



G U I D E L I N E S

# Children's Ministries

Help Children  
Grow in Faith





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**Help Children Grow in Faith**

Melanie C. Gordon

Discipleship Ministries

## **CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES**

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

*This book is printed on acid-free paper.*

ISBN 978-1-5018-3021-1

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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# Blessed to Be a Blessing

If you are reading this Guideline, you have said yes to servant leadership in your church. You are blessed to be a blessing. What does that mean?

By virtue of our baptism by water and the Spirit, God calls all Christians to faithful discipleship, to grow to maturity in faith (see Ephesians 4). The United Methodist Church expresses that call in our shared mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, or the *Discipline*, ¶120). Each local congregation and community of faith lives out that call in response to its own context—the wonderful and unique combination of God-given human and material resources with the needs of the community, within and beyond the congregation.

The work of servant leaders—your work—is to open a way for God to work through you and the resources available to you in a particular ministry area, for you are about God’s work. As stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), servant leaders are entrusted with the precious and vital task of managing and using God’s gifts in the ongoing work of transformation.

In The United Methodist Church, we envision transformation occurring through a cycle of discipleship (see the *Discipline*, ¶122). With God’s help and guidance, we

- reach out and receive people into the body of Christ,
- help people relate to Christ through their unique gifts and circumstances,
- nurture and strengthen people in their relationships with God and with others,
- send transformed people out into the world to lead transformed and transforming lives,
- continue to reach out, relate, nurture, and send disciples . . .

Every ministry area and group, from finance to missions, engages in all aspects of this cycle. This Guideline will help you see how that is true for the ministry area or group you now lead. When you begin to consider all of the work you do as ministry to fulfill God’s mission through your congregation, each task, report, and conversation becomes a step toward transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Invite Christ into the process to guide your ministry. You are doing powerful and wonderful work. Allow missteps to become learning opportunities; rejoice in success. Fill your work with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

God blesses you with gifts, skills, and experience. You are a blessing when you allow God to work through you to make disciples and transform the world. Thank you.

(Find additional help in the “Resources” section at the end of this Guideline, in *The Book of Discipline*, and through <http://www.umc.org>.)

# Guidelines in Children's Ministries

**Y**ou have answered the call to serve as a minister to children. Calls come in a variety of ways, and here you are. You may be wondering where to begin. Begin with the prayer and knowledge of the psalmist:

You've taught me since my youth, God,  
and I'm still proclaiming your wondrous deeds!  
So, even in my old age with gray hair,  
Don't abandon me, God!  
Not until I tell generations about your mighty arm,  
Tell all who are yet to come about your strength.  
(Psalm 71:17-18).

Psalm 71 reminds us of the importance of learning and knowing the wonders of a relational God from our very beginnings. It reminds us that our relationship with God influences our lives today and the lives of future generations. The children that your ministry will touch already have a relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Through your leadership, children may grow in understanding of what God has called them to be and to do.

One way that we live out our call is through the core process for carrying out our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” as stated in ¶122 of *The Book of Discipline*. We can do this by offering all children H.O.P.E.—**H**ospitality, **O**ffer Christ, **P**urpose, and **E**ngagement. Through these discipleship paths of H.O.P.E., new disciples are made and sent out to reach even more people to bring into the body of Christ. We go into the world through outreach and mission, offering hope through proclamation of the gospel, seeking, welcoming, and gathering as we offer **hospitality** to those not yet in the body. We **offer Christ** by providing opportunities for people to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and Spirit and profession of faith. We nurture people in Christian living to help them find a true sense of **purpose** in life, learning what it means to live out their belief through acts of piety and acts of mercy, Christian conferencing, regular participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion, and other means of grace. Through **engagement**, we send out these grace-filled followers of Jesus Christ who are putting their faith into action, helping to transform the surrounding community and offering hospitality in the name of Jesus Christ.

Offer HOPE to your children as you answer the call to serve.

# A Biblical and Historical Foundation

Our first glimpse of Jesus is of a newborn baby who grew and lived each phase of childhood. We assume that Jesus experienced the love and comfort of parents and the fears, sorrows, and joys of a child. Children relate to Jesus because he grew as they grow. We can assume that Jesus grew up in a home in which Hebrew parents were obligated to teach their children the Law and to raise them to be responsible members of the faith community. A young Jesus spoke confidently to religious authorities in the temple, exemplifying the importance of teaching children well (Luke 2:41-52).

It is important to remember that Jesus loved and honored children. Parents brought their children to be blessed by Jesus, not just in his presence, but also through his touch. Jesus publicly claimed children as models of pureness of heart and joy inherent in the kingdom of God. He reminded us that we are to tend graciously to our children, and warned us of the consequences of being a “stumbling block” in our children’s growth and development (see, for example, Luke 18:15-17).

## Our Connectional Commitment to Children

John Wesley was also committed to the education and formation of children; and traditionally, the United Methodist Church has provided a space for children to learn, grow, and actively engage in the congregation.

In his sermons and actions, Wesley took up the cause of children’s issues, especially their intellectual and spiritual development. The Wesleyan movement inspired the development of health clinics and schools that accommodated children from all walks of life. Wesley personally visited children in workhouses and poorhouses, and established Sunday schools, going against the popular writings of the time and actively participating in social justice issues that had an impact on children.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This mission, which reflects Jesus’ Great Commission, includes children. Faith formation for children is not an option. Leaders in ministry with children live out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) by offering opportunities, resources, and experiences for children that are steeped in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, making this your primary task.

Paragraph 256.1a of *The Book of Discipline* states, “in each local church, there shall be a church school for the purpose of accomplishing the church’s educational ministry.” *The Book of Resolutions*, an official document of the church, contains several resolutions that

address our commitment to children, including “Putting Children and Their Families First” (¶2027) “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church” (¶3084) and “Child Care and the Church” (¶3081) All leaders in ministry with children should be familiar with these documents to understand The United Methodist Church’s deep commitment to children.

The general boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church take seriously the role of children in the life of the congregation. Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, through the Office of Ministry with Children, provides resources for leaders engaged in ministry with children in local congregations. Discipleship Ministries offers a quadrennial conference, the United Methodist Conference on Ministry with Children, and also holds the responsibility for training leaders; providing research; connecting leaders and congregations; and developing resources for use in local churches, districts, and annual conferences. The United Methodist Publishing House develops curriculum for children, and a Curriculum Resources Committee reviews curriculum for alignment with United Methodist theology.

The General Board of Global Ministries advocates for children worldwide and supports United Methodist Women in the Campaign for Children, which focuses on advocating for greater support for public schools in the United States. The General Board of Church and Society advocates for children in legislative issues. The Commission on United Methodist Men supports the office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting. The General Commission on Finance and Administration provides support for congregations in matters of risk and in keeping children safe.

Most annual conferences appoint an individual who is responsible for ministry with children. This person is knowledgeable about district and annual conference programs and can direct you to people available to train and resource congregations. The annual conference contact also supports those who work with children. Christians Engaged in Faith Formation (CEF), an organization available to develop leaders in faith formation, will share knowledge and skills in ministry with children.

God loves all children and desires relationship with all children. As Christians, we are called to cultivate that relationship. John Wesley wanted children to know and love God. Our heritage as United Methodists has shown a commitment to children through baptism, Sunday school, Bethlehem Centers, daycare centers for working parents, and homes for children. The United Methodist Church continues to name children as vital participants in the community, and God calls us to love, protect, and nurture them.

## **Your Role as a Spiritual Leader**

You are a vital part of the connection, and how you live out your life in accord with the biblical and historical principles of the church will have a direct impact on children and their families. In the letter to the community at Ephesus, the author appealed to his sisters and brothers to live into the unity of Spirit that God desires of us through Jesus Christ— one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:1-7). Those called to children’s ministry live into this unity, and they use their gifts to serve the children of the

congregation and the larger community in a multitude of ways. It is important to remember that God has given each of us gifts to be used to build up the community of faith (see Ephesians 4:11-13).

As a leader in The United Methodist Church, you set the example for the people that you lead—the children. Your life—both public and private—should reflect the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to teach what we do not practice or understand. The General Rules (the *Discipline*, ¶104) set forth a rule of life to aid in that practice. Marjorie Thompson, in *Soul Feast*, tells us “a *rule of life* is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. . . . It fosters gifts of the Spirit in personal life and human community, helping to form us into the persons God intends us to be” ([Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995, 2005], 146, italics added). The General Rules expect us to begin by doing no harm and doing good, then to attend upon the ordinances of God through regular practice of the public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting or abstinence.

While they are not specifically mentioned in this section of the *Discipline*, Wesley also included works of advocacy, service, and justice among them. All these practices will direct your life and support your ministry “to witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (the *Discipline*, ¶1117.2).

Self-care is your gift to God, to those you serve, and to you. Jesus spent time alone in prayer and visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus when he needed to take respite. It is important to follow this model. Plan wisely. Set boundaries. Take time to care for yourself. Taking time for renewal is a discipline that will allow you to grow in holiness.

# Ministry with Children

A vital, disciple-making congregation provides multiple opportunities for children to participate in the life of the church. “As people of faith, we are called to teach children through Scripture, our tradition as Methodists, the Social Principles, the ritual of baptism, and our concern for families. In responding to the call set before us, we will provide environments for children to be nurtured in the faith and to grow as children of God” (“Child Care and the Church,” ¶3081, *Book of Resolutions*). The process for disciple making can be found within ¶122 of the *Discipline*. We make disciples as we create a welcoming environment for children, offer children engaging occasions to make a commitment to Christ, offer experiences where children can grow in faith by participating in the means of grace, and provide opportunities for children to help transform the communities in which they live.

## The Spiritual Lives of Children

Children are spiritual beings, born with the essential knowledge of God’s presence and with the potential for spiritual experiences with God to activate that potential. The role of those who are responsible for their faith development is to help children on this journey. Scripture gives the example of Jesus growing strong and gaining in wisdom in his community (Luke 2:40). A congregation that intentionally fulfills this role actively:

- creates experiences that support children in the knowledge and awareness of God;
- models God’s unconditional love for all God’s children;
- provides opportunities that support children in discovering, developing, and sharing their unique gifts from God;
- listens and responds to the needs of children.

## Small Groups and Covenant

Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in a vital congregation includes multiple opportunities for children to participate in small groups. During this kind of engagement, children are able to form deeper relationships with one another and with God. Small groups vary from Bible study to mission groups to Covenant Discipleship groups. As with any ministry, listen to children and offer them the space to shape the group. Consider helping children develop a covenant for each of these groups to equip them to recognize the importance of covenant as is found in Scripture and in our Methodist heritage.

## **The Digital Child in Christian Community**

The children we serve today are surrounded by more technological advances than many of us could have ever imagined. Depending on your setting, you will encounter children who are savvy with technology from as early as eighteen months old to children whose families do not have the resources to offer them handheld technology. Most of them will fall somewhere in between. Your role in children's ministry is to understand how children learn in light of the digital age and to recognize the importance of forming relationships in community where all of the senses are engaged. Technology lacks the human touch. Technology cannot give safe hugs. Technology cannot console a grief-stricken child. It is a tool that can connect us to one another in new ways that can be healthy and encouraging.

We can assume that Jesus grew up in a culture where children were formed and educated through relationships and face-to-face communication. Your primary formational tools are communication and building relationships. Help children actively build relationships with peers, with family members, and with the gathered community of Christ. Use media only to enhance those relationships.

# Getting Started

**A**s coordinator of children's ministries, you are "responsible for assuring that children are considered and included within the life of the congregation. The coordinator will lead the children's council, when organized, and will work closely with clergy and other program-related staff. The coordinator will vision, plan, and advocate for children, particularly in the areas of faith development, safety, and discipleship. The coordinator will work with other leaders in the congregation to assure that policies and procedures are in place to help keep all children and the adults who care for and work with them safe. These policies and procedures include such things as background checks, having at least two adults per group, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first-aid training. The coordinator will also advocate for mission education for children, including The United Methodist Children's Fund for Christian Mission." (the *Discipline*, ¶ 256.2a)

Each district office and each annual conference office has access to the *Ministry with Children District Leadership Training Model* developed by the Office of Ministry with Children at Discipleship Ministries. This comes in print and media versions for use in new church starts and new children's minister training. Find it at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/ministry-with-children-district-leadership-training-model>.

## Your Ministry as a Children's Leader

In most congregations that serve a small number of children each week, the coordinator of children's ministry is probably the primary person responsible for seeing that the needs of children are met. In most large-membership congregations that serve a large number of children, the coordinator of children's ministry may be one of several age-level coordinators. Medium-membership congregations serve various numbers of children, so the children's ministry may be served by a coordinator or by a children's minister on the church staff.

If your congregation employs a staff person responsible for children's ministry, your job may be modified in relation to the staff person's duties and whether that person is employed full- or part-time. Although the responsibilities of your role as coordinator of children's ministries may vary, your primary task remains the faithful formation of children as they journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. Depending on the size and staffing of your church, your responsibilities may include these practices and tasks.

**Always begin with prayer.** This is the one means of grace that we can practice alone and in community and the one that is God's gift of communication with God. Pray intentionally for the children and their families.

**Gather information** that will guide your ministry with children by talking with key individuals and groups in the congregation, exploring the resources in your local church, and contacting Discipleship Ministries and your annual conference for support and resources.

**Create a plan of communication** with parents, guardians, and teachers of the children in your congregation.

**Know the children.** Learn the name of each child that you will serve in children's ministry. Address the children by name. Always know how many children you serve. Each child is a gift from God and deserves to be remembered and known.

**Suggest and seek experiences** that may be new or innovative in children's ministries.

**Advocate.** Identify key people in the congregation and community who are advocates for children's needs and issues. Advocate for all children to be welcome and invited to participate in the full life of the church as vital participants. Advocate for quality leadership. Stay informed about the gifts of church members. Advocate for sufficient funding. Keep financial planners aware of the needs of all ministries with children.

**Set realistic and innovative goals.** Appropriate goals are measurable, have a reasonable timetable for accomplishment, and fit the vision.

**Assure training opportunities** for teachers, guides, and leaders at various times of the year.

**Be safe.** Adopt a Safe Sanctuaries® policy and enforce it so that the congregation is a safe place for children and for the adults who engage with them. Know the Safe Sanctuaries® policy in your annual conference. The contact list for Safe Sanctuaries® is on the Discipleship Ministries website ([www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org)) and at [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org).

**Use approved resources.** Acquaint yourself with the curriculum and resource materials available from The United Methodist Publishing House through [cokesbury.com](http://cokesbury.com). Look for approved curriculum that says "UMC Endorsed."

**Stay connected and communicate.** Partner with leaders in the congregation who work with youth, adults, and families. As children grow, the transition to youth ministries will run more smoothly if you plan intergenerational activities. Communicate with leaders of groups with whom children's ministries share space, such as the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, or Alcoholics Anonymous. Open communication will allow everyone to work well in community. Connect with leaders in ministry with children at other United Methodist churches, as well as with other denominations and non-profits. A network of people who care for children is a valuable resource.

## **Build Relationships**

Building relationships with ministry leaders and other stakeholders is crucial to creating a vital community for making disciples. Your responsibility with children places you in a unique position to serve on various committees of the church and to enter into relationships with children's family members.

See the Collaboration Cycle for Planning (Children01-Collaboration Cycle for Planning.pdf) on the *Guidelines* website ([www.UMOfficialResources.com/guidelines](http://www.UMOfficialResources.com/guidelines)) and at [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org).

## Relationships with Other Ministry Leaders

Talk with the pastor or staff person with whom you relate to establish expectations of your involvement with committees and other ministries of the church. Someone should represent the concerns of children as events are planned and decisions are made. Advocate for the inclusion of children's needs. Church size does not matter. Even in a very small congregation, it is important to have an advocate for children. Recruit others who care about children to act as advocates as decisions are made.

Although children's ministry relates to various groups within the church structure, some have a direct impact on children's ministry. Advocate serving on these various committees and councils to see to the spiritual needs of the children in the congregation and the community.

The **church council** provides for planning and implementing a ministry of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources. It serves as the administrative agency of the charge conference in the local church.

**Nurture ministry** in the local church encompasses education, Christian formation, and small groups (at least). All these areas have a direct impact on the work of children's ministry. In addition, the witness and outreach ministries are important places to include a voice for the needs of children and as an outlet for teaching children about service and including children in servant ministry.

**The council on children's ministries** is responsible for planning, implementing, executing, and evaluating children's ministry in the local church. Although the coordinator of children's ministries leads this group, the leadership could vary, depending on the size of the church. If the coordinator of children's ministries leads this group, it is important to invite individuals who share the same characteristics of those in all effective leadership ministries. The council on children's ministries:

shall be responsible for planning, visioning, and advocating for children within the congregation, the community, and the world. The council will set policies and procedures related to children, oversee the planning of short-term experiences, consider children's ministry needs within the whole of the congregation's ministries, and communicate with parents and the congregation. The children's council will work closely with the coordinator of children's ministries and church staff responsible for ministry with children, including children's choirs and weekday ministries. The children's council is accountable to the group responsible for the local church's educational ministry. (the *Discipline*, ¶256.2b)

**A weekday ministries advisory board** is responsible to the church and the weekday preschool ministry to ensure that policies, budget, personnel, space, and program regulations are implemented and adhered to by the director of the weekday preschool.

The term *weekday ministry* applies to any regularly planned ministry for children. When appropriate, one or more weekday ministry boards may be organized to oversee the weekday ministry programs of the congregation. The board's membership should be mostly professing members of the congregation, with parent, church staff, and weekday ministry staff representatives. The board will set policies consistent with the congregation's policies, state mandates, and sound business practices. The board will guide weekday ministries as appropriate opportunities for faith development, mission outreach, Christian education, evangelism, and safety. They will advocate for inclusion of children from various socioeconomic, cultural, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Weekday ministry board(s) accountability should be placed within the local church organizational structure with consideration to the group responsible for the congregation's education ministry. (the *Discipline*, ¶256.2c)

## **Relationships with Children and Families**

In Luke 2, Jesus talked with the religious teachers in the temple as his parents searched for him. Although Jesus was in his Father's house, his parents fretted, not knowing where their child was. We want children to feel that the church is their safe sanctuary, and we want to assure parents and guardians that their children are in a safe and nurturing community.

Building relationships with children and their families is the first step in creating a vital children's ministry. It is important to:

- listen to children and take an interest in their lives. They live in a world where they are very rarely listened to.
- address all children by name. This creates intimacy and makes children feel special.
- communicate with parents and guardians frequently and regularly. Use all of the tools available to connect with parents.
- include parents and guardians in evaluating the children's ministry. They observe in ways that are important to children's ministry.
- know the parents and address them by name. This sounds daunting if you are in a large church, but calling parents by name helps parents to know that they are considered a part of the community. This will also make the parents and guardians more comfortable sharing comments and concerns about their children.

## **Create an Effective Ministry Group**

The ritual of the baptismal covenant of The United Methodist Church retells the story of the importance of covenant in our journey as disciples of Christ. Developing a covenant with the ministry group will not only honor this tradition, but will help

you to encourage and hold one another accountable in a way that gives an “account of what you have done and not done to build up the body of Christ and to grow in holiness of heart and life” (“A Rule of Life for Small Groups” article by Steve Manskar <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-rule-of-life-for-small-groups>). Each member has a voice in building and keeping the covenant. When building a covenant, consider everyone’s ideas. You may want to offer the following as a starting point. Find sample covenants at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org> under Covenant Discipleship.

- We will balance the time we devote to school, church, work, family, and friends, including our own spiritual and recreational life.
- We will spend some time each day in prayer for the children of this congregation and the world.
- We will practice listening to other people as a ministry of grace.
- We will not be silent when confronted with social injustice, and we will witness for justice, inclusiveness, and equality. We will encourage reconciliation wherever possible.
- We will be faithful in attendance and participation in worship each Sunday.
- We will pray for those who lead us in worship each week, especially the pastor.
- We will speak to one another with respect.

Effective teachers, guides, and leaders communicate well, build healthy working relationships, continue to improve their skills, and advocate for what they believe in. Although this skill set looks like it belongs to someone who is extroverted and assertive, these skills are present in all people who lead groups well. The role of those in children’s ministry is to tap into the gifts of the people in the congregation and community, provide opportunities for them to share these gifts with the children in your ministry, and offer opportunities for these skills to develop.

### **Identify Teachers, Guides, and Leaders**

As you look around for people to share in this ministry, start with basics. Make a list of people who attend worship often and regularly; pray, read, and study the Bible; give time and money to support the ministries of the church; and have a genuine concern about the sound faith formation of children. Go deeper in discovering the potential for leaders and teachers/guides by looking at the following gifts and commitments:

- **Passion.** People who demonstrate a deep commitment to the faithful formation of children and advocate for the needs of children.
- **Character.** People who demonstrate and model a mature Christian faith and who practice the means of grace frequently and regularly.
- **Knowledge of Ministry.** People who possess appropriate experience or academic credentials in Christian education; share knowledge of the Bible and biblical interpretation; demonstrate a basic knowledge of child development; and are familiar with United Methodist history, doctrine, polity, and tradition.
- **Professional Practices.** People who are committed to quality in all areas of ministry understand the importance of undergoing a background check and other Safe

Sanctuaries® requirements, will take direction, are equipped to lead, exhibit positive interpersonal skills, and will participate in ongoing training.

### **Training Opportunities**

Even the most experienced leaders in children's ministry will benefit from training and enrichment events. Plan for some combination of these opportunities.

- Plan a yearly retreat that combines training, information, and fun.
- Ask a church or community member with a specific expertise to share some ideas with the children's ministry group.
- Invite a local teacher to lead a workshop on classroom management. An experienced teacher can offer tips on addressing issues that come up frequently.
- Contact the district office, annual conference office, and United Methodist Communications for free and low-cost audiovisual training. This will alleviate the cost of paying a speaker each time training is needed.
- Connect with other United Methodist churches to plan joint training events for leaders. All congregations are concerned with faithful formation of children.

### **Communicate with Teachers, Guides, and Leaders**

Face-to-face communication is vital to building strong leadership in children's ministry. Scripture exemplifies the importance of person-to-person contact. The current reality is that we communicate more and more through technology, which is a wonderful tool when used wisely. As technology evolves, evolve with it. Use it to send updates, check on meeting dates, issue reminders and announcements, and provide inspiration. But your primary mode of communication must be in person, where you will gain a deeper understanding of individuals by tone of voice, facial expression, and human touch. Plan regular meetings that give teachers, guides, and leaders an opportunity to voice opinions, compare notes on activities, evaluate past events, and support one another through covenant.

# Planning for Children's Ministry

**T**he liturgical calendar defines the seasons and holy days of the Christian year. It stands as an example of the importance of preparation. A well-planned calendar places you in a proactive position and can minimize conflicts with events taking place in the local and general church and in your community. Your children and families can plan well in advance so that they can more freely participate in activities. As you plan, keep in mind the essential process of starting with your intentional goals, then plan for how you will meet those goals so that you reach out to children, nurture them, equip them for discipleship, and then send them out (in age-appropriate ways) as disciples making disciples.

## A Calendar for Ministry with Children

This calendar is a basic place to begin in your ministry context. As you plan your calendar, include dates for meetings, financial reconciliations, programs, community activities, paperwork due dates, training, deadlines, and publicity. Consider using the *United Methodist Program Calendar*, available through United Methodist Communications, a valuable planning tool. It includes special dates and observances and prompts you in earlier months to begin planning. Some of the items here will help you to work and plan ahead, and others indicate dates of events.

### January

- Covenant with a small group to serve as leaders in ministry with children in your congregation.
- Gather your children's ministry group to work on the ministries and programs through the church year, starting with Advent (four Sundays before Christmas, often starting the last Sunday in November). Beginning with Advent gives you the opportunity to set your calendar eleven months in advance. In larger churches, you may want to allow for more advanced planning.
- Celebrate Human Relations Day (see <http://www.umcgiving.org/how-we-give#sundays>).
- Offer a training opportunity for children's leaders.
- Plan for a Lenten study for children.

### February

- Celebrate African American History Month.
- Plan for vacation Bible school for children of all ages (and collaborate with other age-level leaders, if VBS is intergenerational).
- Offer a gesture of appreciation to children's teachers and leaders.

## March

- Partner with the family ministries leader to observe Christian Home Month in May (see <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries> or [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org)).
- Plan for Peace with Justice Sunday (see <http://www.umcgiving.org/how-we-give#sundays>).
- Celebrate World Day of Prayer (see <http://www.unity.org/wdop>).

## April

- Celebrate Earth Day (see <http://www.earthday.org/>).
- Celebrate One Great Hour of Sharing (the fourth Sunday in Lent; see <http://www.umcgiving.org/how-we-give#sundays>).
- Offer an intergenerational day of service in the community.
- Evaluate children's ministry: participation, children's needs and concerns, feedback from parents, feedback from leadership.

## May

- Celebrate Christian Home Month (see [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org)).
- Celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day (see [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org)).
- Celebrate Aldersgate Day (see <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-aldersgate-day> and [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org)).
- Organize teacher training opportunities for fall.
- Celebrate teachers, guides, and leaders through ritual in worship.
- Invite children to give feedback on what they experienced in children's ministry activities.
- Create and distribute a list of activities to keep children and families connected during the summer months.
- Distribute program evaluations to leaders, parents, and guardians.

## June

- Offer a training opportunity for children's leaders.
- Review and update curriculum and resources.

## July

- Participate in United Methodist training opportunities, such as The United Methodist Conference on Children.
- Review the covenant that children's teachers, guides, and leaders have made with one another.
- Prepare for charge conference.

## August

- Provide a back-to-school blessing and celebration for children and their families.
- Celebrate Promotion Sunday.

- Download the planning manual for Children's Sabbath (<http://www.childrensdefense.org>) and organize a weekend of service activities.
- Plan for Advent.

## September

- Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15–October 15; see <http://www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov>).
- Offer a Communion study for families with children.

## October

- Celebrate Children's Sabbath (see <http://www.childrensdefense.org>).
- Celebrate World Communion Sunday (see <http://www.umcgiving.org/how-we-give#sundays>).
- Organize teacher training opportunities for spring.

## November

- Celebrate All Saints Day.
- Distribute a prayer calendar for Advent.
- Offer a Parents' Night Out.

## December

- Celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

## Create a Budget

Jesus repeatedly addressed the issue of money. To live into our Christian identity, it is important to use our resources well. Some congregations will have ample budgets for children's ministry, while others may struggle with a tiny budget. One important thing to remember is that you are the advocate for the faith formation of children, and the congregation should invest in the children of the church and community. You may be asked by the finance committee to make recommendations about the budget for children's ministry for a new fiscal year. Having this information on hand will greatly assist that process and help them create a realistic budget. Fiscal responsibility is part of your role as a leader in children's ministry, so keep these things in mind each year:

- Consider what experiences you want to offer children.
- Develop a budget and justify each line item.
- Perform a monthly reconciliation of the budget to actual costs.
- Calculate the average cost per child per year.
- Calculate the cost per age group, identifying the most and least costly.
- Ask for what you need and be aware of what teachers, guides, or others pay for themselves.

## Training Opportunities

Build in at least one training retreat each year. This may be a district training, an annual conference event on children's issues, or a national children's ministry conference offered by Discipleship Ministries. This training serves three purposes. It gives teachers, guides, and leaders an opportunity to more deeply understand the work to which they are called, to connect with those in other ministry settings who work with children, and to build relationships with those with whom they work. It is important to stay updated on children's issues because children are exposed to more information, more rapidly each year. Consider the following training topics:

- first aid and CPR
- building intergenerational relationships
- Safe Sanctuaries®
- helping children deal with grief
- helping children build covenant discipleship groups
- brain development of children
- faith development of children
- self care for the teacher
- positive discipline
- including children with special needs
- spiritual lives of children
- addressing bullying
- helping children through transitions
- storytelling

## Select Resources and Curriculum

As the proverb goes, "Train children in the way they should go, / when they grow old, they won't depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Selecting developmentally appropriate curriculum and resources is a daunting task, but one that must be taken seriously. Traditional models of teaching catered to a specific kind of learner, and other children had to adapt. This was followed by the model that entertained children rather than form them. We are fortunate that research has given us a better perspective on children's development. Children learn by using multiple senses and by imitating adults, through experience and play.

We know that:

- Children learn differently and at different rates. Explore options that offer experiences for the whole child.
- Children need space to experience the holy. Look for resources that allow for quiet reflection and mission opportunities.
- Children learn best in secure surroundings. Create a nurturing environment.
- Children are overscheduled and overstimulated. Offer children a space to unplug.

Be intentional about resource and curriculum selection by keeping these points in mind and by taking care in the way that Scripture is interpreted for our children. Many

available curricula are not aligned with the United Methodist doctrine of grace, so they should be evaluated to determine if they are appropriate. The Curriculum and Resource Selection Checklist (Children02-Curriculum & Resource Select Checklist.pdf, available at [www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines](http://www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines) and [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org)) can assist you in choosing curriculum that allows children to deepen their experience of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a way that stays true to our United Methodist heritage.

## Evaluate Children's Ministry

Each year, it is important to evaluate the children's ministries in your congregation. Invite input from the children's ministry leadership group, other ministry leaders, parents, and children.

Several evaluation or planning checklists and visual planning helps are on the *Guidelines* website ([www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines](http://www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines)) or at [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org):

- Children as Vital Participants in the Life of the Congregation (Children03-Children as Vital.pdf)
- Evaluation Cycle (Children04-Evaluation Cycle.pdf)
- Collaboration Cycle for Planning (Children01-Collaboration Cycle for Planning.pdf)
- Curriculum and Resource Selection Checklist (Children02-Curriculum & Resource Select Checklist.pdf)
- Evaluation of Children's Ministry (Children05-Evaluation Form.pdf)
- Parent Evaluation of Children's Ministry (Children06-Parent Evaluation Form.pdf)
- Checklist for Implementing and Maintaining the Basics of Safe Sanctuaries® (Children07-Safe Sanctuaries Checklist.pdf)

The Evaluation Cycle document includes a graphic that depicts a process for developing strategies that begin with identifying the specific, intentional results you want to achieve through your children's ministry. Then, within the several stages of the discipleship cycle (reach out, nurture, equip, and send), you set strategies for how you will work with children of all ages to promote their growth through those stages.

But how do you know if you are accomplishing what you want? Attendance or other "countable" indicators are helpful. Those *quantifiable* attainments are easy to recognize: 40 new children in the Sunday school, 5 percent growth in participation in VBS, and so on. For each of the strategies, establish target measures (or perhaps you use the term *metrics*) for what will be considered a "success." These measures must be age-appropriate and describe what will have happened—not just what you do and how you do it, but the outcome for the people who do it. If, for example, the desired result is "knowing and practicing the spiritual disciplines," one strategy for early readers might be to provide written copies of the Lord's

Prayer and to say it together weekly in each class or group. A specific activity for that strategy might be for children to decorate their prayer as a colorful mini-poster. The *quantifiable* measures might relate to how many children made the poster, how many weeks they recited it, how many learned it by heart, and so on.

Be sure not to confuse measures with strategies. While you want to see good numbers and increased percentages, story and relationships are the most important. In addition, looking only at what is happening with children and not the adults who work with the children omits an important set of measures. Children have a profound ability to teach adults lessons in generosity, humility, cooperation, simplicity, inclusiveness, and love. Those intangible measures are the *qualitative* indicators of whether a life is being formed and transformed in the image of God, which is the ultimate goal.

To continue the “Lord’s Prayer” example, the *qualitative* measures relate to how well the children understand it, how they have learned about God from it, and what it means to them—in age-appropriate ways. (For in-depth help in setting measures and doing evaluation, see also the Measures Evaluation Tool and other helps in the “Setting Goals” tab at [www.umvitalcongregations.org](http://www.umvitalcongregations.org).)

You may be asked to report, or to provide information for a staff member’s report, to comply with annual conference requirements for data related to the conference’s strategic growth goals. To this end, you will want to track and record the number of participants, including the trend (up or down) in all the functions, classes, groups, and experiences planned for ministry with children. In addition to the number of children, you will also want to note the number of adults (and youth) who help to provide for this ministry.

Equally important, be intentional about collecting the stories that children, teachers, and group leaders share about what is happening to them as a result of their efforts and participation. In these narratives, either self-reported or witnessed by others, you can see the changes in faith maturity, life choices, acquired spiritual disciplines, and other fruit of the Spirit.

## Sharing Space

Sharing space in a church building can be challenging. The doors of our churches should always remain open to the community and the ministries of the church. As a leader in the church, your role is to create an atmosphere where ministries and programs can live together in the space allowed. These suggestions below will be helpful as you address the needs of space in your setting.

- Continually look at ways to improve communication and relationships between the church education staff, the weekday ministries staff, and the leaders of groups that meet in the areas designated for children’s ministry.
- Together, write a covenant of how you will be in relationship with one another.
- Develop and maintain mechanisms to bring people to the table to work through issues constructively regarding use of space.
- Develop policies that allow ongoing communication concerning issues around space between the weekday ministries and church committees.

- Communicate with one another so that there is more of a focus on community than on individuality.
- Develop a budget process to maintain ongoing ministries adequately, given varying economic climates.
- Set an example for children through your actions and decisions on shared space.

# Create Safe Sanctuaries®

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

“As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake. How terrible it is for the world because of the things that cause people to trip and fall into sin! Such things have to happen, but how terrible it is for the person who causes those things to happen.” (Matthew 18:5-7)

It is unfortunate that the children God places in our care can and have become victims of sexual abuse in the very place where they should feel safe—the church. It is your responsibility as a leader in children’s ministry to work with others in leadership and ministry with children to create a safe space for children to grow in love of God and neighbor. Therefore, as the book *Safe Sanctuaries* points out, each church must have updated policies, guidelines, procedures, and insurance coverage to protect children and those engaged in ministry with children. This is not optional.

Our Social Principles state that “children must be protected from economical, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and exploitation and abuse” (the *Discipline*, ¶162C), and the 1996 General Conference adopted Resolution 3084, “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church,” which notes,

Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse. (the *Book of Resolutions*, ¶3084)

It is imperative that abuse be taken seriously.

- Require every person working directly with children to undergo a background check every two years.
- Require every person working directly with children to participate in Safe Sanctuaries® training annually.
- Educate the congregation, parents, and children on the basics of Safe Sanctuaries®.
- Review Safe Sanctuaries® policies and guidelines annually and when there is an incident or change in the community.

- Include an accountability statement in the covenant to adhere to Safe Sanctuaries® standards.
- Stay current on developments in Safe Sanctuaries® by contacting your annual conference or Discipleship Ministries.

Find out more at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries>.

# Address Special Needs

Jesus shared a special connection with people who lived with disabilities, exemplifying for us that all of God’s children are welcome participants in the life of the church. It is the responsibility of the leaders in ministry with children to work with the trustees and other leaders to advocate for the accommodation and participation of all people who live with disabilities, including children.

A welcoming congregation makes sure that architecture allows individuals with physical disabilities to navigate the space. Attitudes are based in a community’s knowledge and understandings about disabilities. Good communication includes the use of sight and sound that allows the least restrictive opportunity for participation. Programs allow individuals with disabilities an opportunity to share their gifts and talents with the community. Liturgical practices, such as sacraments or rituals, are adapted to meet individual needs. Turn to Disabilities Ministries of The United Methodist Church for resources (<http://www.umdisabilityministries.org/resource.html>).

Other basic needs for children with disabilities:

- Provide appropriate support for families of children with disabilities.
- Design ministries that include children with disabilities.
- Prepare and train teachers and guides to address the needs of children with disabilities.
- Teach the congregation to use inclusive language. Do not use the word *handicapped* and avoid phrases like “the deaf kid.” Instead, use the word *disabled*, and refer to a child as “John, who has autism.”
- Include children with disabilities in all child-appropriate activities in the life of the church.
- Learn about and provide adapted materials for reading, drawing, coloring, or painting.
- Allow for the use of multiple intelligences.
- Make audiobooks and books on computer available.
- Provide adapted utensils for self-feeding.
- Provide adapted brushes, pencils, and markers that are easier to grip.
- Pre-cut items and put glue down while children paste them by pressing the items down.
- Tape papers to the table so they will not move around when children try to paint, draw, or color.
- Use instruments that can be strapped to the body or hand.
- Use seating that allows children to be on similar levels.

# Ministry in the Community and the World

**T**he Great Commission tells us to “go” and make disciples, and John Wesley did just that. Children’s ministry goes beyond the walls of the church. Wesley used his financial resources to buy food for poor families, hire a teacher for children in the school, and purchase wool for children in workhouses. Wesley also visited children in workhouses, orphanages, and poorhouses to witness and advocate for justice for children. Today, we may live out this scriptural and historical heritage through mission, evangelism and witness, stewardship, and advocacy as we care for children.

## Mission

It is important that children participate in mission opportunities, locally and globally. Jesus preached about the importance of serving the poor, and John Wesley’s ministry for children had a running theme of serving children who would otherwise go without. Some of these children may be in your congregation, and they are certainly in the community and in the world.

Collaborate with community organizations and other faith communities to find out the needs of the children in your community, and then ask the children in your children’s ministry to imagine ways to serve those children.

On the global level, participate in The United Methodist Children’s Fund for Christian Mission. This joint ministry of Discipleship Ministries and the General Board of Global Ministries undertakes projects in which children learn more about children around the world and about the practice of mission. These resources are available for free download from the children’s ministry area of the Discipleship Ministries website ([www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org)).

Additional opportunities that allow children to be actively involved with mission are available through UMCOR (the United Methodist Committee on Relief). UMCOR provides relief following disasters in the United States and worldwide through relief kits that can be built at the local church level. Also consider supporting UNICEF, Heifer Project International, ZOE Ministries, and CROP walks. All these organizations offer child-friendly resources and mission opportunities for children.

Annual conferences, the United Methodist Women, and districts also offer opportunities to live into our call to social justice. In all mission opportunities, make sure that children understand that this is an opportunity to serve and to learn from others.

## **Evangelism and Witness**

One important way to make disciples is through inviting children from the community to participate in the ministries and programs of the church. Opportunities for evangelism can be intentional or serendipitous, but always be prepared.

Your congregation can evangelize children and families by offering ministries that support families in a nurturing, safe, and Christ-like environment. Work with community organizations, the school system, and other congregations to evaluate the needs of your community in the areas of after-school care, tutoring, daycare, ill-child care, and hunger. Explore the gifts of your congregation to discern how you can meet these and other needs.

Talk to children about their faith stories. Ask them regularly and often their thoughts about God, Jesus, the church, love, and doing good. Knowing how to articulate what they believe will give them the tools that they need to talk about their faith to others and to connect what they believe with who they are in the world.

## **Stewardship**

Jesus talked about stewardship nearly as much as he talked about the kingdom of God. Teaching children to use God's gifts wisely is important. Stewardship goes beyond monetary giving to encompass care for creation, service to God and others, sharing our gifts, participation in worship, and understanding sacrifice.

Talk to children about the work of the church, including missions, creation care, advocacy, and evangelism. Talk to children about the gifts God has given them. Ask children how they can use their gifts to spread God's love and help others. Invite children to share their gifts as a way of helping God and others. Provide opportunities for them to see how the money that they place in the offering plate supports the work of the church, including the use of apportioned funds in local, regional, and global service and ministry.

## **Advocacy**

Through words and action, John Wesley advocated for poor children by calling for education for all, visiting families, establishing health clinics, and stressing giving as important to Christian life. As a leader in children's ministry, it is your role to advocate for children within the church and in the world. It is also your role to share with the congregation the importance of this ministry.

The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) advocates on behalf of the rights of children "by working toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination and oppression of children and by affirming positive initiatives that result in an enhancement of the quality of life for children" (GBCS, "Children," <http://umc-gbcs.org/issues/children>).

The Children's Defense Fund coordinates resources and materials for Children's Sabbath each year. This interreligious event is one opportunity for the church to bring children's issues to the attention of the community through activities, mission, and worship.

A guide to Children's Sabbath (observed in October) is available for free download each August through Discipleship Ministries or The Children's Defense Fund.

## **Inclusiveness and Ecumenical Awareness**

When the Great Commission calls us to make disciples, it adds, "of all nations." We are to go out into the world—a world filled with people who differ from us physically, socio-economically, culturally, and educationally. This commission is not limited to those who are in our country or look like us or speak the same language or celebrate as we do. There are many opportunities for children to learn about others who are different from them—in race, ethnicity, economics, physical or mental ability, or religious beliefs.

- Be intentional in providing opportunities for children to learn about and to appreciate others as created by God.
- Provide anti-bias training for adults who work with children.
- Provide opportunities for learning about and with other faith communities.
- Invite teachers and children from other faith communities to share their traditions and beliefs.
- Observe Children's Sabbath with people from other faith communities.
- Collaborate with other congregations for vacation Bible school and other ministries of the church.

## **Ministries Related to Children's Ministries**

Children's ministry does not stand alone in the formation of children, but with a variety of ministries dedicated to making disciples of Jesus Christ. It is important to work together so that all children can know the breadth and depth of what it means to be a disciple for life.

### **Camping Ministries**

Every annual conference provides a variety of camping opportunities for children. Camping ministry invites children to seek God and to grow spiritually. Camping is an opportunity for Christian love in action. Children have the opportunity to become friends through living together, sharing the responsibilities of a community, embarking on new adventures, and reflecting on the meaning of life. All of this occurs in the midst of nature, which can greatly enhance awareness of and love for God. The lessons learned can be applied to inspire and lead others when children return to their communities of faith and society at large. The camp experience serves as a reminder for children and leaders that we are all God's representatives, meant to care for the whole community of creation—people and the natural world.

### **Youth Ministries**

Youth ministry is the next step for the children in your congregation. This ministry seeks to form relationships and connections for youth, giving them the opportunity to feel

a part of something bigger than themselves. Youth are challenged to develop a healthy and authentic relationship with God, peers, and adults through worship, activities, study, and mission opportunities. At this stage, young people have an opportunity to lead while being trained and equipped for leadership. Like children's ministry, youth ministry includes the entire family. Read *Guidelines: Ministries with Young People* to learn more.

### **Family Ministries**

Family ministry is identifying and enabling all to see Christ-like relationship qualities among those who call one another family, equipping households to be centers of faith formation, sacred places where people experience and respond to God's grace and love. By providing households tools, resources, and opportunities to grow and live out their faith through holy work that includes, but is not limited to, practicing spiritual disciplines together and reaching out through mission and service, your ministry will help families experience, witness, and share the light of Christ. Family ministry has a strong impact on the process of making disciples as the children's ministry goes beyond the church and community into the home. Read *Guidelines: Family Ministries* to learn more.

### **Scouting Ministries**

Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, Big Brothers Big Sisters (Amachi Partnership), Camp Fire USA, and 4-H offer opportunities to minister to young people. They each encompass Christian teachings and long-standing connection with local congregations. The church is endowed with certain responsibilities that allow scouting and civic youth-serving programs to become a ministry, and this differentiates scouting ministries from a civic or community-based club. Read *Guidelines: Scouting and Civic Youth-Serving Ministry* to learn more.

### **Weekday Ministries**

John Wesley set the example for us as Methodists as he began health clinics and schools for children to learn to read, and he encouraged pastors to meet with the children regularly. His call to meet the needs of people where they are stands as a marker for us today. Using our buildings—that otherwise might sit empty six days a week—to meet the physical, mental, and emotional needs of children and their families clearly meets Wesley's expectations.

### **Preschool Ministry**

Weekday preschools are a ministry of the church and, as such, should be treated as any other ministry of the church. Make every effort to work with the preschool director and staff to meet the needs of the children served in this ministry. Remember that this may be the only contact that the children have to a faith community. "Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministries in United Methodist Congregations" is available through the children's ministry area of the Discipleship Ministries website. Weekday preschool ministries are diverse, and they serve many purposes.

**Daycare:** A ministry program for infants, toddlers, and pre-elementary children, daycare may begin quite early in the morning and continue late into the evening to accommodate the work schedules of parents. Daycare provides nurture, care, and meals and offers developmentally appropriate activities in a safe atmosphere of love and concern for each child.

**Preschool/Nursery School.** A half-day to all-day ministry program for children up to five years old, preschool offers developmentally sound curriculum that provides children with experiences and activities that prepare them for kindergarten. Children are taught and nurtured in a safe atmosphere of love and concern.

**Kindergarten.** A half-day to all-day ministry program for children five years of age, kindergarten offers developmentally sound curriculum that provides children with the readiness skills they need to prepare for the first grade.

**Parents' Day/Night Out Program.** This half-day, all-day, or evening ministry program of care and activities for children allows parents some time away.

**Play Day.** A regular or occasional day for young children to gather with their parents for play, this is a time for parents to interact while their children play safely in the church nursery, on the church playground, or at a park.

**Care for Special Needs Children.** These are ministry programs for children recovering from physical or emotional trauma or abuse, children with disabilities, children for whom English is a second language, or children who have other special needs. This type of ministry program provides a service that may otherwise be unavailable in the community.

## **After-School Ministry**

**Before- and After-School Care** is a ministry that provides a safe and enriching atmosphere for elementary school children who otherwise would be without supervision before and after school. Before- and after-school care may be extended to a full-time program during the summer or on school holidays to accommodate the needs of working parents. Activities may include educational tutoring, academic enrichment, music lessons, service projects, faith enrichment, and programs addressing special topics.

**Small Groups** provide an opportunity for children to share their love of God and neighbor, to be in fellowship, to learn together, and to engage in Bible study. These groups meet weekly and provide opportunities for children to learn and have fun, while deepening their relationship with God and peers. These groups frequently provide preparation for entry into the church's youth group.

**Call Ministry to "Latchkey" Children** is a program in which children can call, be called, or communicate via webcam when they are alone at home. This allows children to connect with safe and caring adults.

**Non-Church Programs** are welcome. The church's doors are open to many programs. The Boy Scouts of America, The Girl Scouts, 4-H, and other groups often use the church facility for meetings and activities. These programs are important in the lives of many young people, and The United Methodist Church welcomes them. Children's ministry leaders should make sure that these groups adhere to the policies of the church, including Safe Sanctuaries®.

# What Every Child Should Experience

**T**he proverb, “Train children in the way they should go, / when they grow old, they won’t depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6), shares the importance of training children; but over years, decades, and centuries, we have come to recognize that there are some essentials that children growing up in Christian community should know.

## A Scope and Sequence

Based on Scripture, our Wesleyan heritage, our experiences in faith development, and a reasonable look at our call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the children’s ministries staff of Discipleship Ministries developed and updated “What Every Child Should Experience: A Guide for Teachers and Leaders in United Methodist Congregations.” This guide outlines a scope and sequence in all of the areas of faith development of children, birth through age 11. It is available as a free download on the Discipleship Ministries website.

What follows are some of the basics that a children’s ministry program should offer.

### All Children

- love and acceptance as children of God
- clean and safe rooms, equipment, furniture, and toys that fit their size, interests, and abilities
- trained and caring teachers
- food, clothing, and shelter, as needed
- a welcoming place in worship, fellowship events, and other events where the congregation comes together
- opportunities for vibrant faith development
- childcare when their parents are involved in church programs

### Infants and Toddlers

- nurture
- songs and prayers of our faith
- creative activities based on biblical stories
- inclusion in corporate worship services of the congregation

## **Preschool Children**

- music experiences through Sunday school and a children's choir
- opportunities to be involved in the stewardship program of the church
- adult friends with whom they feel comfortable
- mission studies and opportunities for involvement in mission projects
- encouragement and support when they bring friends to church
- inclusion in corporate worship services of the congregation
- games, music, and creative activities

## **Children in the Elementary Grades**

- discipleship learning opportunities
- opportunities for mission studies that include projects that address justice issues
- opportunities to be involved in the stewardship program of the church
- vacation Bible school and special summer programs
- choir and other music opportunities
- opportunities to serve in worship through litanies, prayers, Scripture reading, ushering, and serving as acolytes
- concurrent, appropriate programs when parents are involved in adult church programs
- encouragement to bring friends to church activities
- small groups for special concerns such as divorce of parents, death or other significant loss, and serious illness of a sibling
- opportunities for intergenerational relationships

## **Parents of Children**

- opportunities for continuing and vibrant faith development
- parenting classes
- food, clothing, shelter, as needed
- assurance of a safe place for their children
- small groups for special concerns such as loss of a child or spouse, child abuse, substance abuse, or divorce
- support from the pastor, professional educator, and church staff
- opportunities to learn about baptism, Communion, and worship
- information about what their children are studying
- resources to support them as their child's first teachers
- information about community issues that affect children and the role of the church in the community

## **Find Support and Guidance**

One of the blessings of The United Methodist Church is connection. No one is alone in ministry, thanks to the structure of the church. Support and guidance can be found in

many places. A contact person who works with the annual conference will support your ministry by offering specific training and directing you to helpful resources. Discipleship Ministries will support your ministry by developing resources, providing training for teachers and leaders, researching best practices, and helping you connect to the people and resources that you need in your church setting. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry offers certification in children's ministry for those who are called into this ministry. The General Board of Global Ministries responds to the needs of the most vulnerable of society—our children. The General Board of Church and Society advocates for the rights of children. All these groups work to support children's ministries in the local church as you make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Remember, you are in ministry with parents, guardians, grandparents, caregivers, and even ancestors who care for and about children. You are in ministry with:

- members of the congregation who are concerned with creating and maintaining a vital church community,
- people in the community who care about the healthy development of children,
- the pastor and church leaders who are responsible for the faith development of all people,
- people within the United Methodist connection who are there to support your ministry,
- a story that has sustained the Christian community for thousands of years.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

# Resources

Items marked as Discipleship Ministries are available at [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org) or at [www.MinistryGuidelines.org](http://www.MinistryGuidelines.org).

## Basic Understanding of Ministry with Children

*Child Care and the Church* (Discipleship Ministries). Official document of The United Methodist Church outlining responsibilities in initiating, encouraging, and participating in the highest quality of childcare.

*The Children's Minister* by Rita B. Hays (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN 9780881775273. Helps those in ministry with children connect with the lives and pastoral needs of children.

*Ministry with Children District Training Model* (Discipleship Ministries or your annual conference office). Web-based training that covers the basics of the importance of ministry with children, including developmental, safety, and theological issues.

## Weekday Ministries

*Afterschool Alliance* ([www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)). Works to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs.

"Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs in United Methodist Churches" (pdf) by Gail Callis, Lynne Paredes, and Melanie C. Gordon (Discipleship Ministries). Lays out the basic guidelines for administrating an effective weekday preschool ministry in United Methodist churches.

*United Methodist Association of Preschools-Florida* ([www.umapfl.com](http://www.umapfl.com)). Information and support in the area of accreditation for weekday preschool ministry nationally.

## Safe Sanctuaries®: Keeping Children Safe

*Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN: 9780881775433. Practical guidance is provided in developing and implementing a substantive, holistic action plan of abuse prevention.

Safe Sanctuaries® (Discipleship Ministries). An online guide to contacts, training, resources, laws, and forms to help congregations make a safe place for children.

## **Formational Studies and Lessons for Children**

Godly Play ([www.godlyplayfoundation.org](http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org)). Teaches children as young as three the art of using religious language.

Worship with Children (Discipleship Ministries). Online resources that support including children in worship and the life of the congregation.

## **Newsletters and Resource Information**

*inFORMATION* on Ministry with Children (Discipleship Ministries). Addresses children's issues in free downloads for leaders in ministry with children

*UMC Ministry with Children* blog (<http://ministrywithchildren.com>). Support, resources, and connections for those engaged in ministry for children, birth to eleven.

## **Faith Development and Formation**

"What Every Child Should Experience: A Guide for Leaders and Teachers in United Methodist Congregations" by Melanie C. Gordon (Discipleship Ministries). Free, comprehensive scope and sequence supports teachers and leaders in addressing the scriptural, developmental, and formational needs of children.

## **Training Opportunities**

Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church offers resources, training, and support for leaders engaged in ministry with children. (1-877-899-2780; <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

UM Quadrennial Conference on Ministry with Children (Discipleship Ministries). National conference that offers workshops, networking, training, and certification classes for those engaged in ministry with children.

Monthly Web-Based Training (Discipleship Ministries, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/webinars>). Connects leaders and teachers engaged in ministry with children with the opportunity to learn new skills and address timely issues with leaders in specific areas that concern faith formation of children.

## **Resource Agencies and Organizations**

Children's Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)). Non-profit agency that advocates for the rights of children in the United States, sponsoring Freedom Schools for Youth and Children's Sabbath for Children.

Christians Engaged in Faith Formation ([www.cefumc.org](http://www.cefumc.org)). Professional affiliate organization for those leading Christian Education ministries in congregations; national organization with chapters in annual conferences.

## Mission Opportunities for Children

The United Methodist Children's Fund for Christian Mission (Discipleship Ministries). Teaches children about mission work and allows them to contribute to projects that help other children.

United Methodist Committee on Relief ([www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org)). Provides supply kits and other assistance during times of crisis.

## Magazines for Children and Families

*The Little Christian Magazine*. Contains faith-based stories meant to be read to or with young children.

*Pockets Magazine* (<http://pockets.upperroom.org/>). Devotional magazine that helps children, ages six through eleven, learn more about loving God and neighbor.

## General Church Resources

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016 (Nashville: The United Methodist Church).

*Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation 2017–2020* ([www.Cokesbury.com](http://www.Cokesbury.com)).

*United Methodist Program Calendar* ([www.umcom.org/](http://www.umcom.org/)).

## UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

General Board of Church and Society, [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org), 202-488-5600; Service Center, 1-800-967-0880

General Board of Discipleship (d/b/a Discipleship Ministries), [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org), 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>, 1-800-972-0433; The Upper Room, [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org), 1-800-972-0433; email: [info@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:info@umcdiscipleship.org).

General Board of Global Ministries, [www.umcmmission.org](http://www.umcmmission.org), 1-800-862-4246 or 212-870-3600; email: [info@umcmmission.org](mailto:info@umcmmission.org)

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, [www.gbhem.org](http://www.gbhem.org), 615-340-7400

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, [www.gbophb.org](http://www.gbophb.org), 847-869-4550

General Commission on Archives and History, [www.gcah.org](http://www.gcah.org), 973-408-3189

General Commission on Religion & Race, [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org), 202-547-2271; email: [info@gcorr.org](mailto:info@gcorr.org)

General Commission on the Status & Role of Women, [www.gcsr.org](http://www.gcsr.org), 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, [www.gcum.org](http://www.gcum.org), 615-340-7145

General Council on Finance and Administration, [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org), 866-367-4232 or 615-329-3393

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting (General Commission on United Methodist Men), [www.gcumm.org](http://www.gcumm.org), 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, [www.umph.org](http://www.umph.org), 615-749-6000; Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; Cokesbury, [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com), 1-800-672-1789

United Methodist Communications, [www.umcom.org](http://www.umcom.org), 615-742-5400; EcuFilm, 1-888-346-3862; InfoServ, email: [infoserv@umcom.org](mailto:infoserv@umcom.org); *Interpreter Magazine*, [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org), 615-742-5441

United Methodist Women, [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org); 212-870-3900

**For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.**