



Children's Ministry Beyond the Church Walls

Do you find yourself wishing for more children in your church on Sunday mornings? Instead of hoping they come to you, consider expanding your church's imagination to include the local school. Here's a practical idea to bring this vision to life!

An Elementary Book Club: A Secular Ministry

I am a full-time professional Christian Educator in a church. I lead a variety of children's ministry programs at my church. But one day, I began a secular book club for second graders at my local elementary school, and it has felt more like ministry than many church activities and we never discuss God or the Bible.

How It All Started

It began with my 2nd grader expressing a desire for a book club like the one I attend. Inspired by this, we decided to start a club with specific priorities:

- **Diverse Authors:** The goal was to diversify the authors read by the children, promoting an anti-racist school community. Books with the #ownvoices notation were prioritized, ensuring that authors shared the same cultural background as their stories.
- **Series Starters:** The first book in a series was always chosen to encourage further reading.

Book Club Format

The children's book club was modeled after an adult club, focusing on discussion, snacks, friendship, and fun. This model is based on 2nd grade but could be adapted for other Elementary ages. Here's the basic format:

- **Read Aloud:** Begin by reading a chapter together.
- **Author Exploration:** Learn about the author.
- **Discussion Questions:** Discuss three questions related to the book.
- **Theme Snack:** Enjoy a snack loosely connected to the book.
- **Activities:** Engage in 2-3 games, crafts, or activities related to the book.

Key Learnings and Tips

After a year of running the club, here are some valuable insights:

1. **Keep It Small:** Limiting the group to 10 kids fostered close connections without overwhelming the leader.
2. **Parent Volunteers:** Involve different parents each time to assist.
3. **Convenient Timing:** Meet right after school in the library for about an hour.
4. **Monthly Meetings:** Once a month is sufficient to build community without burnout.

5. Set Expectations: Start with a covenant to outline behavior expectations.
6. Mix Leadership: Alternate between adult-led and kid-led sessions for a variety of book selections.
7. Collaborate with Staff: Work with the grade-level teaching team and librarian for support and resources.
8. First-Come, First-Serve Signups: This method, while not the best, still seemed to create a diverse group.
9. Resource for Book Selection: Tools like [Imagination Soup's book ideas](#) offer guidance and support and let kids vote on curated options.

Impact and Ministry

This book club has become a holy space, akin to children's ministry. The consistency of the same ten kids fosters strong group bonds. A loving, trusted adult provides a safe, caring environment where children feel valued. The group supported each other on bad days and good ones. Through the books chosen and group conversations, the values of love, kindness, peace, and inclusion were shared within community and connections were built. The group celebrated wins in reading and in life. At the end of the year, each child received a personalized bookmark and a book with an affirmation note, celebrating their unique qualities in the group.

Call to Action

Imagine what impact your congregation could have with 1-2 adults volunteering once a month. Whether it's a book club, LEGO club, service club, or running club, trust that God will show up in these spaces! See how this small step can transform your community and church.

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