

A Church for All God's Children

CHECKLIST

IMPORTANT: This Checklist should be used with the Guidelines and Reporting Form contained in this packet. Order information for resources mentioned here will be found in the Resources list at the end of this Checklist

A. EDUCATING THE CONGREGATION ABOUT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN 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 in your community by:
 - a. forming a committee or task force;
 - b. ordering copies of *Putting Children and Their Families First: A Planning Handbook for Congregations* from Service Center (1-800-305-9857);
 - c. using the handbook to guide the committee's assessment process;
 - d. 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, with an emphasis on children in widely differing circumstances and communities.
5. Hold a series (at least two sessions) of seminars on the needs of children in your community, to include one

"hearing" with a panel of various community leaders and one "open mike" session to hear from children 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 listed under "Brain Research.")
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 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 families and statistics on children 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 children with legislative alerts and other current information in each issue of the church newsletter;
 - c. a Children and Poverty 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.
10. Other _____



Kristen Hensleigh. Purvis UMC, Purvis, Miss.

B. MAKING CHURCH FACILITIES SAFE AND WELCOMING FOR CHILDREN 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;
 - c. child-sized bathroom facilities;
 - d. buildings checked for lead and asbestos;
 - e. playgrounds safe, secure, and supervised;
 - f. hand-rails on stairs reachable by a 3-year-old;
 - g. child-height directional signs with pictures;
 - h. cleaning supplies locked away;
 - i. facilities inspected regularly for safety (such as no ladders or carpentry items lying around);
 - j. 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, with measures such as:
 - 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. crayons and paper in pews, or activity kits to be picked up by families on the way into church;
 - d. good selection of children's books in church library;
 - e. murals and special designated walls for children's art;
 - f. safe, secure, and supervised outside play area;
 - g. ushers, church staff, and other adults greet children by name.
3. Assign the church school committee or children's 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. age-appropriate toys for nursery and preschool classes;
 - c. child care available during worship services and meetings;
 - d. all classrooms bright and visually stimulating;
 - e. all classrooms clean (standard: that adults in

Sunday clothes will sit on floor/carpet and eat from tables).

- f. *The First Three Years: A Guide for Infants, Toddlers and Twos* used for improving nursery facilities.
4. Other _____



Miranda Griffin. Thaxton UMC, Thaxton, Miss.

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. 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;
 - 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 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 walking to and from school.
 6. Sponsor a before-and/or after-school ministry that provides a safe haven for children.
 7. Other _____
-
6. Design a study series for children in grades 4-6 and middle school using the resource Building a New Community: God’s Children Overcoming Racism.
 7. 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).
 8. Provide opportunities for parents (in your congregation and in the community) to learn about raising their children as faithful disciples.
 9. Match an adult faith mentor with each child in the congregation (perhaps beginning with infants, kindergartners, third graders or confirmands).
 10. Design a 9-week study session for parents on faith development of young children in the home, using Faith Home, a study resource.
 11. Sponsor an annual mission study series for children, using the ecumenical study theme and materials from Friendship Press. The study should involve children in mission outreach.
 12. Other _____
-

D. HELPING CHILDREN GROW AS FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

GOAL: To acknowledge the spiritual growth needs of children 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 happens within the congregation. Use United Methodist resources such as Planning for Christian Education (Discipleship Resources, Order #DR134, \$9.95 1-800-685-4370), Children and Prayer (Upper Room Books, Order #UR803, \$11.95 1-800-972-0433), “Faith Development of Children” (leaflet, available through the Office of Children’s Ministry, GBOD, P.O. Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202).
2. Provide one new opportunity each quarter for children 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 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. Include children in the financial stewardship campaign.

E. INVOLVING CHILDREN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

GOAL: To re-order congregational life in ways that recognize and involve children and youth as full participants. **In this section, complete #1 and at least one other.**

1. Regularly involve children in worship by:
 - a. welcoming them and encouraging their participation in all worship services, including Communion;
 - b. asking children what songs they like to sing and including at least one in each worship service;
 - c. inviting children 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 in special music times through singing, playing small hand instruments, dancing, etc.;
 - e. training children for special tasks such as acolytes, ushers, and greeters;
 - f. using children’s art as bulletin covers once a month;
 - g. numbering each item in the worship bulletin so children can more easily follow the order of worship.
2. Order a copy of Children Worship! from Discipleship

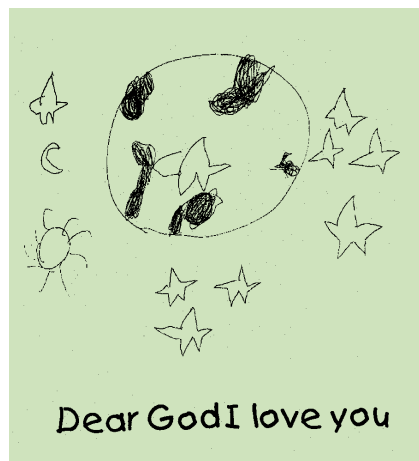
- Resources, and use as a guide in helping children and adults prepare for worship.
3. If “children’s time” is a regular part of your worship service, reverse the process once a month, having the children provide teaching moments for adults.
 4. Include children and/or youth as members of all church committees (recognizing that this will mean scheduling meetings when they can attend and otherwise treating them as full members).
 5. Include a regular children’s column, written by the children, in the church newsletter, or create a separate newsletter by and for children, mailed directly to all children of the church.
 6. 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, etc.
 7. Other _____
-

F. REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY

GOAL: To engage in programs and activities aimed at improving life for children 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.



Ben Humphrey. First UMC, Quiteman, Miss.

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 in the community.

4. Provide supervised before and/or after-school programs 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.
 5. Offer weekly “Parents’ Day (and/or Evening) Out.”
 6. Offer a drug prevention program for neighborhood children and youth, 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.
 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.
 10. Send community children to church camp along with children of the congregation.
 11. Sponsor a summer program for church and community children (could be an extension of Vacation Church School or a summer day camp).
 12. Develop a community garden on church property, encouraging (and teaching/helping) children 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. Sponsor and nurture partnerships between experienced mothers/ grandmothers and new and/or single mothers and between experienced fathers/grandfathers and new young fathers.
 17. Other _____
-

G. ADVOCATING FOR LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES THAT IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LIVES AND 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 a child 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 child advocacy information and legislative action alerts in each issue of your church newsletter.
3. Sponsor a monthly 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.
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 children's needs 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 children poor and increase the likelihood of children 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 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?

- g. Does this program or policy refrain from punishing children 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 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 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 on Children and Families for all candidates for office. Ask them to state their positions on issues affecting children 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 _____



Dee Works. First UMC, Iuka, Miss.

H. RELATING TO CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

GOAL: To raise consciousness among United Methodists about the lives of children 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 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 like “Rugmark” 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 around the world. Distribute the articles among members and have one person report each week (during worship, at weekday fellowship evening, or other regular event) on the situation and needs of children 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 around the world. Send contributions through Advance Specials to one or more ministries serving children, such as:
 - Child Development Villages in Zaire, #012670-7RA
 - Childhood Immunizations, #982400-7
 - Children and Youth in Costa Rica, #012187-5RA
 - Children in High-Risk Situations in Argentina, #703200-4
 - Street Children in Brazil, #714367-6 or #714490-0
 - Children in Latin America and the Caribbean, #011244-8RA
 - Children Now Program, Philippines, #240135-8

- The Children’s Center, Mississippi USA, #762500-5
- Alaska Children’s Services USA, #931430-6
- Native American Children’s Fund USA, #583581-7

AND MANY OTHERS - CHECK Advance Specials Catalog or ABC’s: Advance Book of Children’s Projects.

7. Begin (or strengthen) an annual focus on mission for the children of your church, culminating in an offering by children for the United Methodist “Children’s Fund for Christian Mission.” Order the resource packet. In addition, order and use with children copies of the Children’s Prayer Calendar.
8. Encourage children in Sunday Church School and Vacation Church School to get to know children in other parts of the world through pen pals. An organization for this purpose, related to UNICEF, is the Just Like Me Pen Pal Club. Another is Tapori, the children’s branch of the Fourth World Movement.
10. Other _____

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 a Children’s 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 children’s involvement in the life of the church and make suggestions to appropriate church bodies.
2. Have the Children’s Advisory Council annually and systematically evaluate the congregation’s ministry with children (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 revamp the church’s training in light of learnings; 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 children in the church and the community and with the impoverished.
6. Other _____