



A CHILD-FRIENDLY CHURCH

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I just browsed through the Internet and discovered that the term “child friendly” is used to describe a multitude of things. There are child-friendly advertisements, board games, cruises, dogs, furniture, jokes, movies, nail polish, paint, recipes, scary stories, websites, vacations, and more! The “child friendly” label implies that these products and services are designed with the child in mind. They were created to protect, engage, educate, entertain, and/or serve children.

So what does it mean to be a “child friendly” church? Does a child friendly church serve children by providing necessary resources for their care and ministry? Does a child friendly church seek to know and address the needs of every child? Does a child friendly church provide a safe environment for children--screened and trained workers, a secure environment with clean, safe facilities and equipment?

Yes, these are outward indicators of a child friendly church. But these and other child friendly actions are sustained by a set of foundational beliefs regarding children and families. These beliefs guide vision, values, decision-making, and programming. These beliefs lay a foundation that allows the local church to welcome and nurture children.

Child friendly churches welcome children. Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me;” Mark 9:37. Welcoming children is more than greeting them with smiles or calling out their names. A church that welcomes children embraces ALL children regardless of race, economic status, physical or mental ability, or family history. Every child is known and accepted as he is and for who he is.

Child friendly churches embrace the value children bring to the kingdom of God and the local church. They do not accept cultural, social, political or religious values of children. They embrace what God says about children in His Word. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” Matthew 18:1-3. Because they understand the value God has placed on children in His Word child friendly churches fully accept responsibility for evangelizing lost children and equipping children for the good works God intends for them to do. A child friendly church is committed to consistently praying focused prayers for children. A child friendly church assures that children are involved in significant relationships with adults in the congregation--relationships that affirm, teach, mentor, and model. Finally a

child-friendly church provides programming and ministry that equips children for lifelong faith.

Child friendly churches engage children. The church provides programs and events that allow children to build lifelong, intimate relationships with other children and their families. Children are participants rather than observers in the rituals and sacraments of the church. These are programmed in such a way that children do not simply mimic the actions of adults. Through good teaching children participate and gain understanding as they participate. Children's gifts and abilities are acknowledged, strengthened and used. Most importantly, children are not only equipped to accomplish the mission of the church, they are on mission NOW. They are doing the works of ministry--witnessing, giving, interceding, worshipping--in their homes, schools, communities, and in their church.

Could your local church be labeled "child friendly"? What foundational beliefs regarding children are embraced by the leadership and congregation? What evidence can you give to verify that your church welcomes, values, and engages children? If your answer to any of these questions is "no" or "none", "perhaps" or "some", read through the articles in this issue. You will discover ways your congregation can develop a biblically correct value of children and implement strategies that will make your church a place where kids are welcomed, discipled, and engaged in ministry.