

By Steve Jones (Fellowship Canada President)

Anyone who claims that their local church is committed to evangelism, but is not committed to kids or youth ministry just doesn't get it.

Billy Graham's Evangelistic Ministry has been telling us for decades that most North Americans come to Christ before their 18th birthday. Child Evangelism Fellowship's (CEF) ministry is currently working in almost 200 nations. That's amazing! Even more amazing is that CEF reported that five million children made professions of faith in their "Backyard Bible Clubs" during one summer of ministry.

I found some interesting information and statistics in a back issue of a CEF newsletter. CEF states the importance of evangelism to kids and youth. The reality is that 19 of 20 Christians come to Christ before the age of 25. After 25, the odds against someone coming to Christ increase dramatically.

The evangelist D. L. Moody was once asked how the night's meeting had gone. "We had two and a half conversions," he replied. "You mean two adults and one child?"

"No," Moody said. "Two children and one adult. The adult only has half his life left."

Shortly before his martyrdom at age 95, Polycarp said, "Eighty-six years have I served the Lord." Likely, he was converted at his mother's knee.

Billy Graham was converted as a teen. Matthew Henry was six, Isaac Watts was nine, W. A. Criswell was eight, and Stephen Olford was seven. They were not only saved from their sin, but the results of a sinful lifestyle in their teenage years. As former Youth for Christ President Jay Kesler once said, "any evangelism after high school isn't evangelism; it's really salvage."

Some say children who make early professions of faith often struggle with assurance, thinking, "I wasn't really sure of what I was doing when I was seven." However, could it be that the individual explaining the Gospel may have not been sure of what they were doing? None of us knows or understands the full salvation story upon conversion—children or adults. The criterion for salvation is not a seminary degree, but a willingness to believe and receive God's gift of salvation.

The great British Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon once said, "Out of a church of 2,700 members, I have never had to exclude a single one who was received while yet a child. Teachers and superintendents should not merely believe in the possibility of early conversion, but in the frequency of it." Why would church leaders believe that we should wait or be cautious to influence young minds? Advertisers don't wait. Advocates of cultural engineering in our schools don't wait. Predators online don't wait, nor does Hollywood.

So what are we doing to win children and youth to Christ? Get onside with Onside Athletics this Summer. Our Fellowship acquired a new outreach ministry in 2020 to support our churches. It's called Onside Athletics. Onside Athletics comes alongside our local churches and their community through sport by providing the best sporting experience for every family. Sport is an effective tool to engage children and families with the Gospel. Whether on a rink, a soccer pitch, or gymnasium, children and families are being introduced to Christ and disciple in their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus says it plainly: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:14, KJV). That is a double imperative, as strong a statement as Jesus can make it. Not only to allow them to come to Him, but also to not forbid them. You say your church is not doing much outreach these days—then start with outreach to kids. It's a wonderful door into your community.

Have a blessed week,

Steve

HYMN: SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME (William M. Hutchins, 1850)

1. When mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus,
The stern disciples drove them back and bade them depart;
But Jesus saw them ere they fled,
And sweetly smiled and kindly said,
“Suffer little children to come unto Me.
2. “For I will receive them, and fold them in My bosom;
I’ll be a Shepherd to those lambs, oh, drive them not away!
For if their hearts to Me they give,
They shall with Me in glory live:
Suffer little children to come unto Me.”
3. How kind was our Savior to bid those children welcome!
But there are many thousands who have never heard His
name;
The Bible they have never read,
They know not that the Savior said,
“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”
4. And still the kind Savior bids little children welcome,
For Jesus’ loving, tender heart to children is the same;
Though here His voice is no more heard,
From heav’n itself He speaks this word,
“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”