Session #1: Philosophy

Why do we do children’s ministry?

Philosophy is an important question for us to think through. Our philosophy answers the question “why?” Why do we show up week in and week out and study and prepare and play silly games? Do we do this so that we can have fun? Or so that parents don’t have to worry about their kids? Hopefully most workers would say something along the lines of “We are here because we love children and want to serve them and the Lord.” But we will take some time in this session to clarify our thinking on these matters. We will do this by looking at the vision of NextGen Indy and then developing that vision with four principles.

**A Vision**

If we were to sum it all up, what is the goal of the children’s ministry at Colonial? The following vision statement gives a succinct description of the goal of every children’s worker at Colonial:

*We want children to love Jesus’ Word and His church, so that as they grow they set their hope in God.*

**Principle 1: Our Ministries Should Focus on Evangelism and Discipleship**

The children’s ministries at Colonial are extensions of the church, and the focus of our church should be both evangelism (sharing the gospel with the lost) and discipleship (helping believers grow in their faith). This means our Wednesday night ministries (Kids 4 Truth and Dynamite Kidz), as well as our Sunday morning ministries (Sunday School and Children’s Church) should seek to both share the gospel and help believers to grow. We will, however, have a distinct focus for each of these times. As a general rule, ***Wednesday night ministries*** will focus on ***evangelism,*** while ***Sunday morning ministries*** will focus on ***discipleship.***

This means that our Wednesday night ministries will be structured with unchurched children in mind. We will run the bus on Wednesday night, will include a high-energy game time, will celebrate birthdays, give away prizes, have fun review games, will include more “fun” songs, and will focus our prayer and attention especially on those who do not know Christ. Several times throughout the semester the gospel will be shared, and an invitation given. None of this is to downplay the important ministry Wednesday nights will have to children who have made professions of faith, but it does mean that our primary burden is to see the lost come and to see them accept Christ.

Our Sunday morning ministries are designed primarily with regular church attenders in mind. This means that there will be a greater emphasis on teaching, on singing great hymns of the faith, and on preparing the children to become those who love Jesus’ Word and His church and who will remain faithful to both for the rest of their lives. This is not meant in any way take away from Sunday morning visitors who don’t know Christ, but the focus for Sunday morning will be to instill within the children a love for God’s Word and the habit of regular church attendance.

**Principle 2: We Will Seek to Partner with Parents**

Scripture is clear that primary responsibility for the spiritual growth and discipleship of children is their parents (Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25). This means that we as a church (and more specifically, you as Sunday School teacher, Children’s Church volunteer, or Kids 4 Truth worker) are not the primary disciplers of these children, the parents are! Our goal as a ministry is to ***equip*** parents to do the work of discipleship, as well as to ***assist*** them in that work.

Much of the equipping work of parents happens in other venues, such as Pastor’s preaching ministry, elective classes, counseling, and just ordinary life to life discipleship. But the assisting aspect of Colonial’s ministry to children is where we come in. Through Sunday and Wednesday ministries, NextGen Indy seeks to assist parents in their work of discipleship. Salvation and spiritual growth are first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit, but from a human level they are the responsibility of the parents. Our task is to support and assist parents in this work.

So how does this work out practically in our ministry? First, never say anything that would denigrate an authority in the child’s life, especially a parent. If you disagree with something a parent has said or done, don’t communicate that to the child. If you are truly concerned, consider having a private conversation with the parent at another time. Do not undermine parents in the eyes of their children.

On a positive note, seek to partner with parents whenever possible. Stay in communication with parents if there are concerns with their child or if you have seen growth. Pray for parents as they seek to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Encourage your students whenever possible to respect, honor, and obey their parents.

**Principle 3: We Recognize the Power of an Example**

Almost everything you teach these students will be forgotten. But some of your students will never forget you. All of us are followers, but children are followers to a much greater degree than adults. With this simple truth in mind, we want to make sure that those who serve in children’s ministry at Colonial Hills are worthy examples of the gospel. It is important to share the right teaching with your students, but it is perhaps even more important that you model right living before your students.

This works itself out practically in a number of ways. First, make sure that in your dealings with the children you are exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: that you are being patient, kind, longsuffering, and gentle. Beware being frustrated and angry when dealing with students. Seek to respond as Christ would respond.

Because your example as a teacher, worker, or leader matters, it is important that you model regular church attendance as much as you are able. Work obligations and pressing issues may come up from time to time, but whenever possible you should plan on being at church as an example to your students.

Do your best to be engaged in lesson or songs if you are not the one leading. There may be discipline scenarios or other situations which prevent you from singing or listening carefully, but if you are able listen to the lesson and sing with gusto, not just as an example to the children, but also to praise God and to learn about Him.

**Principle 4: We Want to Exemplify the Joy of the Lord**

While we will have rules and policies, we want to make sure that kids who come to Colonial Hills’ children ministries have fun! The Bible reminds us that “the joy of the Lord is [our] strength!” (Nehemiah 8:10). We want to make sure things are run smoothly and well, but we want to make sure that the children that come to NextGen see that following Christ is a joyful experience!

Satan will try to discourage you and cause you to see ministry as a burden to borne rather than as a service to be enjoyed. Be zany and goofy! Smile big and smile often (smiles are, after all, free). Keep an eye on your expression, especially if you (like me) tend to have a natural scowl.

Have fun with the kids you are overseeing. Learn what a second graders favorite hobby is or a fifth graders most embarrassing moment. Participate in dress up nights (Kids 4 Truth) or play a zany review game (Children’s Church and Sunday School). Satan will try to convince the children in our church that following God is miserable and depressing. Make sure the children at Colonial know he’s dead wrong, and there is nothing of lasting value that they are missing out on by following Jesus.