of parental agreement in ministry to the church.

Parents' Feedback

A mother shared that the Children's Ministry was working because her son (age 5) insisted on coming to church every Sunday so that he could greet people as they came to church. A grandmother shared that her two granddaughters (ages 8 and 10) enjoy participating in the worship

service. A father shared that his son (age 8) enjoys participating in the service. He also stated that it helps keep his son off his electronic device, so as a parent, it makes him feel good that children are allowed to participate in the worship service.

One grandparent mentioned that the Hospitality Ministry used to hand out mints before Covid-19 when they greeted people. She suggested that once the pastor made mask-wearing optional, the children should be allowed to hand out mints. She said the length of time the children serve on the floor is good, and she loves having her grandchildren serve in the worship service.

Another parent suggested adding Sunday School, having a dance (liturgy) ministry, and allowing children to dance at least once or twice a month.

Another parent shared that she was pleased with how things were going and that her son (age 5) loves serving as a greeter.

Expressions of Gratitude

I requested that the pastor acknowledge the children and parents for participating in the study by announcing it at the Sunday morning worship service.

Children's Ministry Post Pilot

The children continue to serve on the Usher's Ministry by helping people to their seats and on the Hospitality Ministry by greeting people when they come to church. On Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023, the Children's Ministry was expanded by including Sunday School. The children are invited to attend Sunday School during the sermonic hymn, so they can learn about God on a level they understand. After the sermon, the children return to the sanctuary to participate in the remainder of the worship service.

A meeting will be scheduled with the leaders of the choir to discuss a process to include the children so that they can, on occasion, sing in the choir.

Children's Ministry Manual

The results of my project provided information to develop a Children's Ministry Manual (see Appendix D) to be used by those who work with the Children's Ministry. The manual includes overall information on our church's history, mission statement, vision statement, information about our pastor, and Greater's staff. Information specific to the Children's Ministry includes:

- leadership team,
- its philosophy of ministry, which reminds us that teaching children is not enough, as they must be involved in service to others,
- information on elementary school-age faith development that will help guide the volunteers who work with children,
- the Children's Ministry vision, which helps parents guide their children by providing safe and loving interactions with them,
- ministry guidelines that list the requirements for ministry volunteers, such as the volunteer must have a personal relationship with Jesus, regularly attend worship service and Bible Study, support the church financially, and adhere to the foundational beliefs of the church,
- ministry assignment process to guide the volunteers in working with children and assigning them to their assigned ministry activities,
- ministry volunteers, children's uniform while ministering,
- Reportable Offense Procedures and definitions of reportable offenses as reflected on the State of Maryland's website,
- statement of acknowledgment and agreement that requires the volunteers to read the Children's Ministry Manual in its entirety, sign the acknowledgment, and submit it to the Children's Ministry leader,

- parent and children feedback, which includes comments about the children's experience while serving and the parents' satisfaction with the Children's Ministry impact on their children,
- frequently asked questions made by parents and ministry volunteers, and
- an application for the volunteers to complete with basic contact information, membership at Greater, other ministries they serve on, and prior experience working with children's ministry.

The Children's Ministry leader will update and expand the manual as the Children's Ministry grows.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Suggestions For Future Research

I accomplished my mission to begin the process of revitalizing Greater's Children's Ministry and prepare a Children's Ministry Manual, and I accomplished that by obtaining feedback from the children, parents, and grandparents whom I interviewed. Based on the responses from the children, the two activities favored the most were selected for the inauguration of the pilot . The Children's Ministry has been in operation since January 22, 2023.

Implications

The information I received from the children surveyed suggests that elementary school-age children want to participate fully in the church's life during worship. Regardless of age, ushering, hospitality, and dancing were the most favored activities.

From the information I received from the parents and grandparents, I concluded that they want the church to allow children to participate in the church's life. I also concluded that they would support their children's participation by bringing them to church regularly and encouraging other parents and grandparents to bring their children to church.

Applicability

Other urban African American churches with similar activities to those in our church might benefit from the results of my study. Urban African American churches serve as a haven for African Americans to worship God together and a place where we are motivated to rebuild our communities. Since a Christian community also includes children, other churches that do not currently have a children's ministry or are looking for ways to revitalize an existing one might benefit from my study's results.

Sustainability

To sustain the Children's Ministry, we plan to work closely with the ministry leaders, parents, and children to obtain feedback and support and to address all their concerns as we move forward. Although all the parents and grandparents interviewed said they support children's participation, not all have regularly brought them to church. Sometimes, when the children come to church, they are unprepared to participate.

Before we include the other surveyed activities, such as singing in the choir, praying aloud, reading Scripture aloud, and dancing during worship, we want to ensure that the children's participation in greeting people and helping people to their seats is going well. We also plan to add only one new activity at a time so that we do not overwhelm the children, ministry leaders, parents, and grandparents.

Feedback has been positive for the children who have participated thus far. The children reported that they like participating and want to do more. The parents whose children have participated have said they have seen positive results. For example, when the children are allowed to participate in the worship service, it helps them to be engaged, thereby keeping them off their electronic devices because they are not bored. A mother reported that her son insists on coming to church to greet people and help the ushers. So, while there are obstacles, such as getting all the parents on board by bringing their children prepared to participate, the Children's Ministry is in operation and has plans to incorporate other activities as time permits.

Ecclesial Significance

One of the things that I learned from my interactions with the children I interviewed is that they have a heart for God. They want to learn about God, and they want to learn about Jesus. They want to share what they learn with their parents and others. I learned that children are quickly

bored; therefore, it is essential to keep them engaged by allowing them to be active in the church.

One of the things that I learned from my interactions with the adults is that not all of them take their responsibility seriously to ensure that the church disciplines children. While some say they support the Children's Ministry, their actions do not align with what they say. Why does that happen? What can the Children's Ministry leaders do to minimize this behavior? For example, we could ask the parents what prevents them from supporting the Children's Ministry, and once we receive their feedback, determine how we could help them.

The Children's Ministry Planning Committee plans to meet with the parents and grandparents to discuss ways to ensure that the Children's Ministry becomes and remains a vital part of the church. We want to learn from parents and grandparents about any obstacles they may see or anticipate that would discourage them from fully supporting the Children's Ministry.

Future Questions

We need to explore several questions as we proceed with developing and expanding Greater's Children's Ministry. How will the Children's Ministry impact the overall structure of the church? For example, who is responsible for maintaining a budget to support the Children's Ministry financially? The Children's Ministry would need a modest budget to purchase uniforms for children whose parents cannot afford them. What steps must we take to ensure the Children's Ministry can accommodate every elementary school-age child? What further steps do the leaders need to incorporate to ensure the safety of the children?

Identification of Further Questions Raised by Results

The first question church leaders must ask is, "What is the most effective way to nurture children's spirituality and help them develop their relationship with God?" In addition to the church teaching children about God, children should be able to demonstrate what they learn through their

actions and what being in a relationship with God looks like. When children are involved in church, they can experience and share the love of God when they greet people who come to church and help them to their seats. Their interactions with others allow them to see God in action through them.

The second question for church leaders to ask is, "What other ways should the church engage children in the life of the church?" Children have spiritual gifts and talents, just like adults, and they should be able to use them to minister to other children and adults. One spiritual gift a child might have is the gift of helping others, and another is the gift of encouragement. When children are permitted to participate, it gives them opportunities to discover their spiritual gifts. When the church allows them to participate, it will enable them to serve others who may need to be ministered to in those areas.

The third question for church leaders is, "What is the best way to obtain the full support of parents, grandparents, and guardians?" While the study results demonstrate that children want to participate more fully in the church's life, they have to rely on the adults to bring them to church. That means the adults in their lives need to support their involvement in church activities completely; otherwise, their participation in such activities will not occur.

The fourth question that church leaders must ask is, "Since the sermon is geared towards adults, how do the church leaders ensure that children are ministered to on their level?" While it is essential that children participate fully in the church's life, it is unreasonable to assume that they understand the sermons that the pastor and ministers preach. Church leaders must determine the most effective ways to teach children about the Bible and how God requires them to live. One way to do that would be to permit them to leave the service during the sermon to a designated church area, so they can learn on a level they would understand. The children could attend Sunday School

while the sermon is being preached, after which they could return to the sanctuary for the remainder of the service.

Identification of Avenues for Further Research

The results of my study determined that children at my church want to be involved in the worship service. More research needs to be done to determine feasible ways to get children fully engaged in the church. Church leaders and parents must be fully committed to children's participation in church; therefore, a study to determine their level of commitment regarding children's roles in the church would be beneficial. One way to do this is by conducting follow-up interviews with the parents. Two examples of questions to ask them are 1) What challenges prevent you from bringing your child(ren) to church? 2) In what ways can the church help you in that regard? Interviews could also be conducted with the church leaders to determine their perspectives on children's participation in the worship service. My study only focused on children and parents; however, church leaders are also critical to ensuring that children are engaged when they come to church.

Assessment of Ministry in Light of the Results of the Project

Ministry must involve children, and children should not be excluded from participating in the full life of the church, nor should children be treated as an afterthought. The survey results demonstrate that children want to participate in the worship service and can do so if the church, parents, and grandparents allow and encourage them.

Hope for Increased Missional Impact in Light of the Work

The Children's Ministry pilot ran for four weeks. The children enjoyed the experience, and the feedback from both children and parents was favorable. Because of the favorable feedback, the children will continue to participate each Sunday and other ministry related activities will be

added. Since the inauguration of the pilot, the Children's Ministry has been expanded to include Sunday School. The Children's Ministry leaders plan to collaborate with other ministry leaders to get the children's participation in the choir, liturgical dance, reading Scripture aloud, and praying aloud.

In addition to the service and instructional activities, the Children's Ministry will eventually include fellowship activities. Also, eventually, children will be able to interact with other ministries in the church. For example, children could join the Kids Klostet, and Mobile Feeding Ministries during some of their outreach activities. As other examples, when the Usher's Ministry meet to discuss protocol or the Hospitality Ministry meets to discuss ways to greet people, the children could attend those meetings. The Children's Ministry could collaborate with the Visitation Ministry, encouraging children to make get-well and sympathy cards. Participation in these ministries will allow children to use their spiritual gifts, ministering with the adults, helping others in need, finding meaning in a Christian setting, and spending time with people of all ages.

Children's Ministry Manual

The results of my project provided information to develop a Children's Ministry manual to be used by those who work with the Children's Ministry. The manual is in its early stages because of the newness of the ministry; however, the Children's Ministry leader will update the manual as the Children's Ministry grows and expands. (See Appendix D).

Personal Significance

As a result of my study, I have gained a greater appreciation for the children and the responsibility that church leaders have to ensure that children are not an afterthought. I had not given much thought to the Children's Ministry in the past, but I believe God placed the desire on my heart. I have broadened my perspective of children in ministry due to Scripture passages like

Matthew 19:13-15 and Deuteronomy 6:1-9. As a result of my study, I am committed to ensuring that children are allowed to learn about God, develop relationships with him, and serve him and others. Participation in the church is not limited to adults but must be shared by everyone, including children.

The Children's Ministry needed to be revitalized sooner rather than later because the children were not actively involved in the church's life. In my role as Director of Ministry Development, I am responsible for ensuring that everyone in the church can use their spiritual gifts and talents, including children. The Children's Ministry will benefit the children attending Greater and those who are to come. The Children's Ministry will also help the adults as well because adults can learn from children how to develop relationships with God.

I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to initiate the revitalization of the Children's Ministry because the children are now active participants in the worship service. When I see their faces as I see them greeting people and helping people to their seats, I am reminded that Jesus said, "Let the children come."

When I see the children serving in the church, it motivates me to do everything within my power to ensure that they are vital participants and have the opportunity to use their spiritual gifts and talents. I love seeing the children dressed in their uniforms, greeting people, and showing them to their seats. When I see their smiling faces, it makes me want to do more to get them and keep them involved in the church. Children have so much to offer us, and I want to ensure they have every opportunity to contribute to our church community and beyond.

Bibliography

- Adawu, Anthony. "Doing theology with children through multimodal narrativity." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5494>.
- Barna, George. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.
- Beckwith, Ivy. *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Bell, Valarie, and Matt Markins. *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church*. Chicago: Awana Clubs International, 2019.
- Bergant, Dianne. "The Book of Proverb." In *The Catholic Study Bible*, eds. Donald Senior, Mary Ann Getty, Carroll Stuhlmueller, John J., Collins, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Blanchette, Leon and Robert G. Crosby, III. "The Measurement and Evaluation of Children's Ministry Praxis." *Christian Education Journal* 3: vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 247-265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131601300202>.
- Borgo, Lacy F. *Spiritual Conversations With Children: Listening to God Together*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- Camp, Claudia V. and Carole R. Fontaine. "Proverbs." In *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, eds. Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, Jouette M. Bassler, Werner E. Lemke, Susan Niditch, Eileen M. Schuller, San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1989.
- Crosby, Robert G, III and Erin I. Smith. "Church Support as a Predictor of Children's Spirituality and Prosocial Behavior." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 243-254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711504300402>.
- Crosby, Robert G., III, Erin I. Smith, and Thomas V. Frederick. "The Kid-Friendly Church: What Makes Children Feel Loved, Valued, and Part of a Supportive Church Community." *Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 82, no. 1 (2015): 87-109. <https://www.academia.edu/28663407>.
- Csinos, David M., and Ivy Beckwith. *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Donahue, John R. and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002.

- Evans, Craig, A. *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27-16:20*, Vol. 34B. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.
- Haight, Wendy L. *African-American Children at Church: A Sociocultural Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Hood, Dana Kennamer. "Six Children Seeking God: Exploring Childhood Spiritual Development In Context." In *Children's Spirituality*, eds. Kevin E. Lawson and Scottie May, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019.
- Horn, Cornelia B., and John W. Martens. *"let the little children come to me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009.
- Horne, Milton P. *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Proverbs-Ecclesiastes*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2003.
- Houser, Tina. *Building Children's Ministry: A Practical Guide*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- Ingersoll, Heather Nicole. "Making room: a place for children's spirituality in the Christian church." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19, no. 3-4 (Aug-Nov 2014), 164-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.979774>.
- Larson, Mimi L. "The Child in our Midst: The Shifting Trends in Ministry with Children and Families over the Past Forty Years." *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (December 2020), 434-448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320943902>.
- Lawson, Kevin E. and Adam Harwood. "Comparing Five Theological Views and Ministry Practices." In *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality: New Direction for Education, Ministry, and Discipleship*, eds. Larson, Mimi L., and Robert J. Keeley, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.
- Lawson, Kevin E. ed. *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 3, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012.
- Lovaglia, Dan. *Relational Children's Ministry: Turning Kid-Influencers Into Lifelong Disciple Makers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.
- Luccock, Halford E. and Frederick C. Grant. "Mark." In *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, In Twelve Volumes, Volume VII, eds. Buttrick, George Arthur, Walter Russell Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, Noland B. Harmon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951.
- Martin, Charles G. "Proverbs." In *New International Bible Commentary: Based on the NIV*, ed. F. F. Bruce, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.

- May, Scottie, Katie Stemp, Grant Burns. "Children's Place in the New Forms of Church: An Exploratory Survey of Their Ministry with Children and Families." *Christian Education Journal Series* 3, Vol. 8, no. 2 (November 2011), 278-305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131100800204>.
- Mercer, Joyce Ann, Deborah L. Matthews, and Scott Walz. "Children in Congregations: Congregations as Contexts for Children's Spiritual Growth." In *Children's Spirituality*, 2nd Edition, eds. Kevin E. Lawson and Scottie May, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019.
- Potts, Colette. *Love First: A Children's Ministry for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing, 2018.
- Short, Stephen S. "Mark." In *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.
- Schloerb, Rolland W. "Proverbs." In *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, In Twelve Volumes, Volume IV, eds. Buttrick, George Arthur, Walter Russell Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, Noland B. Harmon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951.
- Schultz, Richard L. "Proverbs." In *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, edited by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020.
- Yust, Karen Marie. "Being Faithful Together." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin E. Lawson, Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2012.

Appendix A

Consent Form for Ministry Project

Project Title: Revitalizing Children's Ministry

I, _____

hereby give my permission to allow my child(ren) to participate in a study by Rev. Joyce Vance. I understand that the study aims to learn which activities related to worship service children would like to participate in when they come to church.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Assent Form for Ministry Project

I have asked your parents if it is okay if I talk to you and they have said yes. Now I want to know if you would like to speak to me about having a ministry in which children themselves are involved. Please print your name here.



And draw a circle around the face showing if you would like to talk to me about Children's Ministry.



Yes



No



I don't know

Appendix C

Table 1: Overall Responses of Children

	Total Responses N=18
1. Do you like coming to church?	
Yes	15
No	2
Do not know	1
2. Which activities would you like to do when you come to church?	
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	14
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	13
Praying out loud in the front of the church	12
Singing in the Choir	11
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	10
3. Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?	
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	16
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	15
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14
Singing in the Choir	12
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	11
Praying aloud in the front of the church	10
4. Would you invite your friends to come to church?	
Yes	18
No	0
5. Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?	
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	16
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	14
Praying aloud in the front of the church	13
Singing in the Choir	12
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	9

Appendix D

Table 2: Responses By Age*

	5-7 N=6	8-10 N=9	11-12 N=3
1. Do you like coming to church?			
Yes	5	7	3
No	1	1	0
Do not know	0	1	0
2. Which activities would you like to do when you come to church?			
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	5	7	2
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	5	7	2
Praying aloud in the front of the church	4	7	1
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	5	6	2
Singing in the Choir	5	5	1
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	5	5	0
3. Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?			
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	4	8	2
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	4	8	3
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	5	8	3
Singing in the Choir	4	6	2
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	4	6	1
Praying aloud in the front of the church	4	4	2
4. Would you invite your friends to come to church?			
Yes	6	9	3
No	0	0	0
5. Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?			
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	4	9	1
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	5	8	1
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	5	8	3
Praying aloud in the front of the church	5	7	1
Singing in the Choir	4	6	2
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	3	5	1

*Table arranged in the order that the largest group (8-10 year olds) preferred.

Appendix E

Table 3: Responses By Gender

	Girls N=9	Boys N=9
1. Do you like coming to church?		
Yes	8	7
No	1	1
No Response	0	1
2. Which activities would like to do when you come to church?		
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	6	8
Singing in the Choir	7	6
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	5	9
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	5	5
Praying aloud in the front of the church	4	8
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	7	6
3. Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church?		
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	8	6
Singing in the Choir	6	6
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	8	7
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	6	5
Praying aloud in the front of the church	5	5
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	9	7
4. Would you invite your friends to come to church?		
Yes	9	9
No	0	0
5. Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that they would enjoy?		
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	7	7
Singing in the Choir	6	6
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	7	7
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	4	5
Praying aloud in the front of the church	7	6
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	8	8

Appendix F

Table 4: Responses, Children vs. Adults*

C=Children, M=Mothers, F=Fathers, G=Grandmothers

Parents/ Children Survey Questionnaire				
	<u>C</u> N=18	<u>M</u> N=4	<u>F</u> N=4	<u>G</u> N=6
1. Do your children like coming to church?				
Yes	15	3	4	5
No	2	1	0	1
No Response	1	0	0	0
2. What activities would you like to see the church include children?				
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14	4	3	6
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	14	4	4	6
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	13	4	3	6
Praying aloud in the front of the church	12	4	4	6
Singing in the Choir	11	4	4	6
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	10	4	3	5
3. Please check the activities you think other children would like to do when they come to church.				
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	16	4	4	6
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	15	4	4	6
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14	3	4	6
Singing in the Choir	12	4	4	6
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	11	3	3	5
Praying aloud in the front of the church	10	2	3	4
4. Would you invite your friends' children to come to church?				
Yes	18	3	2	6
No	0	1	2	6
5. Which activities would you tell your friends about your church that you think they would enjoy doing?				
Dancing with other children in the front of the church	16	4	4	6
Helping people to their seats (Usher)	14	4	2	5
Greeting People (Hospitality Ministry)	14	4	3	4
Praying aloud in the front of the church	13	2	1	4
Singing in the Choir	12	4	3	5
Reading Scripture aloud in the front of the church	9	2	1	5

*Parental responses did not vary by domicile.

Appendix G

Responses By Parent Domicile

City (N=8)

County (N=6)

Question 1 "Do your children like coming to church?"

Seven city and five county residents responded yes, and one city and one county residents responded no.

Conclusion

- Regardless of where they live, parents report that children like to attend church.

Question 2 "Which activities would you like to see the church include children?"

All six county residents responded helping people to their seats, singing, greeting people, reading Scripture, praying aloud, and dancing. Eight city residents responded singing, greeting people, reading Scripture aloud, and praying aloud. Seven city residents responded dancing and helping people to their seats. Six city residents responded reading Scripture aloud.

Conclusions

- All of the activities were favored by county residents.
- The activities most favored by city residents were greeting people, singing, and praying out loud; the least favored was reading Scripture aloud.

Question 3 "Which activities do you think other children would like to do when they come to church."

All county residents responded helping people to their seats, singing, greeting people, reading Scripture aloud, and dancing, and four responded praying aloud. All eight city residents responded singing, greeting people, and dancing; seven responded helping people to their seats;

and five responded reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.

Conclusions

- County residents favored all the activities except for praying out loud.
- The city residents most favored singing, greeting people, and dancing; the least favored were reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.

Question 4 "Would you invite your friends' children to come to church?"

Five county and six city residents responded yes. One county and two city residents responded no.

Conclusion

- The county residents were more inclined to invite their friends' children to church than the city residents.

Question 5 "Which activities do you think your friends' children would enjoy?"

Six county residents responded singing and dancing; five responded greeting people and reading Scripture aloud; four responded helping people to their seats and praying aloud. "Eight city residents responded dancing; seven responded helping people to their seats; six responded singing and greeting people; and three responded reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.

Conclusions

- The activities the county residents most favored were dancing and singing; the least favored were helping people to their seats and praying aloud.
- The activities the city residents most favored were dancing and helping people to their seats; the least favored were reading Scripture aloud and praying aloud.

Appendix H

The Last Two Parent/Children Questions

All these responses were oral.

Question 6 "If you were the pastor, what would you let children do when they come to church?"

Overall

Girls (9) – not every girl gave a response.

- Color.
- Get a Bible.
- Eat candy.
- Learn about God & Jesus.
- Learn about the Bible.
- Ask questions.
- Let them talk.

Boys (9) – not every boy gave a response.

- Get a Bible.
- Assign children to adults so they can train children to use their spiritual gifts.
- Social activities so they can learn about Christ.
- Arts & crafts.
- Play.
- Make slime.
- Learn about God & Jesus.
- The same as adults.

Children By Age Group

All these responses were oral.

Children 5-7 (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Eat candy.

Children 8-10 (9) - not everyone gave a response.

- Color.
- Get a Bible.
- Have a fun day.
- Arts & crafts.
- Play.
- Make slime.
- The same as adults.
- Ask questions.

Children 11-12 (3) – not everyone gave a response.

- Assign children to adults so they can train children to use their spiritual gifts.
- Social activities so they can learn about Christ.

Parents - All these responses were oral.

Parents (8)

Mothers (4)

- Have the pastor check in with the children to see how they are doing.
- Allow them to go to another area of the church with other children they can relate to.
- Have the pastor meet with children on a smaller scale to interact with them.
- Allow parents to attend Sunday School so their children can teach them.

Fathers (4) – not everyone gave a response.

- Minister to other children.
- Let children lead worship service, introduce the preacher, and when other children join the church, allow children to talk to them.

Grandmothers (6) – not everyone gave a response.

- Train them in different areas of the church.
- Have a mentoring program to help children learn to work in multimedia, play instruments, and do other activities.
- Work with the Intercessory Prayer Ministry. Have bake sales. Go on field trips. Host worship services.
- Have a curriculum to teach children church etiquette. Allow children to have the same type of experiences as adults. Have a space for children to worship on their level.
- Allow children to be free, not make them do something, but encourage them to be themselves.

Conclusions

- The children's responses suggest they want to do more than the six activities surveyed above, although the activities reported might not be church related. They want to participate in the life of the church.
- Children in the five to seven age group want to eat candy, but there was no mention of explicitly learning about God and the Bible.
- Children in the eight to ten age group want to participate in fun activities and ask questions, but there was no mention of explicitly learning about God and the Bible.

- Children in the eleven to twelve age group want to participate in activities that pertain to learning about God and the church.
- The parents' responses suggested that they too, want to see children participate in the life of the church.
- The children's responses suggest that as children get older they can understand the purpose of the church.
- The activities the children selected are more age-dependent rather than gender dependent.

Question 7 "Is there anything else you would like to share with me that would benefit the Children's Ministry?" This question needed to be clarified for some participants because they repeated some of the activities they mentioned earlier. I only used responses for activities that were not previously mentioned. All these responses were oral.

Girls (9) – not every girl gave a response.

5-7

- Watch what the pastor does.
- Use iPads.
- Talk.

8-10

- Coloring book.
- Play instruments.
- Arts & Crafts.
- Watch movies about God/Jesus.
- Play games.
- Make the activities fun so that children would want to know.

11-12

- Attend Children's Church.
- Paint.
- Read the Bible so they can learn about God.
- Share what they know about the Bible.
- Make cards.
- Watch videos.
- Share their notes.

Boys (9) – not every boy gave a response.

5-7

- Watch what the pastor does.
- Read the Bible.
- Share what they know about the Bible.
- Make activities fun so children will want to know.

8-10

- Have a fun day.
- Watch movies about God/Jesus.
- Make decorations for Christmas.
- Play instruments.

11 – 12

- Have a say about what happens in church.
- Have a play area where children can play after church.
- Have some say about what children are allowed to do.

- Watch movies about God/Jesus.
- Review the movies they watch.
- Work in multimedia.

Children By Age Group

All these responses were oral.

Children 5-7 (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Watch what the pastor does.
- Read the Bible so they can learn about God, share what they know about the Bible.
- Use iPads, talk.
- Sing in the choir.

Children 8-10 (9) – not everyone gave a response.

- Coloring book.
- Dance, play instruments, cook.
- Have a play area where children can play after church.
- Watch movies about God/Jesus, make decorations for Christmas.
- Watch movies about Jesus, draw about Jesus, make the activities fun so that children would want to know.
- Make cards, watch videos, take notes, share their notes.

Children 11-12 (3)

- Attend Children's church, paint, arts & crafts.
- Have some say about what happens in church, and what children are allowed to do, work in multimedia.
- Watch movies about God/Jesus, review of the movies.

Parents (14)

Mothers (4)

- Make the Children's Ministry more interesting by allowing children to be creative.
- Get children involved with music and arts & crafts.
- Have monthly activities for children to keep them engaged.
- Make sure that children are fully engaged where adults are in attendance.

Fathers (4) - not everyone gave a response.

- Have regular meetings and breakout sessions to keep children engaged. Have monthly gatherings for children to stay engaged. Do things that are more interactive to keep children engaged.
- Let children engage with children their age.
- Get people who are trained to work with children to work with the Children's Ministry.

Grandmothers (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Have Children's Church every Sunday.
- Recruit qualified teachers who love children.
- Change how things were done before because children need to experience the worship service based on today's environment.
- Look at the children and not the needs of the parents.

Conclusions

- Children want to be engaged in the life of the church, and parents want to see the church offer more activities to keep children engaged.
- Some children like to have a say in what happens in church.

Appendix I

Survey Questions Asked Only of Parents

The fourteen participants responded to all of the following questions without the need for further explanation or clarification. Therefore N=14 for each question.

A. What is your scriptural perspective of children in ministry? What Scripture supports your viewpoint?

Mothers (4) – not every mother gave a response.

- Children need to be ministered to while they are young.
- Children should be engaged in ministry.
- Children have a right to be a part of the worship experience.

Fathers (4) – not every father gave a response.

- The Bible is for everyone.
- Children are a necessary part of the church; they need to be in the presence of the Lord just like everyone else.

Grandmothers (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Children have the instinct to draw closer to God.
- God sees children as an integral part of the Christian community.

I asked this question to see if the participants knew any passages addressing children.

There were 14 respondents, but only nine gave a Scripture reference. The following Scriptures were referenced.

Fathers (2), Mother (1), Grandmothers (4)

Proverbs 22:6

"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." (NRSV)

Grandmother (1)

Matthew 19:14

"but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (NRSV)

Grandmother (1)

Matthew 28:19-20

" Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (NRSV)

Conclusions

- Overall, the participants support children's involvement in the church.
- The participants acknowledge that Scripture supports children in ministry.

B. What is your vision for the Children's Ministry?

Mothers (4)

- The church should teach children in the generation that they live to have a reverence for and relationship with God.
- To educate, communicate and keep an open dialogue with them.
- The church should have a space during worship service where children could be ministered to, based on their age group, to nurture their spirituality.
- Children should participate in the worship service.

Fathers (4)

- Something that keeps them engaged so that parents can worship without interruptions. The church should offer discipleship opportunities such as Sunday School.

- Something that welcomes young families and allows them to see a vibrant ministry.
- The church should partner with other churches for youth conferences, community days, and trips to places of interest. In addition to participating inside the church, children should be allowed to minister to others outside the church.
- Teach children all the facets of the worship service.

Grandmothers (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Equip children with the knowledge and ability to serve the Lord and to be able to take over the church.
- Groom children so that they can become ministry leaders.
- Children should participate in the worship service.
- Create a safe environment where they can explore, ask questions, and participate in ministry that reflects the freedom and ideas of a child's mind.
- A safe place where they could develop spiritually and personally and speak without being judged.

Conclusions

- The participants believe the church has a responsibility for discipling children.
- The participants want to see children involved in the church's life by participating in the worship service and other related activities.

C. Where do you see the Children's Ministry fitting into the overall structure of the church?

Mothers (4) - not everyone gave a response.

- The Children's Ministry should be a vital part of the church; children should not be an afterthought on the part of the church.

- The Children's Ministry is another opportunity for children to get involved in the life of the church with other children on their level.
- The Children's Ministry should be the church's foundation so children can learn to become future leaders.

Fathers (4)

- The Children's Ministry should be an essential part of the church, and the church should provide activities for families as a whole.
- The church should have a budget to support the Children's Ministry.
- The Children's Ministry is essential because children need to learn about God and have a relationship with him. The children are the future leaders of the church.
- The Children's Ministry helps to ensure that the church is intergenerational.

Grandmothers (6)

- The Children's Ministry should fit into the overall structure of the church.
- The church must make children feel like they are a part of it. Children should be allowed to share their ideas.
- The Children's Ministry should have a place in the overall structure of the church so that they have the same experiences as adults.
- Requiring children to "fit in" is why we lose them. Children are not their parents' generation; yes, the church must set boundaries and give direction, but let them express their perspectives. Children are the church of today, not just tomorrow.
- The Children's Ministry is important because it allows children to see how leaders operate in the church.

- Having a Children's Ministry is imperative; children should be allowed to laugh and have fun without judgment.

Conclusions

- The participants believe that children are a vital part of the church.
- They want the Children's Ministry to be an integral part of the church.
- The responses support the Children's Ministry discipling children, so that the children are prepared to disciple other children.

D. What do you like about bringing your children to church?

Mothers (4) - not everyone gave a response.

- It is letting them know that it is a way of life, not just something we do on Sundays but part of our culture.
- It is being able to see their family and friends.
- Children can experience the atmosphere and listen to music.

Fathers (4)

- It is being part of the Christian community, attending Sunday School, and being part of the curriculum.
- To start at an early age to learn to engage in gospel music, Scripture, and being part of a Christian community.
- Introducing my children to the same lifestyle, I grew up with in the Lord.
- To see me, their parent, involved in ministry.

Grandmothers (6)

- To learn what church is all about.
- They want to come to learn about God by hearing the Word of God.

- Fellowshiping with other children.
- They can learn about God and develop a relationship with him.
- They are exposed to preaching and teaching in a safe environment.
- They need to get exposure to God and develop a relationship with him. Allow the children to come and see other people and children in church. They like music.

Conclusion

- Overall, the participants like to bring their children to church because of the opportunities children have to participate in church and spend time with family members and friends.

E. What other activities would you like to see children involved in the church?

Mothers (4) - not everyone gave a response.

- Allow children to participate in outreach ministries that are age appropriate.
- Allow children to use their spiritual gifts and talents.
- Have some programs to display what children learn in Sunday School.

Fathers (4)

- Allow children to work in multimedia and audio-visual activities.
- Have Children's Church during worship service. Have a movie night and other outdoor activities. Provide programs for health & wellness, tutoring, and peer mentoring.
- Provide training programs for Jr. Deacons and Jr. Armor Bearers. Allow children to participate in the collection of offerings.
- Allow children to shadow different leaders and ministers.

Grandmothers (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Vacation Bible School.
- Bible Study.

- Allow children to participate every Sunday, not just on special occasions.
- Allow children to participate in Vacation Bible School, Bible study, and Sunday School.

Conclusions

- In addition to children's participation in church, some parents would like to see children participate in ministry-related activities outside the church.
- Some parents would like to see the church offer activities that allow children to demonstrate what they learn about God.
- Parents would like for the church to develop training programs so children can learn about the operation of the church.

F. What don't you like about bringing your children to church?

Mothers (4)

- Children need something to do.
- Because children are not engaged in the worship service, parents spend the entire time trying to keep them quiet so that others are not disturbed; consequently, parents do not get anything out of it.
- I like everything about it.
- My son gets fidgety and easily distracted, so he needs to be involved in the service.

Fathers (4)

- Parents can only focus on the service if the children have activities.
- My son sits in the service on his tablet because he needs help understanding most of the sermon.
- I do not bring them if they are having a bad day.
- Children should be able to get the meaning of the sermons as well as adults.

Grandmothers (6) - not everyone gave a response.

- Nothing.
- Some children are given opportunities to participate, while others are ignored.
- The sermon is often above children's understanding. The way it is now, we are just teaching them to come to church and sit still, and it is time wasted or that could be used to disciple them.

Conclusions

- Some parents want children to have a separate space for worship so they can experience worship with children on their level.
- Because the sermon is geared towards adults, and children are not able to receive anything meaningful from it, some parents are concerned that their children's relationship with God is not being fully developed.

G. How involved were you in church when you were a child?

Mothers (4) - not everyone gave a response.

- In the church all of my life. I served in all aspects of church life because attending church was not an option. Sang in the choir, participated in the dance (liturgy) ministry and attended Sunday School.
- Attended Sunday School, participated in fellowship activities, visited nursing homes, participated in home visits, artwork, and sang in the choir.
- Very involved in church. Attended Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and sang in the choir.

Fathers (4)

- Church attendance was mandatory. He participated in all children and youth activities, outreach, and passing out information about the Gospel.
- Led worship service, praise and worship, prayer, read Scripture, and attended Bible Study.
- Very involved in church. Attended Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, served as an usher, sang in the choir, and participated in sports programs at other churches.
- Pretty involved. Attended Sunday School, sang in the choir, and participated in youth activities.

Grandmothers (6)

- Church attendance was required.
- Attended Sunday School and served on the dance (liturgy) ministry.
- Very involved.
- Attended Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and participated in Easter and Christmas programs.
- Very involved. Served as an usher and sang in the choir.
- Very involved. There were no activities geared toward children. Helped clean the church, attended Sunday School and Bible Study, and sang in the choir.

Conclusions

- Overall, the participants indicated they were required to attend church as children.
- As a result of attending church, the participants were actively involved in church activities that were age- appropriate.

H. What benefits did you receive as a result of your involvement?

Mothers (4)

- Fellowship opportunities.
- The testimonies of others help to develop a relationship with God.
- To build my relationship with God.
- Children were involved in the Christian community.

Fathers (4)

- I gained the passion and love to serve others. I learned how to have the right spirit. It helped me to learn who I am as a person and a father and to grow as a person.
- I had the opportunity to be a part of the Christian community and learn how to disciple and serve.
- I learned how to stay connected in relationships.
- I learned how to develop friendships. I learned how to grow spiritually and develop socially.

Grandmothers (6)

- I learned what church is all about, how to serve, and how to teach.
- I learned how to be involved, doing a service for Christ. It is fulfilling to serve in different ways.
- I learned about God early and received the foundation to develop a relationship with him.
- I enjoy serving; it is part of my heart and soul.
- It taught me to be faithful in coming to church.
- I learned how to serve.

Conclusions

- The participants indicated that attending church as children positively impacted their lives throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, and the experience helped them to become better people, adults, and parents.
- Their childhood church attendance also helped them to make better choices in life.

Overall Conclusions

- Children want to be active participants in the church's life and have a voice in the activities that impact them.
- Church leaders must allow children to let them know what they would like to do when they come to church because, if not, the church could lose them to activities outside the church.
- Some of the activities children favored were not necessarily the same ones parents selected, demonstrating the importance of letting children speak.

Appendix J



Children's
Ministry
Manual

First Edition, 2023

Pastor Reginald Thomas, Sr., Pastor

Contents

1. <i>Welcome</i>	1
2. <i>Church History</i>	2
3. <i>Our Beliefs</i>	3
4. <i>Our Pastor</i>	4
5. <i>The Greater Staff</i>	6
6. <i>Children's Mission Statement</i>	7
7. <i>Children's Vision Statement</i>	7
8. <i>Children's Ministry Leadership Team</i>	8
9. <i>Philosophy of Children's Ministry</i>	9
10. <i>The Process of Development in Elementary School-Age Children</i>	10
11. <i>The Experts Speak</i>	12
12. <i>Greater's Children's Ministry Vision</i>	14
13. <i>Children's Ministry Volunteer Guidelines</i>	15
14. <i>Ministry Assignment Process</i>	17
15. <i>Children's Ministry Uniform</i>	18
16. <i>Children's Ministry Volunteer</i>	19
17. <i>Reportable Offenses Procedures</i>	20
18. <i>FAQ</i>	21
19. <i>Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement</i>	23
20. <i>Children's Ministry Highlights</i>	24
21. <i>Children's Ministry Volunteer Application</i>	26

Welcome

Welcome to the world of Children's Ministry! Here at Greater, we take children and ministering to them very seriously. We know that children are the church of today and tomorrow, and that is what our Children's Ministry is all about - training children now for a lifetime of service.

Church History

The late Pastor J.R. Halsey founded Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church on the fourth Sunday of January 1982. It was a cold, icy winter day when a group of believers came together in a small section of a church on Broadway and Gay streets, Old Knox Presbyterian. Dr. Halsey preached the Word, and he extended an invitation for discipleship. As a result, sixty-six people joined what is now known as the Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church (hereafter, Greater). On Sunday, November 9, 1986, God gave the church its sanctuary at 2525 E. Preston Street, Baltimore, Maryland, and other buildings. The church uses its buildings for various activities, including Christian workshops, Vacation Bible School, choir rehearsals, and sharing with other believers who also needed a place to hold their worship services. In January 1992, the Lord called Pastor Halsey home. In November 1994, Rev. Dr. Reginald Thomas, Sr. was officially installed as the pastor. Greater is an urban African American ministry that has existed for forty-one years. There are approximately 2,500 members and about 650 active members.

The leadership team comprises the pastor, diaconate, trustees, directors, ministry directors, ministry leaders, and assistant ministry leaders. The ministries are divided into five divisions: Membership, Maturity, Ministry, Missions, and Magnification.

Our Beliefs

We believe God is the Father Almighty and the Maker of Heaven and Earth. We believe that Jesus is the Christ and the only begotten son of the Father. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We believe He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died, and buried. On the third day, He rose from the dead and declared victory over the grave, death, and hell. He has returned to the Father to prepare a place for us in His Kingdom. He will return as He promised with victory over the grave, death, and hell. He will return as He promised to judge the world and deliver the righteous. We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life for all true believers. Greater's denomination is Baptist. We believe that Christ is the Head of the church and that the Bible is the supreme authority for the practice of faith. We believe that believers are to be baptized by water immersion. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, a congregational polity, the local church's autonomy, the observance of the two ordinances (baptism and communion), and church and state separation.

Our Pastor

Reverend Dr. Reginald Thomas, Sr. was called to preach at an early age and preached his initial sermon at The Ebenezer Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Mark Saunders. Since 1994, Dr. Thomas has served as the pastor of the Greater Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church (Greater) in Baltimore, Maryland. Under his leadership, the church has provided effective ministry to the congregation and the community.

Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, Pastor Thomas has sought to make Greater a church that goes beyond the walls to bring people to Jesus by meeting their spiritual and physical needs, empowering them to break generational strongholds and live more abundantly.

Dr. Thomas served as a District Overseer in the Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship and is a member of the Executive Board of the Kingdom Association of Covenant Pastors (KACP) under Bishop Walter Scott Thomas, Sr. In 2011, he served as one of the lecturers during the historic Hampton University Minister's Conference. In addition to serving multiple spiritual organizations, Dr. Thomas also serves within his community, notably, on the Board of Directors for the prestigious Baltimore Mental Health Systems, Incorporated.

His commitment and love extend to the people of God and the community. He founded Urban Life Solution, Inc., a community development corporation designed to minister to individuals, families, and urban communities by teaching and empowering them to overcome societal and economic strongholds. Dr. Thomas has licensed twenty-three ministers, ordained eight ministers, and was instrumental in installing five as pastors. Eighteen associate ministers currently serve under his leadership.

Dr. Thomas believes that when leaders stop learning, they stop growing. His academic portfolio includes a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Towson State University; a Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology from Philadelphia Bible College and Seminary; a Master of Arts in Theology from St. Mary's Seminary; and a Doctor of Ministry, with a concentration in Formational Counseling, from Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio.

In addition to being a faithful pastor and a dynamic preacher and teacher, Dr. Thomas also prioritizes family life. He is the loving husband of First Lady Stephanie and the proud father of Reginald Jr., Candace Victoria, and Kayla Moriah.

The Greater Staff

Executive Staff

Dr. Reginald Thomas, Sr., Pastor

Deacon Brian Stokes

Rev. Dwayne Pate, Executive Minister

Avery Lawrence, Director of Administration & Worship

Rev. Joyce Vance, Director of Ministry Development

Tyrell Colbert, Director of Audio & Video

MINISTRY DIRECTORS:

Deacon Howard Fields, Ministry

Minister Lula Fields, Magnification

Sis. Veronica Land-Davis, Membership 2

Sis. Takiyha Reed, Missions

Deacon Marion Thompson, Maturity

Children's Ministry Mission Statement

The Children's Ministry at Greater aims to bring children to Jesus and membership in His family, develop them to Christ-like maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world to magnify God's name.

Children's Ministry Vision Statement

We seek to help children become transformed, purpose-driven followers of Jesus Christ.

Children's Ministry Leadership Team (TBD)

Ministry Director

Name:

Phone#:

Email:

Ministry Leader

Name:

Phone#:

Email:

Assistant Ministry Leader

Name:

Phone#:

Email:

Philosophy of Children's Ministry

In Proverbs 22:6, it says, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." (NRSV)

Teaching children about ministry is not enough. By involving them in service to others through effective ministries that they enjoy and by which they can see the value of their participation first-hand, children can see that Jesus can use them. They are important to Christ now! Children are the church of today and tomorrow.

The Process of Development in Elementary School-Age Children

For spiritual development to take place, the following needs to happen:

- 1. Children need to be involved in practices that communicate they belong. An effective relationship with people in the church community, other than their parents and relatives, is an essential piece of their spiritual nurture.²⁵⁰*
- 2. Children need to be guided in practices that involve participation. For positive spiritual nurture to happen, children must be allowed to participate in church activities.²⁵¹*
- 3. Children need to be able to see models of faithfulness in the adult lives in front of them. When children interact with people in the church through participation in the church's life, they see models of faith.²⁵²*
- 4. Children need to be guided in instructional practices as interpretations of life. Children tend to learn more through informal and nonformal means of education than through sitting in a classroom.²⁵³*

²⁵⁰ Ivy Beckwith. *Post Modern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 65.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 67.

5. *Children need help and encouragement when it comes to making choices. After all, following Jesus is about making good and appropriate choices.*²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

The Experts Speak

James Fowler was an American theologian who was a Theology and Human Development Professor at Emory University. He directed Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics. According to Fowler:

In this stage of development, elementary-age children believe in justice and fairness in religious matters. They have a sense of give-and-take in the universe's workings (e.g., doing good will result in good things happening, and doing bad will result in bad things happening). Their view of God is that He is a man with a long white beard who lives in the clouds. Religious images are often taken literally, which leads to confusion. For example, consider Deuteronomy 11:13-15: "If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving the LORD your God and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul,¹⁴ then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil,¹⁵ and he will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you will eat your fill." If these promises do not take place in the world, then a child at this stage might feel cheated or disappointed in God.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ <https://www.toolshero.com/psychology/fowlers-stages-of-faith-development>, accessed 3/22/23.

Eric Erikson was a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on the psychological development of human beings. According to Erikson:

In this stage of development, children are learning various emotional and social skills; because of that, parents and caregivers must support them as they face new challenges and attempt to navigate them on their own. For a child to feel productive, they must feel competent, and they may feel inadequate or not measure up without the opportunities to develop new skills.²⁵⁶

These theorists inform about getting children involved in ministry. They discuss the importance of children having opportunities to learn new skills and helping people. They share how children perceive fairness and justice and what it means to do good instead of evil. When children are given opportunities to develop new skills, it helps them to feel good about themselves, encouraging them to want to do more. The Children's Ministry leaders, church leaders, and parents must ensure that children are permitted to participate in the church's full life so that they have opportunities to use their spiritual gifts and talents.

²⁵⁶ <https://www.verywellmind.com/industry-versus-inferiority-2795736>, accessed 3/22/23.

Greater's Children's Ministry Vision

The Children's Ministry exists to help parents guide their children by providing loving, safe, and caring interaction with them, teaching children the Gospel, and teaching them the character of God for God to be worshipped and glorified. The Children's Ministry will attempt to evangelize children and teach them about God in age-appropriate ways.

In a safe and clean environment, the Children's Ministry will provide an attractive, captivating, and enjoyable place for children to learn about God. The Children's Ministry evangelizes children, equips servants, and encourages parents.

Thank you so much for being willing to serve in such a critical ministry. Especially in a church like ours, with children and a heart for another generation, you are a needed and valuable part of the church's work.

With joy, we take very seriously our responsibility to care for the children of our church, from their spiritual needs to their physical safety. Because of that concern, this manual outlines essential procedures and policies without being overly strict for every situation. Please use your best judgment and initiative to protect and care for our children to whom you minister.

Children's Ministry Volunteer Guidelines

- 1. Have a personal relationship with Jesus.*

We must know Jesus for ourselves before we can disciple children.

- 2. Agree with the core beliefs of our church. (See page 4).*
- 3. Complete a Children's Ministry Volunteer Application. (See page 25).*

This application requests your contact information, the date you joined Greater, previous church membership, and other active ministries.

- 4. Be faithful to your assigned position.*

We need volunteers who are reliable, responsible, dedicated, and committed to the Children's Ministry.

- 5. Attend all meetings and workshops.*

Monthly meetings and scheduled workshops will be conducted on Zoom. The ministry leader will provide the schedule and Zoom link.

- 6. Be loyal to the pastor and leaders of this church.*

We must support the pastor and leaders of Greater. Our children hear adult questions, squabbles, and gossip. If you have a question about something or disagree with anything, discuss it with the ministry leader.

- 7. Be faithful to regular church services. Our children see who shows up at church.*

Being an active church community member is necessary, and we can do that by attending worship services regularly.

8. Be faithful to regular Bible Study.

Attending Bible Study is one of the ways to study Scripture with other believers.

9. Agree to a background check.

We are committed to the safety of our children. We must take every necessary step to ensure that everyone who works with the Children's Ministry has a clean background.

Ministry Assignment Process

Parents

- *Will have child(ren) at church by 9 a.m.*

The service begins at 9:30, and we want to ensure that everyone is in place in time for the service.

- *Will ensure that their children are wearing the uniform of white tops, black bottoms, and black or navy shoes (tennis shoes permitted).*

The purpose of the uniform is to identify the children as participants in the worship service.

- *Will notify us if the child(ren) will serve the following Sunday.*

The ministry leaders will prepare a schedule a month in advance and give it to the parents. If, for some reason, the child(ren) will not be able to participate in the service on their assigned Sunday, parents should let the ministry leader know by email and text (see page 8).

- *Will receive their child(ren) from the Children's Ministry volunteer once the sermonic song begins so they can settle before the sermon starts.*

The ushers and greeters are seated during the sermon. The children will sit with their parents during the sermon.

- *Will contact the Ministry Leader with any questions or concerns.*

The parents and Children's Ministry volunteers should contact the ministry leaders with questions or concerns.

Children's Ministry Uniform

- 1. White Tops*
- 2. Black Bottoms*
- 3. Black or Navy shoes (tennis shoes are permitted).*

Children's Ministry Volunteers

- *Volunteers should greet children by name when they arrive at church. Tell them how glad you are that they are at church.*
- *Volunteers should escort the children to their assigned ministry.*
- *The Usher or Hospitality Ministry Leader will assign the children to an adult to shadow. The adult will address the children by name.*
- *The children will serve in the worship service until the sermonic hymn.*
- *The pastor will then announce for the children to go to Sunday School.*
- *The Children's Ministry volunteer will escort the children to Sunday School.*
- *The Children's Ministry volunteer will escort the children back to the sanctuary to be seated with their parents after Sunday School.*

Reportable Offenses* Procedures

- 1. The child tells the ministry volunteer of the reportable offense. Ministry volunteer includes the ministry director, ministry leader, assistant ministry leader, and other ministry workers.*
- 2. Ministry volunteer reports reportable offense to the director of Ministry Development.*
- 3. The director of Ministry Development informs the pastor.*
- 4. The director of Ministry Development reports reportable offenses to the local social services department (410-361-2235) or local law enforcement agency (911).*

**According to the State of Maryland, reportable offenses are physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse/exploitation, emotional abuse, parental substance use, and abandonment.*

FAQ's

By Parents

- 1. Whom should I contact if my child cannot attend church on the day he or she is scheduled to participate in the worship service?*

You should contact the ministry leader by email and text if your child cannot participate on their assigned Sunday.

- 2. What do I do if my child is sick on the morning of service?*

You should contact the ministry leader by text or phone if your child is sick on the morning of service. The ministry leader will reschedule your child.

- 3. Can my child(ren) serve if they do not have the assigned uniform?*

Children will not be allowed to serve if they do not have the assigned uniform. Please let the ministry leader know before the morning of service so that the ministry leader can reschedule your child.

- 4. Whom do I contact if I have any questions or concerns?*

Contact the ministry leader by email, text, or phone (see page 8).

By Volunteers

1. *What do I do if a child suddenly wants to stop serving in the middle of doing so?*

If a child wants to stop serving, take the child to his or her parent for further direction.

2. *What do I do if a child is disorderly?*

If a child is disorderly, take him or her to the parent and explain the situation.

3. *Whom should I contact if I become sick on the morning I am scheduled to serve?*

If you become sick, please get in touch with the ministry leader by text or phone (see page 8).

4. *What do I do if a parent becomes disrespectful toward me?*

If a parent disrespectfully treats you, immediately get the ministry leader involved.

If the ministry leader is not available, contact the assistant ministry leader.

STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

I have received and read a copy of the church's Children's Ministry Manual and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving the Children's Ministry. I know the Children's Ministry manual may be modified, and the ministry leaders may amend, revise, or eliminate guidelines. I have reviewed the duties listed, and I agree to fulfill these duties.

I understand I may choose to end my voluntary service at any time. I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual do not express or imply a contractual employment relationship between the church and me. I know it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

_____ Volunteer's Name (please print)

_____ Volunteer's Signature

Date: _____

Once you have read the manual, please sign and date it above. Email this page electronically signed to Veronica Land-Davis: vdavis142@gmail.com.

Children's Ministry Highlights

Recently, we started the Children's Ministry at Greater and intentionally asked both children and parents what they thought of the experience. Here are a few responses.

Parents' Comments

"My daughter (5) enjoyed ushering today."

"My son (5) loves ushering. When the pastor told the congregation if they needed an envelope to let the ushers know, he jumped up and said, "That's me."

"My mother wasn't feeling well, so I was up all night. I told my son (age 5) we would watch church on TV, and I laid down. He said, "Somebody must get me dressed because I'm attending church! At that point, I was too proud to be tired! The Children's Ministry is working."

"My son (7) enjoys ushering, and it helps to keep him off his electronic device."

"I am so excited about revitalizing the Children's Ministry because our children are the church's future leaders."

Children's Comments

Boy (5)

"I love to greet people and usher."

Girl (10)

"I like participating in the worship service."

Girl (8)

"I like to greet people when they come to church."

Boy (7)

"I like to usher."

Boy (10)

"I like to have something to do when I come to church."

Boy (7)

"I like helping people to their seats."

Boy (7)

He has not yet participated but approached me and told me he wanted to help people to their seats. Here is an example of a child wanting to participate because of seeing other children's participation.



Children's Ministry Volunteer Application

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ *State* _____ *Zip Code* _____

Phone #: _____ *Email Address:* _____

Current Ministry (s): _____

What Ministries are you currently part of?

Home Church

Do you consider Greater to be your Home Church?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Other Churches

Do you attend any other churches?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Attendance History

How long have you attended Greater? _____

Baptism

Have you been baptized?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Giving

Do you regularly give financially to support the mission of Greater?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Beliefs

Do you agree with Greater's beliefs?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Previous Leadership

Have you served in a children's ministry before?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*

Personal Integrity Commitment

Are you willing to model spiritual growth and personal integrity at Greater?

_____ *Yes* _____ *NO*