

CONFESSIONS OF A CHILDRENS PASTOR

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I have a confession to make. I am a children's pastor, but I am not a magician. I am not a ventriloquist, or a puppeteer. I don't have a clown act, or a stage show persona that tours around. I don't know how to juggle balls, and I can't sing particularly well. But rather than apologize for that confession, I feel liberated by it.

There is a mistaken assumption that a great children's pastor must have some kind of "special talent" to qualify them for ministry. I disagree. When the curtain closes, and the stage lights go dark, that's when the real work of a children's pastor begins. Too many churches hire people based on their performance in the talent show arena rather than on their qualifications as a leader. The question should not be "What does this person do in the spotlight?" but rather, "What can this person do when the spotlight is off?"

Sadly, these talented individuals who have stage gifts from God can find themselves overwhelmed with recruiting nightmares, administrative tasks, parent problems, budget woes, and communication failures. The day to day tasks and challenges of children's ministry can sap their joy, leaving them depressed and discouraged. No wonder that most of these children's pastors drop out of ministry after just a few short years, their gift forgotten and their self esteem shattered from having been placed in a role that was outside of their gifting.

If you examine thriving children's ministry programs around the country, you will find that most are led by men and women who have strong administrative abilities and leadership skills, but are not known for their stage show acts.

Take, for example, the following examples. Kathy Wilkerson, of Christian Faith Center in Seattle, WA. (Pastor Casey Treat), has been in children's ministry for two decades. While she enjoys bringing in special guests who have talent with ventriloquism, puppets, or dramatic flair, Kathy knows that the success of her ministry has come about because of her administrative focus and long term dedication. She has watched the children's ministry in her church grow from just a few kids to thousands.

Rich Maus, of Toledo, Ohio (Pastor Michael Pitts) shares that same gift of administration, but freely admits that he has no claim to fame with a professional stage act. Rich, however, was named the "Children's Pastor of the Year" by Willie George Ministries for 2002 because of his ability to deftly handle a thriving

ministry with hundreds of children and volunteers alike, routinely planning and overseeing special events, services and outreach ministries without burning out.

That isn't to say that Rich, Kathy or myself don't know how to teach kids. On the contrary, it is our passion. No doubt, we have all used a puppet from time to time, dressed up in wacky clothes, and dyed our hair green for a cause. But seasoned, experienced children's pastors understand that it takes a lot more than show time skills to survive and succeed. It takes leadership.

Last year, I was contacted by a church about possibly coming out to their church in the summer and conducting elementary age meetings at night. As we talked about dates and travel arrangements, the caller suddenly said, "What is it that you do, by the way?" Not understanding the question, I was at a loss for a moment until the meaning of his question became clear. Teaching kids – and even teaching kids very well – was not enough. They wanted someone who had an "act" of some kind.

Now, in that setting and for that specific purpose, seeking a talented individual may be fine. But for the day to day operations in a busy church, I am very thankful for the "behind the scenes" gifts that God has given me. Children's pastors need not apologize for the unique ability God has given them to as administrators and leaders in the church.

So, the next time someone asks me what I "do", I think I will answer them honestly. I am a children's pastor and I teach kids.

SKILLS FOR THE REAL WORLD OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

L = Loves kids and has endless compassion

E = Energy to endure long term

A = Ability to do the job well

D = Detail oriented

E = Excitement is still fresh about ministry

R = Relates to kids and parents very well

S = Stable personality and home life

H = High expectations and standards

I = Influences others and recruits well

P = Problem solver