



A Church for **ALL** God's Children



Produced April 2007
Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference
100 Interstate Park Drive, Suite 120
Montgomery, AL 36109
334-356-8014

A Church for All God's Children

In 1996, the Council of Bishops called upon *The United Methodist Church* to reshape its life in response to the crisis among children and the impoverished and in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. In the Biblical and Theological Foundations document sent to every United Methodist congregation, the Bishops outlined their goals:

- *The crisis among children and the impoverished and our theological and historical mandates demand more than additional programs or emphases. Nothing less than the reshaping of The United Methodist Church in response to the God who is among "the least of these" is required.*
- *Providing resources for understanding the crisis among children and the impoverished and enabling the Church to respond is also a goal of the Initiative.*
- *The primary goal is evangelization, the proclamation in word and deed of the gospel of God's redeeming, reconciling and transforming grace in Jesus Christ to and with the children and those oppressed by poverty.*

The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference continues to offer congregations the opportunity to undertake specific actions to make their churches more responsive to the needs of ALL of God's children: children, youth, adults, and the community. The decision to participate in this effort should be made by the Church Council, and coordination assigned either to an already established committee of the church or to a task force appointed for this specific purpose.

I . BUILDING ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND THE POOR

GOAL: To institute congregational systems and processes that ensure the stability and continuation of efforts on behalf of children and the poor.

In this section, complete #1 and at least one other.

_____ **1. Establish an Advisory Council, made up of adults, youth, and children, that meets regularly with the Church Council and the pastor and staff to review the status of the involvement of children, youth, and adults in the life of the church and make suggestions to appropriate church bodies.**

_____ 2. Have the Advisory Council annually and systematically evaluate the congregation's ministry with children, youth, and adults (including ongoing compliance with this checklist), with the goal of implementing three specific changes or additions.

_____ 3. Initiate a thorough evaluation of teacher training for workers with children and youth and revamp the church's training in light of learning's; include training on recognizing and responding to child abuse.

_____ 4. Assign responsibility to an appropriate committee for ongoing oversight of the church's role as advocate for poor families and for coordination of activities that demonstrate the congregation's intention to be "A Church for All God's Children."

_____ 5. Set one meeting of the church council each year at which each committee of the church reports what they have done and are planning to do for all God's children in the church and the community and with the impoverished.

_____ 6. Other _____

While many, indeed most, of the activities in "A Church for All God's Children" will require little or no expenditure of funds, the committee may need a modest budget, mainly for purchase of resources that relate to certain activities. Some of the optional activities involve development of new programs. These would of course have to go through the regular program approval process of the church and any required budget would be part of the consideration at this point. The activities of "A Church for All God's Children" are comprehensive and most will require considerable effort over an extended period of time. Do not expect to "zip" through the process quickly. The impact on the life of your church and community will be deeper and more long-lasting if this effort is approached with care and time is taken to be thorough. See the Guidelines for more detailed instructions and suggestions.

There are many ways your church can respond to the "A Church for All God's Children" challenge. Be creative and open minded to the process. Be inclusive of all age levels in your process. Making your church more hospitable to poor families as well as open to those with handicapping conditions is just one way. Please do not undertake this effort lightly. Remember that the focus of the "A Church for All God's Children", in the closing words of the Bishops' foundation document, ". . . is on communicating and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all children and intentionally reaching out to impoverished persons as recipients and means of God's grace in Jesus Christ."

Guidelines

Once the decision to undertake this effort is made and an oversight committee or task force is appointed, make copies of the Guidelines for each member. Among the tasks that the oversight group will want to undertake in the early stages are:

- a. An unhurried discussion of the concept, in order for everyone to feel informed;
- b. Initial selection of activities to be undertaken, recognizing that some changes may have to be made once the process is underway;
- c. Identification of persons in the church and the community who need to be consulted;
- d. Plans for keeping the Church Council and the congregation informed of progress.

All activities will not be appropriate for all churches. If an optional activity is clearly beyond your church's means or irrelevant to your church's situation, go on to another alternative. At the same time, do not dismiss any possibility too quickly or simply because it will present a challenge — this may be precisely the act of witness or discipleship your church is being called to undertake! If a mandatory activity is for some reason not possible for your church, undertake an activity as close in intent as possible to the original, and attach to your report form an explanation of why the substitution was necessary. You will note that there is an "other" category in each section. It is placed there to accommodate the situations described earlier in this paragraph, and as acknowledgment that local situations vary widely and that wisdom and creativity are abundant among local churches. It is assumed that use of the "other" category, either in place of or in addition to fulfillment of the required number of listed activities, will be consistent with the stated goal of the section and will represent a new activity of the congregation.

United Methodist mission opportunity.

_____ 8. Encourage children, youth, and adults in Sunday Church School, or Bible studies to get to know children, youth, or adults in other parts of the world through pen pals.

_____ 9. Other _____

H. RELATING TO ALL GOD'S CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

GOAL: To raise consciousness among United Methodists about the lives of children and the poor in other parts of the world and to engage in activities that improve their lives.

In this section, complete at least any two.

_____ 1. Join with others to support U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (only three countries — Somalia, the Cook Islands, and the United States — have not ratified this internationally recognized agreement). Write to UNICEF for information and hold educational events in your community about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Contact your U.S. Senators and urge them to vote for ratification.

_____ 2. Sponsor an educational event, or series of events, on the impact of war on all God's children. Join the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines.

_____ 3. Sponsor an educational event on the issue of child labor, in the U.S. and internationally. Contact the Child Labor Coalition for information and resources. Consider joining campaigns that encourage people to buy products that are certified not to have been made with child labor.

_____ 4. Learn about the international campaign against child prostitution. Contact ECPAT (Ending Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes). Sponsor an educational event for your church and community on this issue.

_____ 5. Ask a committee or group of volunteers to research United Methodist mission magazines, *New World Outlook* and *Response*, for articles in the past several years about children and youth around the world. Distribute the articles among members and have one person report regularly (during worship, at weekday fellowship evening, or other regular event) on the situation and needs of children and youth covered in their article. (Link this item with #6 below by making an Advance Special donation to a project for children in the featured country).

_____ 6. Study the needs and situations of children, youth, and adults around the world. Send contributions through Advance Specials to one or more ministries serving children, and/or youth.

_____ 7. Begin (or strengthen) an annual focus on mission for the children, poor, and/or youth of your church, culminating in an offering by children and/or youth for a

Documentation of each activity related to “A Church for All God’s Children” is important. You are asked to prepare a scrapbook documenting each step and each section of the Guidelines. The oversight group will need to keep careful records and preserve copies of minutes, articles in the bulletin and newsletter, flyers, photographs, newspaper clippings, etc. Consider naming one member as keeper of the official list, records, minutes, etc. Be creative during this process. Be relevant to your congregation. Enjoy. The scrapbook may be in written form, may be filled with pictures, or may be on a DVD. After completing your scrapbook turn it into your District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will pass it on to your district representative for approval. After the scrapbook has been approved you will receive a letter from Bishop Goodpaster that will include details of the certificate presentation.

These Guidelines will indicate what is needed for each area of “A Church for All God’s Children.” Please follow the directions under each letter. Remember to document what is done in each area. Mark the activity that has been completed, making certain that you have completed the minimum number in each category; all activities in bold are mandatory ones. For each completed activity, please attach documentation: a description of what your church did to complete the activity and any supporting materials such as copies of Church Council or committee minutes, bulletin and/or newsletter announcements or stories, newspaper clippings, pictures, etc.

A. EDUCATING THE CONGREGATION ABOUT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND ADULTS, AND THE POOR

GOAL: To sensitize United Methodist congregations to circumstances faced by children and by poor families in order that churches might respond with acts of compassion and justice.

In this section, complete #1 and at least two others.

_____ 1. Assess the needs of children, youth, and adults, and the poor in your community by:

- a. forming a committee or task force;
- b. put together an assessment of the community's needs and resources;
- c. reporting findings to the congregation.

_____ 2. Celebrate annual Children's Sabbath by:

- a. designating a Sunday in October, or another Sunday during the year, as Children's Sabbath;
- b. ordering Children's Sabbath Resource Kit from the Children's Defense Fund (202-662-3589);
- c. using the materials, not only in worship on the designated Sunday, but in related adult and children's church school and weekday programs.

_____ 3. Hold a study series on the needs of children and the poor, attended by at least 10% of the adults in the congregation, using a book such as *Welcome the Child, It Takes a Village*, or *Amazing Grace*. Consider beginning the series by showing the video, "Listen to the Children."

_____ 4. Have a sermon series, three to four weeks in length, on the needs of children and poor, with an emphasis on people in widely differing circumstances and communities.

_____ 5. Hold a series (at least two sessions) of seminars on the needs of children, youth and adults in your community, to include one "hearing" with a panel of various community leaders and one "open mike" session to hear from children, youth, or adults themselves.

_____ 6. Hold a series of educational sessions (at least two) on recent research on brain development of children from birth to age three. Use this information to evaluate your church's support for young parents and its care for the very young. (See resources

care, and health care?

d. Will this program or policy support families in providing care, nurture, safety, and stability to children?

e. Will this program or policy help the many who have little rather than the few who have much?

f. Will this program or policy help families stay together and care for their children and youth?

g. Does this program or policy refrain from punishing children or youth for the actions or inactions of their parents or guardians?

h. Will this program or policy actually save money in the long run, rather than gain a shortsighted savings that leaves the next generation to pay the price?

i. Is this program as fair to children and youth as to adults, and to women as to men?

j. Will this program or policy provide young people with opportunities for a meaningful future?

k. Will this program develop in children and youth a sense of responsibility for themselves and their communities?

(The above taken from 1996 General Conference resolution on "Putting Children and Their Families First")

_____ 8. Hold a Candidates' Forum for all candidates for office. Ask them to state their positions on issues affecting children, youth, older adults, and families and to answer questions like those in the previous item. Have children from church and community present and orient them in advance about the purpose and how to participate.

_____ 9. Participate in Child Watch (Children's Defense Fund) or other direct exposure experience to teach church members about the effect of public policies on children in the community.

_____ 10. Other _____

G.ADVOCATING FOR LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES THAT IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND THE LIVES OF POOR FAMILIES

GOAL: To become active in organizations, coalitions, and other efforts that seek to systemically improve life for children and for poor persons and families.

In this section, complete at least any two.

_____ 1. Join an advocacy network such as United Methodist Child Advocacy Network (CAN) or United Methodist Women’s Action Network (WACTION) or start your own in your community or state.

_____ 2. Publish advocacy information and legislative action alerts in each issue of your church newsletter.

_____ 3. Sponsor a monthly or quarterly forum on state and federal legislation, and have a monthly “offering of letters” to congresspersons, governors, the president, etc.

_____ 4. Set up an advocacy center or bulletin board in the church, posting information about pending bills affecting children, and setting out postcards to legislators.

_____ 5. Hold a community-wide voter registration drive. Include encouraging congregation members to get out to vote.

_____ 6. Arrange transportation to voting polls for all local, state, and national elections.

_____ 7. Challenge all candidates for public office to “put children and their families first” by asking them to respond to the following questions and holding them accountable for their answers:

a. Are the needs of children and youth and well-being considered first in evaluating health and welfare reforms, or any new programs or policies?

b. Will this program or policy make fewer poor and increase the likelihood of children and/or youth growing up healthy, educated, and prepared to work?

c. Will this program or policy make families more self-sufficient, enabling parents to work by providing them with jobs, training, child

_____ 7. Using resources from Children’s Defense Fund, offer a “Child Watch” program to sensitize adults in the congregation to the needs of children in the community.

_____ 8. Keep the congregation posted on issues of children, youth and adults, and poverty through:

a. a bulletin insert one Sunday each month giving updated information on the status of local, state and federal legislation affecting children and youth and families and statistics on children and youth and poverty in your state. Some excellent sources of current state-by-state information are *Kids Count Data Book*, and *The State of America’s Children Yearbook*.

b. a regular column on legislative alerts and other current information in each issue of the church newsletter;

c. a bulletin board in a strategic location in the church, updated regularly with information on poverty in your state/city/county and on the status of local, state, and federal legislation dealing with issues such as hunger, housing, employment.

_____ 9. Make it possible for the pastor and other church staff to attend a continuing education event on the needs of children and poverty.

_____ 10. Other _____

B. MAKING CHURCH FACILITIES SAFE AND WELCOMING FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, ADULTS, AND FAMILIES

GOAL: To evaluate and modify church buildings, equipment, and furnishings so that they are safe, appropriate, and hospitable.

In this section, complete #1 and at least one other.

_____ 1. Give a special task force responsibility for evaluating and ensuring the safety of the facilities, such as:

- a. electrical outlets protected with child-proof devices;
- b. water fountains at child height or equipped with sturdy steps and handicapped accessible;
- c. child-sized bathroom facilities and handicapped accessible facilities for older adults;
- d. buildings checked for lead and asbestos;
- e. playgrounds safe, secure, and supervised;
- f. walkways well lighted and safe for those with handicapping conditions;
- g. hand-rails on stairs reachable by a 3-year-old and sturdy enough for an older adult;
- h. child-height directional signs with pictures;
- i. cleaning supplies locked away;
- j. facilities inspected regularly for safety (such as no ladders or carpentry items lying around);
- k. accessibility for children and adults with disabilities.

_____ 2. Give a task force (same as in #1, or a special one) responsibility for making the church hospitable for children youth and adults, with measures such as:

new young fathers.

_____ 18. Other _____

_____ 5. Offer regular “Parents’ Day (and/or Evening) Out.”

_____ 6. Offer a drug prevention program for neighborhood children and youth and parents, utilizing the resources of the United Methodist Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence.

_____ 7. Offer a well-publicized Vacation Church School open to community children. Possibly include a youth component and/or adult component.

_____ 8. Sponsor a Family Health Fair at the church, with health check-ups, immunizations, various screenings such as blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma, scoliosis, vision, hearing, etc. Consider sponsoring a blood drive at the same time, so that those who receive have the option of also giving.

_____ 9. Provide school supply kits to neighborhood children and/or youth.

_____ 10. Send community children and/or youth to church camp along with children and/or youth of the congregation. Also send older adults from the community to Older Adult Assembly along with older adults from the congregation.

_____ 11. Sponsor a summer program for church and community children and/or youth (could be an extension of Vacation Church School or a summer day camp or even once a week).

_____ 12. Develop a community garden on church property, encouraging (and teaching/helping) children, youth, and their families to plant, cultivate, weed, water and harvest. Consider including composting and recycling programs.

_____ 13. Offer free music and/or art lessons as a ministry of the church.

_____ 14. Provide a “lending closet” of costly items families need for children, such as child safety seats, cribs, high chairs, strollers, musical instruments, coats, etc.

_____ 15. Provide transportation for pregnant women to prenatal classes and clinics (or sponsor prenatal classes at the church) and transportation for mothers and children to clinics.

_____ 16. Provide transportation for older adults to doctor’s appointments.

_____ 17. Sponsor and nurture partnerships between experienced mothers/ grandmothers and new and/or single mothers and between experienced fathers/grandfathers and

a. nutritious food and drink, appealing to children, available at events;
b. child-sized furniture in spaces where the congregation gathers, including high chairs in dining area and booster seats in sanctuary so children can see over adult heads;

c. chairs with arm rests for older adults and adults with handicapping conditions;

d. crayons and paper in pews, or activity kits to be picked up by families on the way into church;

e. good selection of children’s books in church library and large print books for those with visibility issues;

f. clean walls, decorated age appropriately;

g. safe, secure, and supervised outside play area;

h. ushers, church staff, and other adults greet children, youth, and adults by name.

_____ 3. Assign the church school committee or other ministries work area the responsibility for reviewing and implementing the following:

a. clean, bright, well-equipped nursery with trained workers and appropriate teacher/child ratio;

b. clean class rooms for all age groups;

c. age-appropriate toys for nursery and preschool classes and age appropriate resources for youth classes;

d. child care available during worship services and meetings;

e. all classrooms bright and visually stimulating for all age groups;

f. all classrooms clean (standard: that adults in Sunday clothes will sit on floor/carpet and eat from tables);

g. *The First Three Years: A Guide for Infants, Toddlers and Twos* used for improving nursery facilities;

h. Evaluate facilities for youth and adults so are welcoming and hospitable for those age groups and handicapped accessible;

_____ 4. Other _____

F. REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND / OR ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY

GOAL: To engage in programs and activities aimed at improving life for children, youth, and for poor people in the neighborhood around the church as well as in nearby communities that may be quite different economically and/or racially.

In this section, complete at least any three.

_____ 1. Support public schools by:

- a. monitoring school board elections;
- b. establishing an active partnership with a nearby school;
- c. sponsoring a fund raising event for a local public school;
- d. recruiting members to be volunteers at local schools.

_____ 2. Provide a six-week study of the church's relationship to public schools using *Education: The Gift of Hope*.

_____ 3. Offer ongoing tutoring and mentoring relationships between adults in the congregation and children and/or youth in the community.

_____ 4. Provide supervised before and/or after-school programs for children and/or youth that include:

- a. safe passage (transportation or escorts for walking);
- b. nutritious snack or meal;
- c. help with homework;
- d. a faith component;
- e. recreation;
- f. enrichment experience;
- g. art, dance, drama, music;
- h. computer practice/training.

_____ 4. Include older children and/or youth as members of all church committees (recognizing that this will mean scheduling meetings when they can attend and otherwise treating them as full members).

_____ 5. Institute meaningful multigenerational activities and programs that bring together children, youth, young adults, middle adults, and older adults, such as multigenerational community service projects, multigenerational Bible study, ongoing multigenerational fellowship groups, mission projects, etc.

_____ 6. Other _____

C. REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE

GOAL: To implement programs, policies, and procedures that reduce the risk of children being abused in the church and the community.

In this section, complete #1 and at least one other.

_____ **1. Create a special task force to develop policies and procedures for prevention of child abuse (using *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* or *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*) and present them to the Church Council for adoption. Remember Safe Sanctuaries policies are applicable for children, youth, adults, older adults, and those with handicapping conditions. They could include the following:**

a. an ongoing education plan for the church staff and all workers with children and youth on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention;

b. screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, reference checks, background clearance, etc.) for workers (paid and unpaid) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children, older adults, or those with special needs;

c. safety procedures for church activities such as: having two or more non-related adults present in classroom or activity; leaving doors open and installing half-doors or windows in doors or halls; providing hall monitors; instituting a sign-in and sign-out procedure for children ten or younger, etc.

d. liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage.

_____ 2. Present an adult education seminar series on identifying and responding to child abuse using videos “Hear Their Cries” and “Bless Our Children” and hearing from child abuse experts in the community. Keep informational brochures about child abuse, neglect, and abuse of older adults in the church vestibule such as *What You Need to Know if a Child is Being Abused or Neglected*.

_____ 3. Obtain age-appropriate curriculum for children on prevention, abuse awareness, and self-protection skills, and use them in church school, vacation church school, weekday activities, and/or other settings. Excellent curriculum is available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. (See Resource list)

_____ 4. Offer parent support groups and parenting classes on a regular basis to church families and to community families.

_____ 5. Organize church and community volunteers to provide “safe corridors” for children and youth walking to and from school.

_____ 6. Sponsor a before-and/or after-school ministry that provides a safe haven for children and/ or youth, especially when school is not in session or day out for families with handicapped or special needs persons.

_____ 7. Other _____

E. INVOLVING ALL GOD’S CHILDREN, CHILDREN, YOUTH, ADULTS, IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

GOAL: To re-order congregational life in ways that recognize and involve children, youth, and adults as full participants.

In this section, complete #1 and at least one other.

_____ **1. Regularly involve all God’s children in worship by:**

a. welcoming them and encouraging their participation in all worship services, including Communion;

b. asking what songs children, youth, and /or adults like to sing and including at least one in each worship service;

c. inviting lay people including children and/or youth to be worship leaders, read parts of the liturgy, read the scripture, etc. (Be sure to spend time in advance helping them prepare and understand the meaning);

d. including children and/or youth as well as older adults in special music times through singing, playing instruments, liturgical dancing, etc.

e. training children and/or youth for special tasks such as acolytes, ushers, and greeters;

f. using art designed by children, youth, or adults as bulletin covers once a month;

g. using large print in bulletins so children and adults are able to follow along easily.

_____ 2. Order a copy of *Children Worship!* from Discipleship Resources, and use as a guide in helping children and adults prepare for worship.

_____ 3. If “children’s time” is a regular part of your worship service, reverse the process once a month, having the children provide teaching moments for adults (adult assistance may be needed).

_____ 12. Design a 9-week study session for parents on faith development of young children in the home, using *Faith Home*, a study resource.

_____ 13. Sponsor an annual mission study series for children, youth, or adults. The study should involve outreach by children, youth, or adults.

_____ 14. Other _____

D. HELPING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS GROW AS FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

GOAL: To acknowledge the spiritual growth needs of children, youth, and adults and to engage them in activities that encourage their faith development.

In this section, complete at least two.

_____ 1. Recruit a task force or committee to evaluate how faith formation for children and/or youth happens within the congregation.

_____ 2. Provide one new opportunity each quarter for children, youth and/or adults to practice being disciples of Jesus Christ, to learn about God, to explore the Bible with relevance to their lives today, or to contribute liturgy for use in congregational worship.

_____ 3. Appoint a task force or committee to discover ways to help children and/or youth understand and participate in the rites of baptism and communion.

_____ 4. Establish a “Sprouts” program for children in the church and the community, using the resource *Sprouts: Nurturing Children Through Covenant Discipleship*.

_____ 5. Establish a covenant discipleship group for youth in the church and community or develop a Disciple Bible Study program for youth.

_____ 6. Establish a Companions in Christ program or a Disciple Bible Study program for adults.

_____ 7. Include children and youth in the financial stewardship campaign.

_____ 8. Provide resources that stewardship is more than financial contributions but time, gifts, prayers, and commitment to the church.

_____ 9. Provide a learning weekend/series for older children/younger youth and their parents using the human sexuality curriculum resources available from Cokesbury (1-800-251-8591) or a weekend/series for older youth and their parents using the human sexuality curriculum resources available from Cokesbury.

_____ 10. Provide opportunities for parents (in your congregation and in the community) to learn about raising their children and/or youth as faithful disciples.

_____ 11. Match an adult faith mentor with each child and/or youth in the congregation (perhaps beginning with infants, kindergartners, third graders or confirmands).