

Kids with Power

Don't Underestimate Children's Global Impact

by Ellen Livingood

Stop! Before you skip over this issue of Postings because you think that kids' ministry is "not your thing," take time to read these next few paragraphs.

Question: If you could select just one person to join you in praying for global Kingdom advance, would you choose an adult or a child?

Most of us would automatically recruit the adult prayer partner, wouldn't we? Why? Because we assume adults have more spiritual power since they have more clout in the physical world. Oh, and they are more knowledgeable and sophisticated in their praying, and those things are important, right?

Then why did Jesus tell adults to come with the faith of little children? If the power of prayer lies in God not us, and the faith that unlocks that power is illustrated by children, then perhaps we all better reconsider our priorities. Seriously.

Ruth Hubbard, senior vice president of Wycliffe Bible Translators says, "Because God is building up the faith of children, He often answers their prayers beyond the way that we as adults see Him answer."

Look around *your* church or agency. What is the evidence that you believe the prayers of children can engage God's power to change the world?

When Kids Pray

Amazing things happen when you unleash children's prayer potential. Irma Chon is children/youth and mission pastor at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, a congregation of 160 in Hilliard, OH. A transformation started as God began to reveal to Irma His compassion for lost children around the world—those who did not know their Abba Father, those suffering

from poverty and war. As her heart was broken by what breaks God's heart, she came to understand that there is no one better to pray about these issues than children themselves.

"God showed me that if we call the children together and show them the world as He sees it," Irma says, "they will become some of the most passionate prayer warriors for God's kingdom purposes. God has created them to be as compassionate as He is compassionate."

Listening to God's Heart

In response to what God was showing her, Irma started a Kids' Prayer Club for those in grades 1-6 which meets for a little more than an hour once a week. The time begins with reading God's Word. They call it "Time with Abba," and the children are encouraged to do the same daily at home. Each child is given a journal with selected Bible readings. Leaders explain what it means to hear God's voice when they read Scripture and to pray. They are encouraged to journal what they hear God say is on His heart.

Praying over the World

After reading God's Word, the group spends time praying. The boys and girls love their huge map of the world that covers the floor of their small auditorium. The children declare who God is over the nations. Sometimes they have a very specific prayer focus like hunger, and Irma helps them identify places where children are suffering in this way.

One of the kids' favorite things is to be able to "go anywhere in the world" to pray. For instance, they have a special burden for North Korea, so they often head to the North Korea area of the map to pray.

Sometimes they prayer-walk around the world on their floor map. Other times they sit on a certain country with a Bible and just pray John 3:16 for that nation. Or leaders may give them little flashlights, and they shine their light over that nation



Children pray over New York City (above) and intercede for the nation with Mrs. Bush (right).



praying things like, “Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world,’ so we pray that your light will come to Turkey and to North Korea.”

Keeping a Record of Requests

Another aspect of the children’s praying involves journaling in blank books, each designated for a different location. For example, they have one presidential journal, one for missionaries in Peru they know well, and one for North Korea. Another volume is their “Praise-for-Jesus” journal. These journals are often laying out, and children can write in them the prayers that God is giving them.



Hilliard children at the UN (above) and praying with an ambassador (right).

Occasionally the journals are sent off to the designated missionary so that they can read the children’s prayers. Then they write back to report how God is responding. The children don’t know where the journal for North Korea will ever go, but they keep writing and keep praying!

“It is so exciting to see their compassion grow,” Irma says. “They love to know about the nations and about the world. There are times that we encourage our children to fast. We explain what fasting means, and they decide to fast—maybe from candy or from video games, or they may fast from food for a special prayer time that we have declared.

Praying for Missionaries

During Cornerstone’s missions conference, a time is set up for the kids to gather around their missionaries to pray for them.

Brian and Rachel Langley, the children’s missionary partners in Peru, eagerly

confirm how much they have been blessed by the children at Cornerstone: “When we visit, the Kids’ Prayer Club is *always* excited to see our family and hear about how we are doing. They know our names, and we know theirs. We sit together in the prayer circle during Sunday school, and when we show them pictures of the children and young adults among whom we work, the boys and girls remember their names and their stories. As we talk, they make notes in their prayer journals.

“We see local churches emphasizing teaching children how to pray correctly rather than on receiving from children’s prayers,” the Langleys note. “But one of the hallmarks of the children’s ministry at Cornerstone is their emphasis on the spiritual capacity of children. We have been blessed by the Kids’ Prayer Club, but we also have learned from the prayers of these young children.

“Every time we visit,” the Langleys continue, “we have been privileged to have them lay their hands on us and send us back into ministry in Peru. Their prayers are one of pillars of support for our family and our ministry among the poor in Lima.”

From Ohio to the World

“Children can take their rightful place in God’s Kingdom work which starts with prayer,” Irma emphasizes. “They can begin to know God through prayer, to recognize His voice, and to experience the love of the Father for themselves. Then He gives them His prayer agenda which consists of prayers for lost people and for the suffering. As they learn, their heart of compassion grows, and God can put them in places of opportunity and in positions of power.”



The impact of this one group of praying children is going far beyond what they could have imagined. In September of 2007, five youth from Hilliard (5th grade through high school) were invited along with over 40 children and 150 adults from various places around the world to come to the United Nations headquarters in New York City. The children heard firsthand from some of the ambassadors, and they were

invited to be part of a historical moment of prayer. These youth stood in the UN building praying for the children of the nations, the victims of AIDS and of war. They declared who God is and prayed that the nations will come to know Him. A number of ambassadors welcomed the children to pray for them.

When President Bush’s wife, Laura, visited their city, she was told about children who pray for the nations, and she invited them to meet with her in a private place away from the press.

There they gathered around her and prayed for her and for the nation, simply verbalizing once again what God had already challenged them to pray many times before.

A Silent Tsunami

The mounting strength and impact of children’s prayers have been compared to a silent tsunami hitting the earth, but this time for good. Around the globe there is an awakening to the untapped resources of children’s prayers. In place after place, boys and girls are beginning to take their rightful place in God’s Kingdom work which starts with prayer.

Last year Irma was invited to Chihuahua, Mexico, where she helped to put on a one-day missions conference for over 1,500 children in the city convention center. Churches across that area worked together to present the nations to the children in this one-day missions adventure.

“I was invited to come and have a House of Prayer there,” Irma reports, “and I included many of the things we do here. The Mexican children spent all day going from station to station learning about the people of the world and then came

“God is putting children in positions of power.”

to the House of Prayer where they prayed with passion for the nations, clearly bearing a new sense of urgency God had given them for needy people.”

Irma shares a poignant example of her children’s heart for prayer: “We had heard a report from a short-term team that had just returned from Ecuador. At the conclusion, we asked for a child to pray. One of our little boys enthusiastically waved his hand. He could have prayed right where he was; we didn’t ask him to move. But he got up, walked to the front, dropped to his knees, prostrated himself, and started to pray. He just followed his heart! That’s the kind of prayer that moves mountains.”



Irma and a child pray together.

Changing the Course of a Nation

“Pastor told us that there is power in prayer. He said we can change the country through prayer,” a 12-year-old child from the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, explained to IMB missionary Sue Sprenkle. “So that is what we are doing, changing the country.”

This past January, in the middle of the violence that wracked this East African nation following contested elections, Sue heard that children were meeting to pray, and followed the stream of boys and girls into a small, tin shack that serves as their church. The pastor explained that the children had started gathering daily on their own, increasing in numbers over a period of two weeks to an average of more than 200, ranging in age from 3 to 17.

“Father, our country is in trouble. We pray for peace to come,” an 11-year-old boy prayed. “Protect us, Father. Teach people to love one another and not to fight anymore.”

A 16-year-old girl prayed for internally displaced people. She asked God to help the children feel safe and be able to go to school.

Sue noted that adults were amazed to see that after the children started praying, there were no more deaths, houses burned, or other violence in their section of the slum. The children were matter of fact about the results; they just expected God to answer their prayers.

A Role for Parents, Churches, and Agencies

What would happen if all local churches determined to teach their children to intercede in this way? Can we afford not to?

When Wycliffe translator Dorothea Lander came home from the field and spoke to children’s groups, she posed the question, “How many of you have been asked by your parents or teachers to consider doing something in missions?” Sometimes there were one or two positive responses, but more often, not one child raised a hand. She was moved to do something to change that and is now Wycliffe’s children’s communications coordinator.

Dorothea says, “Many churches have stopped telling children about the world’s needs, offering them opportunities to make a difference, and challenging them to consider missions involvement. If we want future generations to love the world the way God loves the world, we will have to give them ways to respond when they are young.”

Ruth believes that raising kids as disciples and disciple makers is the Christian parents’ task. “But it is also important for the church to come as a community of faith and do it together, to wield our influence with each others’ kids. Wycliffe comes alongside pastors and church leaders and teachers to provide resources. We minister directly to kids, too, but our primary strategy is to connect churches, parents, children’s leaders, home schoolers, Christian school teachers, etc., with resources that tell the story of the Great Commission and the role of the church which includes Bible translation.

“Wycliffe wants to help equip children to pray beyond themselves,” she continues. “We live in a culture where it is all about ‘us,’ yet praying for ourselves is so stifling. God can use prayer to engage children in something on the other side of the world far beyond themselves. They can be engaged not just in peripheral things but on the front line as intercessors. And we don’t want to just get them to pray but to develop and maintain a relationship with the work so that they see some of the fruit of their prayer investment.



Mexican children pray over the nations.

“And children give,” she adds. “Of course they can’t give huge amounts, but from Scripture we know that God measures the gift by the heart of the giver rather than the size of the gift. When children give their ‘first fruit,’ God not only multiplies their gifts but also uses the experience to mold them into lifetime givers. Kids are not ‘half people’! One way God blesses their obedience is by using it to motivate, encourage, and challenge others.”

As Marilyn West, also on Wycliffe’s children’s communications team, visits churches, she repeatedly sees a lot of time, energy, and funds spent on involving teens in missions, but little or nothing on children’s global involvement. “Churches need an intentional children’s missions education plan that has practical components,” she declares. “Just get started. Launch with one small element. For example, Wycliffe’s resources include a series of 10-minute activities that could be used at the beginning of Sunday school or children’s worship.”

Dorothea is often reminded of the passage in Matthew 7 where Jesus taught that a life based on hearing the Word but

not doing anything about it is like a house built on sand. "Giving children Bible knowledge without opportunity to put it into practice likewise leads to disaster," she warns. "Children deserve better! If we don't give kids ways to act on Jesus' words when they are young, we are raising a generation built on sand and setting them up for disaster."

As churches and agencies, we need to wake up to the reality that one of the greatest but least tapped resources for missions is the prayers of children. Fortunately, a new wind is blowing, and movements raising up children to pray are being launched in countries all over the world. It just remains for missions leadership of the church and agency to plug into this incredible resource.



Local Church Action Steps

1. **Recognize Next Generation potential.** Never before in the history of the world has a generation had such amazing access—to communication tools, to travel, to education, to resources, to medical care, to shared global culture. Let's not shortchange them by offering only entertaining activities but put in their hands tools, training, and understanding so that they can change their world. Take seriously what they can do now and what God has in store for them later.
2. **Develop a written plan for children's missions mobilization from pre-school to high school graduation.** It won't happen by chance! Include your children's ministries leaders in the planning process, and make sure each age bracket is included. What key concepts need to be communicated at every level? How will you consistently challenge boys and girls to commit their lives for God's purpose? How will you guide them into biblical life decisions that will prepare them to freely follow God's leading to serve ends-of-the-earth Kingdom purposes wherever He places them?
3. **Appreciate your children's ministries leaders.** Rather than criticize because they are not currently incorporating missions into their program, recognize the challenges teachers face and encourage them in their ministry. Underwrite the cost of their participation in the children's mobilization track of a regional ACMC conference or other training program. Supply them with good resources.
4. **Recruit a children's teacher for your missions committee and your missions conference planning team.** Adding a children's specialist to your team will do multiple things: (1) It will continue to remind you to prioritize the inclusion of youth in all of your planning. (2) You will have someone who can design children's events using methodology that connects well to today's kids. (3) Exposing a teacher to exciting missions vision is bound to create a long-term missions advocate.
5. **Listen to and learn from kids.** Sit in on your church's children's programs and talk to children's leaders. Appreciate the work the children's ministries team invests week after week. Analyze what connects well with children. Interview kids themselves. Find out what they know about the world and about missions. Discover what they care about. Listen carefully and you probably will hear evidence that God is already developing compassion in their hearts.
6. **Integrate missions into current children's programs.** Rather than adding yet another program, find ways to help teachers include a global perspective in Sunday school, Awana, or other events. Make it easy for them. Give them ready-to-go resources.
7. **Ask your missionaries to speak to the children.** Children's specialist Jill Harris reports that a survey of Urbana 2000 participants revealed that the number one missions influence in the lives of these young adults was a missionary. Meeting a "live" missionary scored far higher than even parents' input.

Children need models, and they *are* impacted when they meet a missionary up close and personal. Note: Your missionaries may need some guidance on what and how to present to children. Perhaps one of your regular teachers could provide advice about what content and presentation methods would be most effective.

Expose children to other missionaries via videos and books. (See resources below.)
8. **Give children their own piece of financial projects.** Karen Hardin of Caleb Resources reminds missions leaders that kids love to take ownership and get involved. When their church recently raised funds to purchase a vehicle for workers in Central Asia, the children took responsibility for raising the money for the wheels. And they reminded the adults that the car would go nowhere until their part of the project had been completed!
9. **Involve your children in hands-on missions ministry.** With proper training, kids can help lead a VBS in an inner-city mission or assist children of recent immigrants adjust to their new community. Properly guided, they can entertain younger boys and girls living at a shelter, or pass out food to the homeless.

10. **Sponsor family missions trips.** Not every short-term project is a good fit for children, but many times kids can contribute. Older children can help with childcare at a regional field conference, or assist in teaching music, puppets, or sports in a missions setting. The world over, children are bridge builders.
11. **Send teachers and other children's education specialists on short-term missions trips** with the specific assignment to return and **develop some children's stories and curriculum** from what they saw and experienced. If you have a **photographer and/or videographer** who can produce materials for children, send them, too. Not only will these be a blessing in your own church, but field missionaries will be grateful to have quality material to use on their next home assignment. Offer these resources to the mission agency, as well.
12. **Stock your church library with children's missions materials.** Many of the sites noted below (especially YWAM, Wycliffe, and Caleb Resources) have books, CDs, and DVDs that should be part of your children's library resources. Consider regularly financing the purchase of new materials from your missions budget.
13. **Start small and grow.** Don't be discouraged when you hear of a large church that holds a huge children's missions conference with spectacular resources. Learn from them (attend their programs to glean new ideas), then work on building your team and initiating one activity at a time. Ask God to bring you gifted people and show you how to use them.
14. **Challenge and train children to share Jesus with cross-cultural friends.** Youth in most Western cultures attend school with boys and girls of other religions. Kids can share their faith cross-culturally right in their own school or neighborhood, but they need to be taught how.
15. **Capitalize on the potential of impacting parents by giving their children a global perspective.** Encourage your kids to share what they are learning with their parents. Send home with them missions information that will engage mom and dad, too. Recruit your kids to help plan a family night as part of an upcoming missions program, and then get them to bring their parents.



Agency Action Steps

1. **Don't write off children's missions mobilization as "not our job."** While agency personnel often bemoan the lack of long-term commitment in others, they have been reticent to dedicate time and resources in children's mobilization because it doesn't produce immediate recruitment results. Yet few investments promise as much long-term potential as giving children a heart for the world. It simply makes sense to focus on the most receptive generation—children under the age of 13. Your agency may not be able to do everything, but you can do something!
2. **Create a children's section on your website.** Check out the sample sites listed below in resources. You may want to begin with fun pages for kids and expand to include teaching materials for families, homeschoolers, and teachers. Make sure to include strategic prayer requests in kids' language.
3. **Publish missions stories for children in various media.** Encourage churches to send skilled children's writers to the field on short-term trips to capture and write stories for kids. If they can recruit a proficient photographer and/or videographer to go, stories also can be captured visually.
4. **Provide children's mobilization expertise to churches.** Recruit children's missions mobilizers to your staff, putting feet to your commitment to prioritize children. ABWE has recently appointed Jim and Susan Cook to lead their next generation ministries which includes, but is not limited to, children's mobilization across the US. Longtime children's pastors, the Cooks had often participated on missions trips, so came with their new role with broad experience.

You might begin by researching which of your churches does a great job with children's missions conferences and other children's mobilization efforts. Is there a key person there who could partner with you, volunteering one or more weekends each year to hold a similar program in another church and/or help train their children's workers?
5. **Develop children's missions mobilization resources.** Ask God to bring you people gifted in producing materials for children. Dorothea, Wycliffe's children's communications coordinator, invests about half of her time developing and editing materials, and the remainder she spends working directly with children and training children's mobilizers at conferences.

She says, "I was trained as a Bible translator and literacy specialist, but children's mobilization is my dream job, the thing for which God created and equipped me." You may find a person with a similar passion just waiting for you to confirm their calling.

6. **Train and resource missionaries to mobilize children for missions on their home assignment.** Many missionaries are reluctant to speak to children because they are not familiar with contemporary teaching techniques and feel inadequate. Provide them with teaching materials and guidelines to be effective in ministry to children. Recruit the pastor of families/director of children's ministries from a local church to come and provide training at your home-assignment conference.
7. **Encourage missionaries to be creative in defining on-field opportunities for families.** Why not include children in a prayer-walking ministry trip? Use kids to help run a VBS? Or a camp program? Or an ESL class?
8. **Challenge appointees and missionaries to recruit as many children as adult prayer partners.** This means a "corner" of each prayer letter should be written for kids—not just to entertain but to provide prayer requests and report answers.
9. **Encourage appointees and home-assignment missionaries to get further training in children's missions mobilization** at a regional ACMC conference or Mission Fest event.
10. **Consider dedicating an area of your headquarters to house a children's missions experience or sponsoring an occasional program for children or families on your campus.** Wycliffe's WordSpring Discovery Center provides a fun educational experience for all ages at their Orlando headquarters. WEC International has held an annual one-day, family-oriented missions fair at its US headquarters for many years.

Or why not sponsor an occasional program for home schoolers and children from Christian schools at your office? You could include a tour of your facilities, an opportunity to meet both home staff and field missionaries, and a challenge to consider missions themselves. You might even have a service project as part of the day. Kids could stuff envelopes, rake leaves, or offer babysitting to missionary parents living on site.
11. **Offer special presentations to assist children in sharing their faith cross culturally.** The majority of today's children have peers of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Many agencies present seminars to help adults share their faith, but why not offer something similar for boys and girls? Children usually can build cross-cultural bridges faster and easier than adults.



Resources for Children's Missions Mobilization

TRAINING FOR CHILDREN'S MISSIONS MOBILIZERS

ACMC Conferences

www.acmc.org

Almost every ACMC conference has workshops or a whole track dedicated to giving kids a heart for the world. Take your missions team and your children's pastor. Published materials are also available for purchase at these sessions.

Mission Fests

Offered in major cities across Canada, these weekend conferences generally include a number of workshops on children's missions.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Caleb Resources

www.calebresources.org

This website provides access to lots of good children's missions materials—focused particularly on unreached peoples—from multi-lesson curricula to simple resources such as posters, music, and globe beach balls. Check the site regularly as new resources are under development.

Discipleland

www.discipleland.com

This curriculum for children age 2 – grade 6 is designed to help the church fulfill the Great Commission. Missions is integrated throughout the material.

Kidology's Missions Zone

www.kidology.org/zones/zone.asp?zone_id=19

Kidology offers teachers creative ideas for teaching missions. A modest membership fee is required to access most of their resources.

Reinbridge

805.987.0064

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSbYXcN5VBQ Prayer and Fasting for Kids

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQQLGTKL_ag&feature=related Prayerwalking for Kids

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A75w748_Ro&feature=related 10/40 Window for Kids

Three short videos present basic missions concepts. Preview on YouTube and order a high-quality DVD.

Most of the agency sites below also include materials for adults to use with kids. Wycliffe, in particular, offers a host of resources for teachers.



RESOURCES FOR KIDS

IMB South Asia Caravan & GO West Africa

www.go2southasia.org/caravan.html

www.gowestafrika.org/kids/

An interactive site for kids presented by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's South Asia region and a number of children's resources available from their West Africa division.

New Tribes Missions' Kidstuff Page

www.ntm.org/kidstuff

Interactive pages for children with some materials in the "Teacher's Lounge" for adults.

PrayKids! Magazine

www.navpress.com/Magazines/PrayKids!/

Published by NavPress, *PrayKids!* is an 8-page, full-color children's prayer curriculum published bi-monthly inside each issue of *Pray!* magazine. Past issues and information are available on the website.

Planet World Bible

Thomas Nelson, publishers

Available in many bookstores and from online sources, this edition of the Bible helps children understand God's plan for the world as evidenced throughout Scripture.

SIM Kids Website

www.simkids.org

A fun, animated "trip" to different continents where there are stories, things to do, recipes, and much more. Teachers can find resources here, too.

Voice of the Martyrs resources and Kids of Courage website

www.vombooks.com/ and www.persecuted.com/link

Both of these sites sponsored by Voice of the Martyrs provide books, videos, and online resources for helping kids learn about, and pray for, those suffering persecution.

Wycliffe's Kids Website

www.wycliffe.org/kids.aspx

This site offers a number of pages for children filled with fun information and interactive games, but there is also a wealth of free resources for parents and teachers. Keep checking back, more free materials will be added soon!

YWAM

www.worldchristian.com

Youth with a Mission publishes missionary biographies at several different reading levels. Some or all of these books are available from other sources, but the entire list is here.

A Missions Experience on a Disneyworld Vacation

Wycliffe Bible Translators US Headquarters

Orlando, Florida

407.852.3626

If you are taking a family vacation to Disneyworld, take time to stop by Wycliffe Bible Translators' Orlando headquarters. Their WordSpring Discovery Center offers you an opportunity to see the world and the Word in a whole new way. Children and adults will enjoy a living cultural adventure exploring the history of the Bible, the world's languages, and the ongoing work of Bible translation. Multimedia presentations, interactive computer games and simulations, audio dramas, and hands-on activities engage all ages.

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