

Understanding 'Church' Words

We often assume that the songs we sing and the stories we tell children in church schools are fully understood, but only too often, if we ask the right questions, we find that we have been misunderstood. These misunderstandings are often funny and 'cute,' but we do need to take the time to explain difficult words, or words which are not normally in a young child's vocabulary, or our lessons are meaningless. Examples: a child repeats 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Harold be thy name;'; a child listens to a story on the exile and hears it as the 'eggs aisle' in the supermarket; a child hears about the house being built on a firm foundation and thinks there is a Dalmation buried beneath it. Make sure words are explained and, with children in second grade and above, even printed for the children to see, and test for understanding often.

Add to the Story

Enhance the Bible story you read as much as you can. Use one or more of these: pictures, sounds, touch, taste and smell. If your curriculum doesn't have a picture to help you tell this week's story, find one in old Sunday School material, in a children's Bible or on the internet. Two sites you might try are: www.teacherhelp.org for colouring type pictures, and www.biblia.com for paintings by old masters. A good picture is truly worth a thousand words.

If the story involves food, try to have some of it for children to try e.g. unleavened bread (pita), grapes, figs, wine (use grape juice!), fish.

If spices or perfumes are used or talked about, bring some (but beware of allergies) E.g. you could bring an incense stick for frankincense, or some olive oil to show anointing.

Let children handle large nails such as would have been used at the crucifixion, or uncarded wool to get the feel of a sheep, or palm branches.

If possible allow them to make models of scenes out of clay or play dough.

Use maps with older children.

January Attendance Blues

Many Sunday Schools struggle with poor attendance after Christmas: hockey practice gets in the way, or the excitement of being part of a Christmas play or pageant is no longer motivation to attend or any number of other reasons for not coming may be given.

Maybe we need to try an alternative approach. Choice is, after all, the name of the game these days, and a one time only/take it or leave it Sunday School does not offer that choice which people have come to expect in every other aspect of their lives.

If Sunday seems to be a problem, try offering an after school Bible Club instead. You may be able to use an empty classroom at a local school, your church may be central enough for children to get there, or a brave parishioner living close to the school may be willing to offer a large rec room or other space. Sometimes it is possible to get the school bus for the route where your space is located to drop children off at that point. Run the After School Club like a Vacation Bible School - in fact, use VBS material. A two week, ten session, VBS curriculum will contain enough material for about 20 meetings for a 1 ½ hour club. Have the children come right after school ends and feed them first! Juice, milk and cookies are simple enough and replenish energy and spirits which may be flagging by this time. Then present a story, high energy games, music, crafts and so on for the rest of the time. Do more activities on the same story the next week and then move on to the second session of the VBS.

Parents will appreciate not having to worry about after school care on one day a week, and children are given fun activities in a safe setting which will help them to grow in their Christian walk.

The biggest difficulty in running an After School programme is in finding the volunteers to run it as so many people work full time and are not free in the daytime. If you are able to recruit 3 adults who are able to commit to running the club for 2 out of every 3 sessions (i.e. 2 are 'on' in any given week and the 3rd one has a break), you may be able to get 2 or 3 teens from the local High School to help. If your adults are of retirement age, the teens are invaluable in running the active games which are part of this approach.

The weekly sessions will be over at around 4:30 or 5, and parents may then be able to collect the children on their way home, or organise a car pool to do so.

Does your church have a vision of a large number of children growing in faith and excited about Jesus? Cher once said, "If you really want something you can figure out how to make it happen." Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." Jesus said, "With God all things are possible."