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Guidance in Children's Work (June 1963)

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A never increasing plea heard from Assemblies and Churches is "How can we keep our Teenagers interested in things spiritual?" Many gatherings of the Lord's people find that upon reaching a certain age, their young people show a distinct disinterest in the life of the local assembly and in some instances endeavour to break with the fellowship. How can this problem be overcome? Is it possible in this day and age to not only hold them but even to attract new young people? There is no master formula that will give guaranteed results, but we would like to bring to your attention, briefly, how one large Eastern Assembly has successfully coped with this problem.

Bethany Chapel, Yonkers, N.Y., has long been known as the assembly with a heart for Youth. Visitors are amazed at the large percentage of young people present at all meetings. Young People are trained and encouraged to exercise their God-given and varied talents at various meetings. A query of one of the Adult Youth Directors brought forth the following: "Undertaking a work with youth is certainly not an easy task. There are times when your Christian patience will be taxed to the limit, and yet it is a most satisfying and rewarding work. Of course, not everyone is suited to lead Young People, and some very necessary and essential prerequisites are needed to create a healthy, spiritual state in a youth group. One feels that the prime need for an adult blessed with leadership, is a sincere love for youth. You

will manifest it in your dealings with them and they will know instinctively whether it's real or not. To desire to see them won to Christ and grow in grace and knowledge of spiritual values, is another required condition to leadership. The Youth Director must also have a knowledge of the Word and some measure of ability to lead and teach others. Patience and understanding of the young mind is needed for youth does not reason or think as an adult. We can't measure youth by the yardstick of our own age. When minds and hearts are co-ordinated between the leader and youth, both will know it. All will know that you as the leader under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, are the one who will make the decisions that will benefit your group most.

Too few adults realize that many young people are capable and do make their mark in life during teenage. Hitler recognized the value of young people, so did Lenin, and modern dictators like Castro. Within youth lies great potential to be exploited either for good or for evil. The devil recognizes this and will take full advantage of it if we give him half a chance. But God also recognizes it! In fact, if we will place ourselves completely at His disposal and allow Him to guide and develop this potential, our lives can be a tremendous influence for good.

Several years ago, the elder brethren of Bethany Chapel concluded that God's testimony in Yonkers, New York, area could only thrive and continue by training and encouraging the young people to show Christian leadership and love for Christ through self action. Under the guidance of brother Donald R. Parker, young men of the Assembly developed their God-given gifts that were

dormant. Intensive and thorough Bible studies were undertaken; platform manners, song leading and leading in prayer, are a few of the subjects that were taught by well-qualified individuals.

This devotion to leadership training richly paid off, for today. Bethany Chapel has an excellent group of young men leading in all services. They in turn, are training the young folk in their various youth groups. A brief look at the various groups may be an aid and a stimulus to others to set up similar groups. We would point out that the surrounding chapel population area is by actual physical census, 90 to 95% of other than the Protestant Faith. Thus, under a formidable handicap, but with a vision to see boys and girls won to the Lord Jesus Christ, there was organized a Friday Night Young Club, entitled "The Grenadiers."

From the very start, many young people came with their friends. Initially, each program varied considerably from week to week in order to ascertain what format would be best for the group as a whole. Through the whole hearted co-operation of 35 adults, who served as teachers, ten different Craft classes were set up and the children chose the type of class they wished to enter. With the viewpoint that the best is none too good for the Lord's work, each feature of Grenadiers offers only the finest obtainable. The Lord has blessed Bethany Chapel with ten (10) first rate children's speakers. Others are able Quiz leaders and song-leaders. Each has gladly contributed his talents to the work among the boys and girls so that it would be hard to determine what feature of the 11/2 hour program appeals most. A minimum age of eight years was set from the outset for acceptance into the Grenadiers, as handling of youngsters below

this age presented too many problems. Each year has found the work growing both numerically and spiritually. An average of 32 boys and girls find the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour each season. Until a recent building expansion was undertaken, room was at a premium and attendance had to be limited.

The Grenadiers season is always brought to a conclusion in early May with an outdoor picnic. A variety of games, mouthwatering food and a message from God's Word, ably presented by one of the youth leaders, entice all to attend.

"The Teen-A-Diers"

An outgrowth of the Grenadiers was Teen-a-Diers, those in the 13 to 18 age group, who "graduated" from the younger organization. Under the leadership of one of the men who had a heart for the spiritual needs of these older youths, this new group was founded, assisted by three brethren. Their programs vary also from time to time. To mention just a few of their activities: Homoletics; hymn and chorus analization; Emmaus Bible School courses; a session entitled "Youth wants to Know" has proved particularly popular. Everyone freely participates in talking about the current problems encountered by young people today in relation to Chrstian living. Thought-provoking questions are interjected by the leaders during the rare moments of silence.

The many extra curricular activities are a source of encouragement and delight to the Teen-a-Diers. A Saturday might find them attending a Youth rally anywhere from the immediate New York Metropolitan area to as far afield as Boston or Chicago. How blessed

it is to have leaders who are willing to give unstinted help and encouragement to Teenagers!

Guidance in Children's Work (Part 2) (July 1963)

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It is indeed an exciting and thrilling experience to young people when they are officially entitled to join the High School Youth Group. This Group is open to all who are enrolled in the 9th through 12th grades in School. Their meetings are held every Sunday afternoon from 5:30 to 6:45 in the home of one of the Youth Directors. The home is purposely used as unsaved young people will readily go to a home, whereas they might hesitate or refuse to enter a Chapel.

Besides the hearty singing, there is always something exciting featured at each meeting. The finest of youth speakers; a Christian motion picture; a thought-provoking Forum or question and answer period, etc, are always in store. Supper is provided with the food courses determined in the previous week's meeting and supplied by the young people. Many picnics, youth retreats and miscellaneous activities, may be entered into during the entire year. Most of the young people attend the Sunday Night Chapel Meeting after their afternoon meeting, and their presence is appreciated through help they render by audience and service contributions.

The College Youth Group

Ample provision for the spiritual needs of young people of College age and in their twenties, has been made. They, like the High Schoolers, meet at the same time in

the home of another Youth Director. This Group, though meeting only for the past three years, has “outgrown” the home where meetings are held. The Youth Director is now looking for a home of larger proportions. The main attraction of the meetings for College Youth has unquestionably been the enthusiastic reception to studying the deeper things of the Bible; round table forums; the problems and perplexities that confront their generation, etc. The Sunday night food provisions are handled on a volunteer basis.

Like the High School group, the College Age young people have their separate “outside” activities, such as week-end retreats, outings, etc.

The Spring Children’s Series

An old, but firmly established fixture in the life of Bethany Chapel is a two week series of meetings for children held annually during the Easter Season. Much publicity and work is expended to encourage the youngsters to not only attend themselves but to bring their unsaved friends. The High School Youth Group contributes by combining a neighbourhood tract distribution with announcements of the Children’s series. Incentives, such as a punched attendance card serve as a stimulus for the children to achieve various prizes offered for each of the two weeks.

Only experienced and enthusiastic leaders are used for the singing, contest, and other phases of the programs. Usually an outstanding Children’s speaker (This year it will be brother W. B. Mackie of Detroit) presents the Word, though at times, the Youth Directors of the Chapel will undertake the entire series of meetings. The value of these meetings cannot be too highly praised for they

have contributed immeasurably to the spiritual tone of the Assembly. Though intended primarily for youth, many adults are urged and do attend these most interesting meetings.

The Sunday School

A strong and stable Sunday School certainly is a prerequisite to any children's work worthy of the name. The ultimate aim is that all other Youth groups might eventually channel the children to the place where they can be established and grow in their Christian faith. Here an intimate and individual understanding is reached between the pupil and teacher. Through co-ordinated effort on the part of each Youth Group leader, many children have found the Sunday School to be a wonderfully adventurous and new part of their lives. The use of audio-visuals both for the entire Sunday School as well as individual classes, has proved a boon to both enthusiasm and attendance response. Frequent variations of audio-visuals have been advantageous so that the children do not become tired of the same thing.

A well-equipped, modern nursery adaquately supervised is always available to parents with very young children who wish to attend services. The Primary children have their own individual room and meeting. Grade School children occupy the main Sunday School auditorium with their own song-leader and all of the usual activities. The High Schoolers meet in a modern, large sound-proof room in another section of the building and also have their own Sunday School program.

Daily Vacation Bible School

Daily Vacation Bible School is the Pied Piper of vacation time for the alert Christian assembly today. It not only attracts children with an appeal to come to a “circus” atmosphere, but it is clearly one of the most effective Bible teaching arms of the assembly because of the concentrated instruction it provides. It makes children more interested and better students in Sunday school. They do better assignments and memorize with zeal. VBS can carry over into the pupils’ daily life as well, and many a parent has noted changes in the lives of their children which have resulted in the parent’s being attracted to the Gospel. Many a family has been attracted to Gospel Chapels because of favourable first impressions gained at VBS and, thus, how wise it is that we Christians give our utmost support to this vital undertaking for the Lord.

Many assemblies “freeze” at the thoughts of undertaking a DVBS and thus this vital work never gets underway. The usual excuses are “We can’t get teachers.” “There are too many conflicting activities.” “It’s too expensive,.” Thank the Lord for those assemblies who try anyway (and usually always succeed). May we suggest some ideas that may be put to profitable use.

Build a large file of prospects during the year. Your Sunday School and Youth Groups will provide a prime nucleas. Enroll your teachers well in advance (several months if possible). Have a get-together meeting where an outline of the School program may be presented and discussed. Serve refreshments. As a leader show vital enthusiasm for your DVBS. You’ll see that your

enthusiasm can and will be contagious. When shall you hold the school? Conditions in various localities vary, but with the co-operation of the teachers you can arrive at a suitable date. Some assemblies find that it is best to hold their DVBS before the summer slump sets in and before the children leave on vacations. Others find the best time is at the end of the summer when vacations are mostly out of the way and teachers feel more inclined to take on VBS responsibilities. If teachers cannot be found for day-time school, why not undertake a Twilight DVBS when adequate teachers and transportation are available? This has proved highly successful in some localities. Provide every teacher with a young person as a helper for taking care of such things as records, recreation, and handwork. A Coffee break is a very welcome treat to teachers.

A pre-registration day can be a time saver. On this special day pupils can come and fill out their record cards. Other special features for this day could be refreshments, special films and slides of last year's school, singing, and games. Teach the DVBS theme song; distribute special promotional materials.

Have vibrant, enthusiastic training sessions for the teachers, using the free audio-visual training kits now available on the market.

We have just heard of some Christians who used forethought to lighten the refreshment problem. The housewives made several hundred cookies, carefully wrapped them in foil and put them in cannisters. These are then placed in freezers and are available for instant use when DVBS finally takes place.

We therefore believe that with some effort and much prayer, every assembly of Christians can successfully carry on a DVBS to the glory of God.