



USER'S GUIDE

TO THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Toolkit

View the toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits



Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
Ministries**

crcna.org/FaithFormation

“LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME
TO ME, AND DO NOT HINDER THEM,
FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE”

—MATTHEW 19:14





The brochure you're holding is a user's guide to our online Children's Ministry toolkit.

The toolkit contains dozens of informative and practical ideas for strengthening your ministry with children. And many of these ideas are from Christian Reformed churches like yours!

Before you read further, open the toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

What's in This Toolkit

In this toolkit you'll find all sorts of resources, including practical ideas, thought-provoking articles, resource lists, ministry tools, and more. Specifically, you'll find help for

- * understanding how faith is formed in kids.
- * providing a welcoming environment.
- * choosing your curriculum.
- * calling, encouraging, and equipping leaders.
- * connecting with families.
- * and more!

About Our Toolkits

The Children's Ministry toolkit is one of several topical toolkits created and designed by the Faith Formation Ministries team in collaboration with CRC church leaders *for* CRC church leaders. Our toolkit resources are gathered from real-life church practices, from online sources, and from published materials.

As new tools become available, we'll add them to the online toolkit. If there's a tool you need but can't find, or if you have an idea to contribute, let us know! You can contact us at faithformation@crcna.org.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP! For assistance with faith formation challenges in your church, contact our Children's Ministry Catalyzer or one of our Regional Catalyzers at crcna.org/FaithFormation/coaching.



Download this quote and image to share with your leaders and volunteers at
crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits/childquote.pdf



Visit the Children's Ministry toolkit at
crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

HEARING GOD'S CALL IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

BY KAREN DEBOER

When I was a kid, Sunday school was everything its name implied. After taking attendance and listening to us recite memorized Bible verses, our teachers would read a Bible story, write words on a chalkboard while we filled in the blanks on our take-home papers, lead us in singing “Jesus Loves Me” and “The B-I-B-L-E,” and pray for us. If we finished early, we could play a game together, such as “Hangman.”

Looking back now, I'm unable to recall the Bible verses I quickly “memorized” in the car on the way to church. And I can't say for sure which teachers told what stories. **But I remember feeling sure that I belonged to God and to God's family.** The teachers who told me so welcomed me each week by name and continued to speak with and encourage me long after their Sunday school teaching days had ended.

Today's children's ministry programs are held in well-equipped rooms where learners play, sing, create, act, and wonder their way into God's story. Fill-in-the-blank activities are now rare, songs have actions, and prayers are like popcorn, with every person jumping in to add words of thanks, praise, or supplication to God.



The methodology has (thankfully) changed, but, like God's story, the focus of ministry geared specifically to children remains the same: "We want to help children build a faith that has three dimensions, a faith that affects their head, their heart, and their spirit. We want our children to know God and love God, and we want God to be an important part of the fabric of their lives" (*Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*, Robert J. Keeley [Baker Books, 2008], p. 14.)

Here's what that kind of faith nurture looked like one Sunday in Deb Flaherty's third-grade class at Talbot Street CRC in London, Ontario:

"We were learning about Deborah and Jael, the defeat of the armies of Sisera, and how God used these two women to achieve his purposes. It's a difficult lesson to teach in some ways—potentially full of side-trips into politics, gender dynamics, and gore. However, the *Dwell* curriculum teaching points offered clear guidelines

on how the lesson could be presented to show that this is part of God's story and that the kids too are part of this bigger story God is creating in them.

"We led into the lesson by talking about the various gifts/jobs God has given people—and for what purpose. I discovered the impact this approach was having when, near the end of the lesson, one eight-year-old looked me full in the face and asked, "What if God is calling *me*?"

Children's ministry leaders are faith activators. They form faith-nurturing relationships while providing space for children to experience God as they hear and respond to God's story in ways that are specifically geared to their ages and developmental stages.

How might God be calling *you*?

It's a big job. It's an important job. Because children's ministry matters.

Karen DeBoer works for Faith Formation Ministries and volunteers in children's ministry. She never left Sunday school.

A LOOK INSIDE THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TOOLKIT

Children's ministry leaders have a big job to do, but our toolkit can help. Inside the Children's Ministry toolkit you'll find resources for . . .

1 Forming Faith in Children

This section addresses how to help children meet God, grow in faith, and respond to God's story in ways that are specifically geared to their ages and developmental stages.

2 Providing a Welcoming Environment

No matter where your children's ministry is housed, this section provides tips for ensuring

that the environment is welcoming, inviting, inclusive, and safe for all.

3 Choosing Curriculum

Choosing curriculum to nurture a deep and wide faith in children is an important and time-consuming task. This section provides an overview of how to choose a curriculum that is theologically and pedagogically sound and fits with your specific context.

4 Calling, Encouraging, and Equipping Leaders

Calling people to ministry is a process. Equipping people for ministry requires intentionality. In this section you'll find the support and resources you'll need to do both of those things well.

5 Connecting with Families

This section includes support for children's ministry leaders who want to connect with families and provides faith formation tools to share with parents and caregivers.

Eager for more? Visit the Children's Ministry toolkit online at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

DEAR TEACHER

BY JESSIE SCHUT

Dear Teacher,

My mom tells me I'm going to Sunday school again this year. That's cool. Here's what I hope will happen:

- * I hope you'll love me like nobody's business. You don't have to be the greatest singer or storyteller or craft expert ever, but you do have to love me lots. I hear that's what Jesus did.
 - * I hope you show me that Jesus is living in your heart and that he's changed your life—and I hope you want to tell me about it.
 - * I hope you know how to joke around a little. My mom says that laughter is the shortest distance between two people. When we laugh together, I feel good—and I feel good about being in Sunday school.
 - * I hope you can go with the flow. Once my friend came to Sunday school so sad because his grandma had just died. That day we just talked about heaven and made paper flowers to put on her grave. We all felt better afterward.
 - * I hope you'll expect the best from me. Even if I sometimes complain and whine, I'll be pleased that you think I can grow to be the best I can possibly be.
- * I hope you'll understand where I'm coming from—please try to look at the world from a kid's point of view. And, remember, I don't have all the skills grown-ups have.
 - * I hope we get to move around and do cool things, instead of always sitting and listening. Moving, talking, looking, drawing—that's what helps me learn!
 - * I hope you don't think my faith is not as good as your faith. I know I've got lots to learn because I'm just starting out on this faith journey thing. But Jesus said grown-ups should have faith like a kid's, and that must mean something.

There's more, but I bet you get the idea. Deep down, I'm really glad you want to help me learn more about God and more about me. Thanks for being here . . . hope you learn something too!

Love,

Your “kid” for the year!

Jessie Schut is the author of *Dwelling: Helping Kids Find a Place in God's Story* (Faith Alive; faithaliveresources.org).

This article is adapted from pages 19-20 of *Dwelling*.

10 WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

- 1 Know the goal.** Children's ministry is one part of a congregational faith formation plan. How does your part fit into the whole? (Need a plan? Check out the Building Blocks of Faith toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.)
- 2 Cast a vision.** Everyone in your congregation should know how faith is nurtured through your ministry. One idea: share the article on pages 4-5 of this *User's Guide*.
- 3 Grow your team.** Extending a personal and task-specific call to people is more effective than a general plea for volunteers. Find calling ideas in the Children's Ministry toolkit.
- 4 Provide excellent training.** Equip children's ministry leaders through workshops, webinars, and resource recommendations.
- 5 Train yourself too.** Attend webinars, read resources, and connect with others in similar ministry positions. You'll find resource links in the toolkit.
- 6 Tell God's story.** Assess the curriculum you use to make sure God's story, not virtues or heroes, is the focus. Get help with the *Ten Question Tool for Choosing Children's Ministry Curriculum* in the Children's Ministry toolkit.
- 7 Make room for wonder.** Open-ended "I wonder if/how/why/what . . ." questions help kids put themselves into the story and invite kids to dwell in the mystery of God. Find out how in the Children's Ministry toolkit.
- 8 Practice hospitality.** Welcome children of all abilities and backgrounds. Learn how to meet their unique needs. Show them and tell them that they belong in God's family.
- 9 Build a bridge to families.** Serve as a faith formation resource to the families in your church. Regularly share the very best ideas and tips for connecting with each other and with God.
- 10 Make time for faith storytelling.** Invite adults and teens to share stories of how they've seen God at work. For more, visit the Faith Storytelling toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

Learn More in Our Online Children's Ministry Toolkit

The Children's Ministry toolkit is an online resource collection designed to help children's ministry coordinators build a strong program that helps children grow in faith. You can access this toolkit and others at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

If you'd like someone to partner with you in deepening your church's faith formation practices for children, our Children's Ministry Catalyzer and Regional Catalyzers provide coaching and encouragement free of charge to Christian Reformed churches. Learn more at crcna.org/FaithFormation/coaching.

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