

Tips on how to make J12 happen in your local church

Almost 2 years ago we moved our ministry to The Rock church in Anaheim, CA which became our base of operations. Our goal was to create a working local model of our vision to see a generation living the seven words of Jesus, "I Must be about My Father's business."

Our core values on how to approach the development of healthy, vibrant and active young believers can be expressed and adapted in many different ways. As with any local model, each individual church makes adjustments to fit their style and culture of their church as a whole.

These core values listed below are what we have found to be essential in helping kids live the seven words at an early age.

1. Train kids to do the work of the ministry in areas of supervised leadership.

A. Demonstrate our belief in them

One of the most important things we can do for our kids is believe in them. God believes in us enough to have given us the responsibility of accomplishing His plan on this earth. If He believes in us then we must believe in each other. A young life that is faithfully believed in and never given up on will rise to that level of expectation. We expect that our kids want to serve, that they want to grow in the Lord and that they have the ability to do it at any age.

A Luke 2:49 Testimony:

Virtuous Clothing Line

11-Year-Old Tween

About seven years ago the Lord placed in my heart to start a business that our daughter Virtuous would one day take over. He spoke to me about a high end clothing line for girls and young women. The times being what they are and choices for modest dressing becoming limited, it was time to think about a creative line of modest clothing that would still be hip, modern and fun to wear.

However, with three other children to take care for and many other responsibilities taking priority at the time, the God inspired idea was put on hold. It was talked about here and there but never seriously pursued.

It was in the spring of 2007 at one of sessions of the L7 leadership training called “Dream Lab” that the Lord spoke to our daughter Virtuous. During a time when the kids were instructed to take some time and journal what the Lord spoke to them they were encouraged to “dream” and dream she did.

That Sunday afternoon she came home from “Dream Lab” with excitement in her heart. She began to talk about how the Lord had spoken to her very clearly and told her that she was called to design fashion clothing that would represent the Lord. I had never talked to Virtuous about what the Lord had showed me and so I was in awe of what the Lord was doing. The Lord was speaking to my 11 year old daughter about what she is called to do!

Pretty soon all the sketch pads she had accumulated over the past couple of years became serious business to her. My husband and I began to seek the lord on how to partner with our daughter as she began this area of being about her Father’s business with her business.

Since then she has begun to design shirts for different organizations including one for J12. She is also currently taking sewing lessons in pursuit of the next level of her calling.

The Lord has been faithful to provide the resources we needed every step of the way. All we have had to do is believe, step out in faith, and encourage our daughter in her God given dream.

Virtuous Joi Arevalos is about her Father’s business!

B. Give them basic and necessary tools to do the work of the ministry

When we started working with kids more closely in a local setting we were surprised to find out how little the kids really knew when it came to how believers function and just basic social skills. We assumed that because kids had been around something their whole life that they would automatically know how to do the things they saw. After this realization we incorporated a lot of basics into our leadership program for kids such as shaking hands, looking people in the eye when you speak, introductions, how to give their testimony, and how to pray with others.

Giving kids some of these basic tools builds their confidence and, in a sense, gives them permission to interact comfortably with adults and peers. It also demonstrates our belief in them because we have moved from telling them that, “We believe in you. Go for it!” to “We believe in you so much, we are going to give you the tools and give you an opportunity to go for it!”

A Luke 2:49 testimony:

Isaac Gonzalos, as a 12-year-old, was in charge of our lighting and media ministry. Before he went through our leadership training program, he was fairly shy and didn't have much interaction with the ministry. We discovered his gifts and passion, gave him some basic communication tools, and believed in him and his abilities. Soon after, he was holding a microphone in one of our leadership meetings reporting on the media department and the struggles he was having with faithfulness on the part of the teenagers that were volunteering. This sounds a lot like Jesus in the temple astounding leaders with his wisdom and knowledge at a young age.

C. Involve them in the process of evolving

Ministry is always growing, changing and adapting. Ministry is an evolutionary process that ebbs and flows incorporating different people, personalities, gifts mixes and abilities. The younger our kids can be brought into this process, the smoother the transition from becoming a young person receiving from the church to becoming a solid Christian serving in the church. Yes, training kids how to serve in ministry where change is constant is more work in the beginning but the work IS the ministry. Guiding young lives to serve with a grateful heart while adjusting to changes in position and personnel is an invaluable tool that will help them in every area of life. This also teaches them how we relate to the Lord as growing in Him is a process – we never arrive. We don't work for the ultimate goal of having a perfectly smooth-running ministry controlled by tweens or adults but in everything we do, how can we involve them in the process of evolving. I like to say, “Yes, it is messy, and messy is beautiful.”

As an example, a few areas of involvement are listed below:

- Greet at special events
- Take new kids on tours and introduce them to leaders
- Pray with adults in courtyard
- Registration/check-in
- Missions Is . . . (give gifts to orphanage in Ukraine)
- Make get well cards – first time visitor cards

2. Connect them to what is happening in the Body at large

We are all aware of the trend of kids who grow up in church but somehow don't take ownership and end up leaving the church for a few years until they grow up and have kids themselves, then return. What we are finding is that kids are served and entertained in church until they graduate from high school. Then, what they have understood 'church' to be ends and a new system begins where they are asked to serve and participate. The 'church' life they identify with is gone and we expect them to identify with something else and have immediate ownership. Connecting the kids to what is happening in their church as a whole helps give them identity and ownership. They know the journey through building programs and what they, as young people, were able to contribute. They pray for the needs of the whole church so that they can see the faithfulness of God to His church. They become aware of all the many people and positions it takes to keep a church alive and thriving. This perspective allows them to see where they fit into the big picture and how much they are needed and valued.

As an example, a few areas of involvement are listed below:

- Work day/ cleanup
- Raise money for building program
- Build teams in kids church of all generations (grandpa to teenagers)
- Serve food at church functions

3. Discover the dreams that are in their heart and connect them with adults that are doing it.

We have developed ministry teams in J12 that are constantly looking for giftings in our kids. They encourage the kids to step out and try something new. Our leaders are also looking for ways to be connectors. When they find that a child has an interest, they try to connect them to an adult or a ministry that is involved in that work or interest. Generational gaps do not exist when young people are getting to learn and participate in what they are passionate about and adults are able to pour into young lives from their knowledge and experience.

4. Develop Team Leaders – Not Volunteers

The truth is, one or two people cannot possibly reach as many as a team can. Investing in the lives of our leaders, our team, as they minister to the kids gives us a much farther reach than we could ever have otherwise.

A. Develop strong teams of men and women

Usually, kid's church is comprised of mostly, if not all, women. In J12, it is the other way around. We have more men than women. In a world where most kids do not have a father figure, we believe it is vitally important to use every opportunity to model manhood. These ministry teams are shaping our very near future and helping to determine destinies. They are making deposits that will affect future generations and effectively equipping our kids with spiritual tools to combat issues none of us have ever had to deal with.

Everyone has something beneficial to help kids. Most of the people working in our children's ministry said they never once thought of working with kids but now wouldn't be anywhere else. Each team member has a significant role in our services. None of them come just to be a door monitor or for crowd control. Each team member plays a valuable role in a J12 service. This is a key to keeping leaders. We never refer to our team members as volunteers. The word volunteer implies temporary help with nominal commitment. The words team or leader evoke ownership. Our team members have unique God-given gifts and we expect them to function in them. They are fulfilled as they accomplish God's purpose for their lives through the use of their God-given gifts and the kids receive the benefit of that gift.

B. Develop community

These teams are partners in ministry and laborers for the cause of Christ. This is a special bond and is to be fostered and respected. There needs to be an atmosphere where everyone feels that we are all in this together.

A Luke 2:49 testimony:

Grant, who serves in J12, is a former police officer. A lady named Darlene, who was deaf in one ear and had at one time been homeless, had just joined the team. She walked in to the J12 theater, saw Grant and became very nervous. He had been her arresting officer at one time. She walked up to him and said, "Do you remember me?" Grant said, "Yes, that's all in the past. We serve in ministry together now." After a few months of serving together, she was believing for healing for her ear. Grant, along with other leaders in J12 laid hands on her and was completely healed after having been deaf since birth. This is community.

The Tags: Service components

Our services are broken up into sections. Each section we strive to keep it to a 12 minute minimum. We do this because of the attention span of this age group and studies show that kids retain more if it comes in small pieces, packaged in different ways.

The service components are:

J12 Worship A blend of adult, teen and tween worshippers

Live to Give Offering

M&M **Memorize and Meditate:** creative ways for kids to memorize a key verse for that lesson (signing)

T&T **Tests and Testimonies :** A different person shares a testimony each week

P&C **Pray and Confess:** Confessions and prayers said and rehearsed in unison

R&R **Read and Re-write:** A time for journaling on what they are learning from the Lord and the scripture for that lesson

Fun Zone An area with games and inflatables