



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT ***Oxford University United Methodist Church*** ***Oxford, MS***

November 19, 2013

By Stephanie Caro, Senior Consultant and Deone Perdue, Staff Consultant

BACKGROUND

Oxford-University United Methodist Church is a vibrant church in the center of the town and is the home of Ole Miss. The church was established in 1836, has a rich history and is one of the largest churches in Oxford. OUUMC is the flagship church of its conference.

The members of Oxford University UMC describe their church as a warm, family-oriented place, passionate about Christ and people. One person said, "We take care of each other." It's an inviting church with a lot going on. A parent said, "There are a lot of choices and activities to choose from."

Here is what Oxford-University UMC declares about itself in its mission statement:

"A community of faith that exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ:

By letting people know that they matter to God,

By showing them that they matter to us,

So that others will matter to them."

Warren Black is the Senior Pastor and has been serving OUUMC for 18 years. Claire Dobbs is the Associate Pastor and has been with OUUMC for 9 years. The church has seen tremendous growth under their leadership. Just since January of this year they have taken in 45 new families!



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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The membership of the church is around 1958 and on an average week, 550 people attend one of the church's three Sunday worship services, either the 8:45 a.m. and 10:55 a.m. traditional services or the 9:00 a.m. blended style service.

The children's ministry covers children from birth-6th grade and their families. Programming includes Sunday morning Sunday school for 3 year olds on up, Children's Church for Pre-K through 1st graders during the 2nd service, WOW (Worship on Wednesdays for K-4th graders), Children's Choir (1st through 5th grade on Wednesday nights), and FISH (First In Serving Him geared for 5-6th graders on Sunday nights). There is a fully staffed nursery available during Sunday and Wednesday programming.

Oversight for the children's ministry is provided by the Director of Children's Ministry, Pat Forrester. Other children's ministry staffing includes a part-time Nursery Coordinator, Camille Murphy, who oversees the nursery and its nursery workers. There is also a children's choir program in place for children, which is overseen by a part-time Choir Director. The staff also includes several very part-time children's Safe Sanctuary workers. There is also an active Children's Ministry Team.

There are approximately 339 children on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, about 105 individual children participate in Sunday school, worship and/or one of the other children's programs. (These numbers do not include the weekday pre-school.)

About 75 children attend Sunday school. FISH averages 20-25, Children's Choir settles around 20-25, and WOW has about 35 children attend.

The children's ministry is described by some volunteers and parents as an "energetic," "kind," "loving," "comfortable," and "a nurturing environment." Others described the ministry as "unorganized," "not consistent," and "lacking in communication." One parent said, "It needs a new look and energy. Even the rooms are dull and do not look clean."

The church has a 2013 budget of \$1,561,159 and includes a children's ministry budget of \$88,607.00 (which includes \$7900 in program expenses for children's ministry). The budget covers salaries/ benefits of the staff as well.

There are approximately 23 adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major children's programs. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

OUMC is blessed to offer great facilities for the children's ministry, including large rooms and a gym available for loads of outreach. However, the rooms are spread out and the building is showing its age – both dynamics creating their own challenges. The rooms are in need of a facelift and updating. If the proposed building project moves forward, all of this will be taken care of with beautiful new spaces for ministry.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the children's ministry and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. Ministry Architects met with 67 individuals in 10 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens Ministry Architects likes to use for understanding Children's Ministry is the idea of the "three rents." Children's ministries that "pay these rents" tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Those children's ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement.

It has been Ministry Architects' experience that though these three rents do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by children, parents, staff and the congregation at large.

Rent #1: NUMBERS—A significant percentage of children need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church's ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the church leaders and the staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the children's ministry is typically *more likely* to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

The consensus is that this rent is being paid based on how many pairs of children's shoes pass through the doors several times each week.

Rent #2: PROGRAMS—In order to "earn the right" to experiment with changes, the children's leadership needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective children's programs that give both students and parents "something to talk about."

This rent also appears to be paid due to a strong Sunday morning program.

Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the children's staff, volunteers and the children themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents.

This rent appears to be in default. While there is a deep love and appreciation of the ministry, a general frustration was shared among the leaders involved in the ministry. The director and volunteers are feeling worn out. A number of parents are making comparisons to other churches' programming, leaving enthusiasm low.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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As the leadership of the children’s ministry develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the children’s ministry faces parallel challenges.

Ministry Architects pictures this parallel challenge this way:



1. Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the children’s ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. Continuing to Do Ministry: Maintaining the *current* children’s ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of children, their families, the staff and the church at large.

As the children’s ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, two rules of thumb – or what we call “children’s ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind:

Of course, “what is normal” for children’s ministry can vary widely, but Ministry Architects has observed two general trends that may be instructive as church leaders seek to determine appropriate expectations for the current and future investment in children’s ministry:

- 1) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 75 Children:** Though this ratio can vary widely from church to church, it has been Ministry Architect’s experience that healthy, sustainable children’s ministries require in the neighborhood of one full-time staff person for every 75 children participating on an average week. With 73 dedicated staffing hours, OUUMC is staffed to manage a ministry of 137 children.
- 2) **\$750 per Child:** The cost of providing a sustainable children’s ministry tends to settle in the range of \$750 per child for an area like Oxford, MS. With \$88,607.00 dedicated to the children’s ministry, OUUMC is financially prepared for 118 active children.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. We have found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three *different* kinds of people:

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan. In the case of OUUMC, there is no one currently serving in the role of “architect” and thus no “blue prints” for ministry are in place.
- **The General Contractor:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project. Often, the children’s ministry staff manages this work.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In children’s ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to children, or particular skills in planning and managing events, or particular skills in teaching. These are OUUMC’s wonderful volunteers.

Many churches hire, as their lead children’s director, someone who may have gifts in a single area-- for example, working with children, managing a facility--but who simply does not have the experience base or the skill set to oversee the complex components of a ministry of 50 or more children. The result in these situations can be a pattern of unrealistic expectations for the staff, which can lead to "scapegoating," especially in settings in which a sustainable infrastructure for ministry has not been established. At times we’ll want to draft something more specific for the particular church, identifying that the current children’s director is a great architect, for example.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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ASSETS

Strengths To Protect In The Current Ministry

A “Love of/like Christ” Ministry

In it's commitment to follow and reflect the love of Christ, OUUMC has found ways to demonstrate that love quite clearly. It was heard many times that there is a choice for every family here, always something to do and that it is a place where, “Pat knows each of the kids’ names.” So whether it is through the successful rotation model that helps children learn or through the joyful spirit nurtured while tie-dying t-shirts, the church is hitting the target on a few things that are priceless. “This is the awesomest awesome!” (A 4th grader during SS tie-dying a shirt.) Sure sounds like a child who *knows they matter*.

Ready to Step Up to the Plate

There was a unanimous sense that the children’s ministry is ready to grow! The clarity of need around change as the catalyst for the growth will be helpful in moving forward. While change often comes at the cost of traditional thinking and usually requires additional investments of time, talents and sometimes money, the people heard from in the focus groups articulated their commitment to build a growing and vibrant ministry anyway. One adult shared, “We are ready to do whatever it takes, because our children matter,” while another acknowledged the need to “redefine the programs that we have in place.” Harnessing this willingness to embrace change and step up to the plate will help OUUMC knock it out of the ballpark.

Safe Sanctuaries? Nailed It!

OUUMC takes its children’s safety seriously in appropriate ways. Kudos and pats on the back all around. Solid Safe Sanctuary practices are in place, training is available, and staff/volunteers working with children are aware of the procedures. At the end of the day, when a church knows that parents are able to say, as one did, “I know my children are in a safe environment and I like that,” it will also be free to experiment with new initiatives and explore new avenues of ministry. The trust of parents allows for change.

Pastoral Support

The children (and their families) of OUUMC are blessed to have the full attention and support of the pastoral staff. They care and want to see OUUMC have a strong children’s ministry. This is evidenced in their readiness and willingness to engage in this assessment process, even spending 2.5 hours in their own listening session. They are willing to support whatever it takes to improve the ministry and are great at listening to new ideas.



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Nursery Improvements

The nursery staff has a reputation of being friendly and caring. With the recent hiring of the nursery coordinator, parents were able to share how much better things are flowing in the Nursery Department. One adult explained that the church's commitment to staff a position, "helped to streamline the nursery." And another added that it seems "more organized than before."

Oh! You Kids Matter!

Kids do matter at OUUMC. Evidence is in the fact that the leadership of the church invited Ministry Architects to come in and examine all the nooks and crannies of the children's ministry, and that the church has been preparing itself to look in the mirror. Rather than feel paralyzed by the blemishes, it was compelled by the possibilities of HUGE! 67 people came out to participate in focus groups, invested themselves in a process designed to impact the kids and here's what a few of them said:

- "We have so many kids and they all are precious to us."
- "We want them to know we care about them and that they are important to us."
- "My children love being here. They want to know when they can come back."
- "This is a place where kids can feel part of a community."
- "I can't think of anything else I could possibly want for my kids."

CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the children's ministry strategically forward

The Blooming Onion

An onion starts out small, but if left to grow – layers and layers develop. Soon it's grown big and no one remembers how it started out. Even other little onions begin to grow from the original.

OUUMC is growing its own onion field in the children's ministry...but not in a tasty, savory way. A toxic situation has grown big over an incident that could have stayed small. Although the original problem has been thoroughly addressed, a "large onion" has developed with multiple negative layers. Sides are being chosen, hurtful words have been said, hearts are breaking, and children's ministry spiritual/philosophical theories are being decided – in multiple layers.

Unless the layers are peeled back and properly removed, the toxicity will continue to get in the way of the true mission of the children's ministry: Kids matter. The subject is wearing people out, taking the focus away from solid, sustainable ministry.



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The Discipleship Path Needs Weeding

Although good curriculum choices have been made in the past few years, there still seems to be a missing overall Discipleship Path. A clear plan, which lays out a comprehensive scope and sequence for a child's 18 years spent in the spiritual nurturing care of OUUMC, is missing. Core competencies haven't been established that reflect the personality and theology of OUUMC. Without those path markers, it has left some parents wondering why the children's ministry isn't more like (*insert other local ministry favorite program here...like Awanas!*). When well-defined spiritual goals go missing, there's no program filter available to point to and say, "Here's who we are and who we aren't."

Let's Name It, Claim It and Like It!

Seems as if loads of adults at OUUMC have "THE" perfect plan for what the children's ministry programming menu should offer. Problem is: everybody's got an idea, nobody's got the same idea, and everybody else's idea is wrong. One parent said, "I could not think of one more thing I could want for my kid here at this church" while other listening group participants had multiple ideas for what OUUMC's children's ministry should be doing.

Without established, church-wide, spiritual goals for the children's ministry, as well as clarity on the educational purpose of each program, confusion and chaos will always swirl around what the ministry could/should be doing. It would be savvy for OUUMC as a church to invest time determining the balance of the children's ministry in vertical faith ministry (intergenerational "sticky-faith") and horizontal faith ministry (age-level peer programming).

Imagine what the children's ministry would look like if the majority of children's ministry stakeholders decided the "know-feel-do" desires for OUUMC's spiritual formation and determined together the appropriate programming based on those core competencies! Wouldn't it be thrilling when people begin claiming the OUUMC children's ministry as a finely tuned place to raise their family?

The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round...But in What Direction?

A clearly defined vision map for the ministry could not be expressed by most of the people in the listening groups that included parents, volunteers and staff. When questioned, adults couldn't name OUUMC's desired attendance goals, ministry core values, practical 3-year revolving goals or yearly measurable markers of success. Everyone seemed to know the children's ministry mission statement (Oh! You Kids Matter!) but didn't know a comprehensive direction map for how "the children's ministry bus" was going to arrive at its destination, much less what that destination was.

When ministries are missing clearly communicated and understood ministry markers, they will find themselves spinning their wheels like a "bus stuck in the mud." And what eventually happens? The bus starts to roll backwards.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

115 Penn Warren Drive, Brentwood, TN 37027

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Without road markers of success, a children's ministry can't know how to meet or exceed their goals. It leaves a children's ministry nowhere to go but in every direction.

Volunteer Vortex

While it is true that volunteer recruiting is a lament in every church in America, there does seem to be a particular struggle with it in OUUMC's CM department. Somehow, the CM has not found the formula for the balance between face-to-face with the kids and face-to-face with the parents/adults, when/how much to ask of volunteers, and what the staff should just do themselves.

Here were comments made by listening group participants:

- "We need more volunteers."
- "If we can just reach parents and get them involved."
- "More parent involvement, but I don't know what you can do. You can't lasso them."
- "I've filled out the little sheet we fill out and I was never contacted."
- "No one's ever asked me to volunteer."
- "We ask for volunteers ALL the time. They're just not doing it."

The children's ministry needs to widen the net and cast to other age-levels, deepen the development of the volunteer team, and raise the bar on how it resources the volunteers.

"Teaching Here is a Thankless Job"

These comments from children's ministry teachers stand for themselves:

- "I feel like the other parents and members here treat the children's teachers like they work for the parents. We are never thanked. No one ever says, "Would you like me to sub for you one time."
- "One teacher emailed 30 parents looking for a sub for a day. Not even ONE response. Not one."
- "We were asked to come even earlier for SS so that parents could stand around and drink coffee." "Yeah, that didn't go over well." "I wish I could come early and drink coffee."
- "Parents pick up their kids late and then I'm late getting to the 10:55 service. And they're standing in the hallway talking."
- "Yes, and then we were asked to come even earlier so that others could have coffee. That upset me greatly." "Me, too!" "I'd like to drink coffee." "Yeah, me too."

Behind-the-Times Technology

Millennials have aged fully into being the church's children's ministry parents. Generation Z will be following all too quickly behind them and one demand these parents have? Up to date technology. The Millennials have discovered that you can have both relationships while being connected globally. When a children's ministry in the size of a church as large as OUUMC doesn't seem to be keeping up with today's techno-standards, frustration develops.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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Parent Communication

Currently, the practice of parsing out information via the church's weekly email blast or mailing brochures to families (which are also available at the church), is not meeting the expectations of parents who want to know who their kids' teachers are, what the kids are studying, when and how they can help, what the rules are, etc. Parents talked about a "disconnect" of info. In other words, they're asking for improved communications, including a Parents' Handbook of information. One parent said, "I'll lose a brochure. I want to go to one place and get what info I want when I want." To which another parent said, "Yeah, what if someone wasn't in church? How do they get the latest information then? It would be easier with one place to go."

Crack in the Control Docs Foundation

In churches where so much of the ministry is dependent on its volunteers, getting and staying organized is more important than ever. Heard by one participant, "The ministry is just unorganized" which was echoed by several others. Others shared, "We're a college town. We have high expectations." "We're smart people with lots of different ideas and opinions."

Missing ministry tools include:

- Up-to-date cloud-based data management
- Children's ministry directories for staff, volunteers, and parents.
- Electronic check-in attendance tracking system
- Clear staff job descriptions
- Weekly CM staff meetings
- Volunteer job descriptions
- Volunteer recruiting needs list
- Volunteer recruiting plan
- Volunteer matriculation plan
- Special Event Notebooks
- 12-18 months advanced-planning calendar
- CM org chart (who supervises over what)
- 3-year revolving goals w/ 1-year benchmarks and next steps
- Core educational competencies
- 12-year curriculum spread sheet
- Program purposes
- Up-to-date info on the church website

Spread Too Thin

Parents talked about how their family and church schedules were spreading them around *too* much, they were *too* busy, *too* tired, *too* stretched!" Between volunteering over three major children's ministry time slots and participation in church (and life) themselves, many reflected that they felt they were too stretched and spread too thin. Here are some comments we heard:



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- “We’re driving back and forth too much.”
- “We’re exhausted if you have kids in all age levels.”
- “I’ve got two youth going to two separate small groups in two separate locations and then one to Awanas.”
- “We’re too busy!”
- “The church activities have to take a back seat.”
- “We have a lot of activities: Easter, “Lavinrac,” Valentine’s Day dance, etc. Too many?”
- “I can’t think of adding another thing to my family’s schedule.”
- “I wish someone would give me permission to stay home on Wednesday nights.”
- “We do a lot of a lot but my hubby likes to do one thing GREAT.”
- “We went to that thing in KC and then didn’t take things off the calendar.”



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 18 months as a time of goal setting and infrastructure building for the children's ministry. Target April 2015 as the date for achieving sustainable structures for the children's ministry knowing that incremental successes will be seen throughout the renovation.
- 2) Establish a Prayer Team to undergird this renovation process.
- 3) Determine three "in the next 30, 60, 90 days" ways to lessen the toxic conversations around the children's ministry and declare peace while this renovation process is allowed to take hold, easing some of the "tension-filled" areas.
- 4) Present this report to the Administrative Council, requesting that they endorse an 18-month strategic design process for the children's ministry.
- 5) Establish a Children's Ministry Renovation Team, made up of four to five volunteers who report regularly to the Associate Pastor. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on exceptional day-to-day ministry, while the Renovation Team focuses on the recommendations below. These recommendations include two overarching responsibilities:
 - I. Work with the children's ministry leadership to **address the immediate pressure** points facing the ministry as they transition toward sustainability.
 - II. Establish a consensus for the direction of the ministry and take responsibility for **implementing the strategic, long-term changes** recommended in this report.
- 6) Engage the services of Ministry Architects to take responsibility for:
 - Working with the staff and volunteers to ensure the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report's timeline,
 - Assisting the children's ministry in overcoming the obstacles that are certain to arise in the process of restructuring and fine-tuning the children's ministry.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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RENOVATION TEAM TASK #1: Address the Pressure Points

(Accomplish these urgent tasks first to create a healthy climate conducive to change.)

Pressure Point #1: The Discipleship Path

Invite all interested stakeholders in the children's ministry to a Discipleship Path Retreat of 3 open sessions (4th session open only to staff and Renovation Team).

- Create a deliberate plan that allows children and parents to understand where children are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are. As part of the path, determine any necessary additional Rites of Passage
- Discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum. Objectives include:
 - Evaluate the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the children's ministry programming.
 - Assess the need and purpose for each program in the CM to use an integrated curriculum plan that is interweaved and coordinated with the other children's ministry programming.
 - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- Create an integrated 12-year template and spreadsheet for teaching themes and curriculum, including a design for Sunday school, Nursery, Children's Church, FISH, WOW, Confirmation and any other programming to come.

Pressure Point #2: Develop the Volunteer Process and Team

Shift the children's ministry leadership focus away from directly working with the children to fortifying the systems that support the strongest impact of volunteers. *(Consider the proposal for a Ministry Architects' Volunteer Training Weekend where most all of the items below will be accomplished with the consultants.)*

To do this:

- 1) Create a volunteer recruiting process game plan:
 - Make a list of immediate and future volunteer positions that need to be filled.
 - Using the church photo directory create a list of potential volunteers, otherwise known as the "fishing pond."
 - For immediate needs, divide up this list of potential volunteers and begin calling them personally.
 - Go back to step one until all positions have been filled.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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2) Establish a Volunteer Development and Resourcing Strategy that includes:

- Volunteer Job Descriptions
- Volunteer Training and Resourcing Plan
- Volunteer Substitution Plan
- Volunteer Skillset Survey
- Online Volunteer Management

3) Ramp up Volunteer Appreciation: Develop ways to protect, nurture, affirm and extol the teachers and their dedication towards the children of the church. Be sure to find ways that especially protect their personal and family spiritual needs on Sunday mornings.

Pressure Point #3: Develop a Plan for Long-term Vision

Create a plan to build clarity and consensus through a fun, positive process that involves key stakeholders in the children's ministry. In this process, the following documents pertaining to the church's youth and children's ministry will be developed:

- target audience clarity
- values statement
- 3-year revolving goals
- 1-year benchmarks with next steps and
- organizational chart (the way things really work or should)

RENOVATION TEAM TASK #2: *Establishing a consensus for the direction of the children's ministry and the creation of its infrastructure, including the completion of the following tasks:*

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND STABILITY

- **Control Document Development:** Complete and publish an 18-Month Calendar, create Major Event Notebooks to help event planners succeed, and generate a Preventative Maintenance Calendar that schedules behind-the-scenes activities for each month (like "September: nail down the date for next year's fall kick-off.").
- **Attendance:** Track attendance for all children's activities in electronic form so that reports of "first-timers" and "MIA's" can be easily identified.
- **Marketing:** Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, children, leaders and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the children's ministry.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- **Communication:** Establish normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, children, and leaders utilizing as many forms of communication as possible including updating the children’s page of the church’s website, Facebook, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
- **Children’s Ministry Web Presence:** Put systems in place so that the children’s ministry has up-to-date info on the church’s website. Include links to valuable parent helps, online registration for events, pictures and clips from what the children are doing and accurate times for all programming.
- **Children’s Ministry Manual:** Develop a Children’s Ministry Manual, including the most recent Children’s Directory, an 18-Month Calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and notes for every major children’s ministry event.
- **Fall Kick-Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, family-based, incredibly fun Fall Kickoff event to launch the children’s ministry in the fall of 2014. Use that event to cast the vision, share information and build enthusiasm about the year ahead.
- **Enlist an Experienced, Professional Coach:** Invite MA to play the “coach” role during this renovation period. MA would offer experienced direction for the building of an infrastructure for the children’s ministry and provide ongoing coaching for the children’s ministry staff members as well as the Renovation Teams.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND SERVANTS

- **Strategic Staffing:** Propose clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan for the children’s ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of children.
- **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the children’s ministry staff including coaching, reading and seminars. Include in this development opportunities for regular children’s ministry staff meetings.
- **Leadership Development:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the children’s ministry and create a structure that allows all leaders to have access to resources and training.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Build a fortified volunteer leadership team, some of who will do relational ministry with children while others work behind the scenes. Create a “fishing pond” list of at least 75 possible volunteers to call on for weekly volunteer positions.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer children’s workers at the beginning of each school year.



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NEW INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES

- **Create an Alignment Strategy for Single-Night Programming:** Strategically create a one evening (Wednesday or Sunday) for programming for all ages (birth through High School and possibly beyond). This alignment should be set to start with the 2014/2015 school year.
- **Upping the Technology:** Put a sub-team together, under the supervision of Renovation Team, who will investigate and make recommendations for improving the children's ministry technology branding. This will include technology both in the classroom and in utilization of leadership from the children's ministry.
- **Electronic Check-In:** Put a sub-team together, under the supervision of the Renovation Team, to investigate and make recommendation for moving to an electronic kiosk check-in system beginning the 2014/2015 school year.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

115 Penn Warren Drive, Brentwood, TN 37027

877.462.5718

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PROPOSED TIMELINE AND OPTIONAL CONSULTING PROPOSAL

The following provides Oxford University United Methodist Church with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term children's ministry.

Many churches choose to use the services of Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like Ministry Architects to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas, particularly for the 18-month transition, we are available to help.

November 2013

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Administrative Council for the strategic renovation of the children's ministry and the Council has given full support of this plan.
- A Renovation Team for the children's ministry has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled for December.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the children's ministry. They have received a copy of the assessment report and timeline.
- A Discipleship Path Retreat has been scheduled for early 2014 and a "save the date" email/postcard has been sent to all families.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the children's ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

December 2013

Focus: Renovation Underway, Volunteers, Communications, Continuing Education

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team for the children's ministry has held their first meeting and they have understood their roles for the next 18 months.
- Promotion of the Discipleship Path Retreat has begun.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- Communication norms have been determined and those best practices have been implemented.
- Continuing education opportunities have been explored and calendared for the children's ministry staff.
- An expression of appreciation has been given to each of the teachers and key volunteers (perhaps delivered coffee)
- Work has begun on the summer calendar for 2014.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the children's ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

January 2014

Focus: Compliance, Visioning, Curriculum Retreat, Participation Goals, Summer Calendar

Outcomes:

- The dates for the Vision Retreat have been set for the summer.
- A fishing pond of 75 potential volunteers in the children's ministry has been created.
- A volunteer application, an application process and a screening process for all weekly hands-on volunteers has been created and implemented.
- All programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuaries policy as laid out by the church.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all children's ministry events and weekly programs through August 2014 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- The summer calendar for the children's ministry has been completed and distributed.
- Results-based job descriptions have been written and distributed to the appropriate volunteers for the children's ministry.
- Work has begun on the 2014-2015 children's ministry calendar.
- Sub teams to review and make recommendations for technology updating and electronic check-in have been formed.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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February 2014

Focus: Compliance, Volunteer Recruitment

Outcomes:

- A Discipleship Path Retreat has taken place and an integrated template or scope and sequence of faith formation for birth through 6th grade years has been created, including a design for Sunday morning and other events.
- The 2014-2015 children's ministry calendar has been completed through August 2015 and included a Fall Kick-off.
- Volunteer recruiting season has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.
 - Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2014-2015 school year.
 - The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
 - Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to children's ministry.
- Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2014-2015.
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and in compliance with the safe church policy. Background checks have been completed on each weekly volunteer.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the children's ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

March 2014

Focus: Major Event Notebooks, Compliance, Attendance Tracking, Pressure Points, Volunteer Training

Outcomes:

- All pressure points have been addressed.
- A Visioning Retreat has been scheduled for June and a "save the date" email/postcard has been sent to all families.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- Copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained. Permission slips for each offsite event in addition to standard medical release forms for the entire year have been created and distributed.
- A plan to establish ongoing expressions of appreciation for volunteers has been developed.
- A process for tracking and recording attendance in all children's ministry programs has been created and implemented.
- Work has begun on major event notebooks – creating a template for the notebooks and collecting information on each children's event.
- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers have received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the children's ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

April 2014

Focus: Mid-Course Evaluation, Database

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has completed a 6-month mid-course evaluation of the renovation process and has made any adjustments necessary to improve the work being done.
- Work on the children's database has begun, collecting the most recent information for families and children. All have been categorized in a manner that will follow up on MIA families and children. Each child has been classified in the following categories:
 - **Active Children** are the ones whose families are members and have attended at least once in the past year – plus visitors who have become a regular part of the group. They should show up in your printed children's ministry directory.
 - **Member Inactive (MIA)** are still a part of the flock. You may not need to send them a Facebook message every time the group gets together, but you'll want to regularly pursue these children, whether they ever show up or not.
 - **Visitor Active** are those who regularly attend weekly programs and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- **Visitor Inactive** are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you'll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you'll want to invite everyone you know.
- **First Timers** refer to visitors who have attended a program for the first time. You'll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.

May 2014

Focus: Marketing, Recruitment, Communications, Volunteer Thank You

Outcomes

- Clear, internal marketing processes have been established that allow all church members to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the children's ministry.
- Communication methods currently being used to promote the children's ministry and share the successes with the congregation have been evaluated and added to if necessary.
- Volunteer recruitment has continued.
- A volunteer thank you event has been scheduled and promotional materials have gone out to all children's ministry volunteers.
- A new and improved schedule for fall programming has been determined and advertising has begun for both the schedule and the Fall Kick-off.

June 2014

Focus: Visioning, Volunteer Thank You, MIA Children, Recruitment, Fall Kick-off

Outcomes:

- A Visioning Retreat with all major stakeholders has occurred producing visioning documents for the children's ministry (target audience, mission statement, core values, goals and structure).
- One-year benchmarks have been assigned to each three-year, revolving goal developed in the visioning process.
- A volunteer thank you event has taken place for all children's ministry volunteers.
- MIA children have been systematically reached out to.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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- All volunteer needs for the 2014-2015 school year for the children's ministry have been filled.
- A Fall Kick-off team has been recruited to begin planning for the start of the fall children's ministry programs.
- An electronic check-in system has been decided upon and the summer months are utilized for getting the system fully operational by the Fall kick-off.
- Technology needs have been reviewed and updated.

July 2014

Focus: Benchmarks, Curriculum Review, Database, Manual

Outcomes:

- The effectiveness of this past year's curriculum has been reviewed and decisions have been made for any necessary changes for the upcoming school year.
- The collection of updated information from each child and family has been completed and the database for the children's ministry has been updated with that new information. Every child has been "tagged" with a category.
- A Children's ministry Manual (both hard copy and digital) has been completed, including
 - Visioning documents
 - Directories
 - Volunteer directory
 - Volunteer training agendas and notes
 - Attendance records
 - Annual calendar
 - Results-based job descriptions
 - Game plans and new initiatives
 - Meeting agendas and minutes for the children's ministry team.
 - Discipleship Path and record of curriculum resources used for the current year
 - Budget and other financial documents
 - Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
 - Compliance documents



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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August 2014

Focus: Database, Major Event Coordinators and Notebooks, Leadership Launch

Outcomes:

- All major event notebooks have been updated by the event coordinators and given back to the children's staff to pass along to the next year's coordinator.
- All Major Event Coordinators who will be executing events through January 2015 have been met with for clarity of role and responsibility.
- With the most recent information on children and their families, a directory of all families and a directory of all volunteers have been created to be distributed at the Fall Kick-off.
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Safe Sanctuary Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.

September 2014

Focus: Compliance, Fall Kick-off, Curriculum, Audit

Outcomes:

- Curriculum has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they are trained to implement the curriculum.
- All children's programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuary policy.
- A Fall Kick-off has taken place that welcomed children and parents into a program they can get excited about, introduced parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about and provided a forum for receiving information from families. All participants feel energized and enthusiastic about the coming year's programs
- The new electronic check-in system has begun being used and any kinks are being worked out.
- An audit has been made of the new practices that have been put into place since the beginning of the Renovation period. Modifications have been made where it would be helpful.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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October 2014

Focus: Compliance, Budget

Outcomes:

- All paperwork for hands-on, weekly volunteers has been updated and in compliance with the safe church policy. Background checks have been completed on each volunteer.
- A detailed 2015 budget for the children's ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
- The new data management system is in place for attendance tracking and reporting. Monthly reports are shared with staff and the Children's Ministry Team on first-time visitors and absent children.

November 2014

Focus: Volunteer Training, Strategic Staffing, Major Event Coordinators

Outcomes:

- With the changes in the children's ministry, the staffing to meet the size and scope of the children's ministry has been evaluated and a game plan to meet those needs has been created if necessary.
- All Major Event Coordinators who will be executing event through May 2015 have been met with for clarity of role and responsibility.
- A mid-year volunteer training has been scheduled for January.

December 2014

Focus: Preventative Maintenance Calendar, Summer Calendar

Outcomes:

- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the children's ministry that will regularly deal with on-going "behind the scenes" ministry maintenance.
- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- The 2015 summer calendar has begun to be created.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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January 2015

Focus: Benchmarks, Calendars, Volunteer Training

Outcomes:

- The 2015 summer calendar has been completed.
- Work on the 2015-2016 calendar has begun.
- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers have received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.

February 2015

Focus: Calendar, Volunteer Recruitment

Outcomes:

- The 2015-2016 children’s ministry calendar has been completed through August 2016 and included a Fall Kick-off.
- Volunteer recruiting season has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.
 - Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2015-2016 school year.
 - The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
 - Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to children’s ministry.
- Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2015-2016.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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March 2015

Focus: Participation Goals

Outcomes:

- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all children's ministry events and weekly programs through August 2016 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- 75% of the one-year benchmarks have been completed.

April 2015

Focus: Final Wrap Up

Outcomes:

- The renovation work of the Renovation Team has been completed and mechanisms have been put in place to ensure oversight of a sustainable children's ministry.
- A final wrap up has taken place to update control documents, update the Children's Ministry Manual, evaluate the progress of completing the tasks presented in the MA assessment report, and deal with any current pressure points that are affecting the children's ministry.
- The staff and Renovation Team have celebrated what God has done with their 18-month investment.
- The Renovation Team has transitioned their role to providing support and accountability to the children's ministry volunteers and focusing on strategic issues such as three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, curriculum selection, calendars, and volunteer recruitment.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

115 Penn Warren Drive, Brentwood, TN 37027

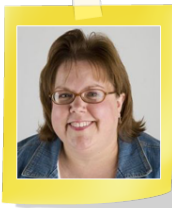
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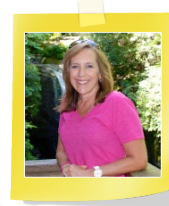
Stephanie Caro Senior Consultant stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com



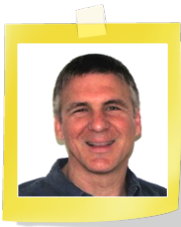
Stephanie Caro has been involved in ministry to children, youth and volunteers in the local church since...a long time. Her humorous, straightforward style keeps her busy presenting and coaching at conferences, training events, camps, mission trips, retreats, churches, etc. The author of 2010's, "Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches," published by Group/Simply Youth Ministry, her latest book, "99 Thoughts for the Smaller Church Youth Worker" came out in March 2011. Stephanie is also a contributing author to several youth ministry resources in addition to her regular column "Smaller Church Youth Ministry" in Group Magazine. Stephanie is a senior consultant for Mark DeVries' Ministry Architects out of Nashville, TN. Check out her Simply Youth Ministry Network blog at <http://morethandodgeball.com> She and her husband, parents of 7 children, live in Houston, TX.

Deone Perdue Staff Consultant deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

Deone has been in Children's Ministry for the past 18 years. Since 2010, Deone has been the Children's Director at Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in Johns Creek, GA. At Mount Pisgah she was tasked with the challenge of moving the Sunday school program from one campus to another and overhauling the existing Sunday morning and Children's worship programming. Both programs are currently thriving along with the Vacation Bible School program, which has grown from 250 to over 800 in three years.



Deone's passion is to help Children's leaders find and reach their potential while influencing their awareness for the next generation. She has spoken at North Georgia Methodist church training events, served on Methodist Conference planning committees, and offers motivational speaking to leaders in the Church and community. Deone lives in Roswell, GA and she has two adult daughters, Caitlin and Savannah.



Jeff Dunn-Rankin Vice-President of Consulting jeff@ymarchitects.com

Jeff has been Director of Youth at Christ United Methodist Church in Venice, FL since 1998. He has consulted with large and small youth and children's ministries from California to Florida and is a frequent speaker at events from the Group/Simply Convention to KidMin.

He is a regular columnist for Group Magazine, and In 2011, Jeff wrote two books, Before You Hire a Youth Pastor and The Indispensable Youth Pastor (Group Publishing), both co-authored with YMA President & Founder, Mark DeVries.

Before beginning church ministry, Jeff was managing editor of the Charlotte Sun newspaper. Jeff is a graduate of the Sewanee: The University of the South and has a Masters in Business Administration from Vanderbilt University. He currently lives in Venice, Florida with his wife, Mary Lou, and their two kids, Katie and Matthew.



stephanie.caro@ymarchitects.com deone.perdue@ymarchitects.com

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