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A Reader's Guide to Children's Ministry

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DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

A Reader's Guide to Children's Ministry

Shannon Clarkson Rains, Jennifer Reinsch Schroeder, and Ron Bruner

Abstract: *Although the church has long practiced ministry with children, this field of ministerial practice is taking new and exciting shapes in the 21st century. Because of the expanding and substantial body of literature produced in this discipline over the last several decades, we have assembled an annotated bibliography intended to give scholars, practitioners, and church members an overview of the more significant printed work that addresses Christian perspectives on ministry with children.*

Ministry with children is older than the church; the people of God have long wrestled with how to empower the native spirituality of children to thrive and take the shape of an enduring, resilient faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The shape of children's ministry, though, has varied over time; by the twentieth century, practitioners focused on education, a largely intellectual enterprise pursued through Bible schools.

In recent decades, children's ministry has broadened in scope. On the heels of youth ministry, a new category of practical ministry emerged: the children's minister. Conversations about faith and character formation as an embodied set of spiritual practices have grown to include the youngest among us. At the same time, scholars and practitioners have examined the faith and practices of children from the perspectives of education, social science, theology, and the biblical text. Consequently, a deep and broad body of literature has emerged, giving scholars, ministers, and parents much to think about as they shape their ministry with children.

In this work, we list and describe the books that we find particularly important in today's conversation about children and ministry with them. Different readers will find differing works to be important to them at any given time. Libraries at universities where children's ministry is taught should have all of them. We have categorized each work by designating its usefulness and approachability to the scholar, the minister, the parent, or some combination of these groups. We have not included curricula, "how to" books, or children's Bibles as those are different categories of work.

The Spirituality of Children

Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. 358 pp. [Scholar] Coles chose to study children's moral and spiritual development after witnessing the racist response of crowds lining the street as Ruby Bridges, faithfully and undeterred, trekked toward her recently desegregated school. One of a series of books exploring the inner lives of children, *The Spiritual Life of Children* surveys Coles' research as he listens to children respond to questions designed to draw out their spiritual understanding. Not limited to Christian children, Coles includes children from Islam, Jewish, and secular backgrounds. Reflecting on his interviews and interactions with children, he discerns how children perceive such themes as God, salvation, good, evil, and death. Ultimately, Coles draws the conclusion that "children are pilgrims . . . travelers on a road with some spiritual purpose in mind," journeying throughout their life in relationship with others (p. 322).

Csinos, David M. *Children's Ministry That Fits: Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Nurturing Children's Spirituality*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011. 173 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] What does it mean to have one's faith shaped in a way that organically leads to encountering God? This is the premise of Csinos' work. Through his research with thirteen, evangelical Christian children and their faith communities, Csinos discovers and presents four spiritual styles—word, symbol, emotion, and action. These styles are the driving force behind a child's connection with God. He offers a thorough explanation of the principles guiding each style, how those principles are visible in the lives of his research participants, and how children actively engage these axioms within their own lives. He engages such questions as "Who helps children to experience God?" and "How do they nurture their relationships with God?" Csinos does not, though, allow his work to rest solely on the theoretical. He offers practical advice for those who desire to nurture a child's spiritual life. This advice encapsulates big picture ideas that demonstrate an inclusive theology of children and faith communities. He also describes methodologies creating a nurturing environment for those who seek to demonstrate the undeniable intersection of God's unfolding story with the lives of children.

Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper, 1981. 332 pp. [Scholar] Fowler has constructed the best-known stage model of faith development to date. Building on the work of Kohlberg, Erikson, and Piaget, he conducts a social science exploration of the connections between developmental theories and the growth of human spirituality. The six stages of his model extend from infancy to mature adulthood; not all adults move past the third stage. Although many now dispute some of Fowler's assertions or question the validity of age and stage models for faith, this book remains prominent in informed conversations about faith development.

Hay, David, and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, rev. ed. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006. 223 pp. [Scholar] When "Spiritual and Moral Education" became a part of the standard British school curriculum in 1996, authorities sought to better understand childhood spirituality. Hay, a zoologist by education, argues that spirituality is not a cultural artifact but a fundamental aspect of humanity. He and Nye find children to be born with spiritual potential and capable of profound religious thinking early in life. Families shape native spirituality into a particular form, a faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for example. Unfortunately, modern cultures are often destructive of childhood spirituality. This work demonstrates the highly relational aspects of childhood spirituality and discusses how to nurture that spirituality. The revised edition considers relevant research between 1998 and 2006.

Nye, Rebecca. *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters*. London: Church House, 2009. 107 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Drawing on research, Rebecca Nye explores the "rich natural spiritual capacity of childhood" in her book *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (xi). In doing so, she focuses on not only the importance of developing a child's spirituality, but also discovering the essential role of Christian nurture and worship within that growth. Nye begins by exploring spiritual development through six defined criteria: space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust. Nye further offers practical advice on how to foster a child's spirituality through prayer, the Bible, and imagery.

Spiritual Formation of Children

Anthony, Michael, ed. *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation: Four Views*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006. 286 pp. [Scholar/Minister] In the introduction of his book, Michael Anthony explains a common problem facing children's ministry leaders, the need to reconcile a theory of children's spiritual formation with the practice of children's ministry. First, he describes a philosophy and theology of children's spirituality and then proposes a model in which to understand children's spiritual formation. Drawing upon Holmes' phenomenology of prayer and Kolb's Learning Cycle, Anthony introduces a four-quadrant model of children's spiritual formation. Most ministers will identify with one of the four styles Anthony describes: Contemplative-Reflective, Instructional-Analytic, Pragmatic-Participatory, and Media-Driven Active Engagement. Following this extensive introduction are four chapters contributed by respected leaders in children's ministry, each describing one of these styles. The chapters include scriptural, theological, and philosophical rationale supporting each model. Then, the authors describe the model's program characteristics and design. Finally, each chapter concludes with responses from authors aligned with each of the other models. As such, readers develop a deepening appreciation of each model utilized within children's ministry.

Boyd, Jared Patrick. *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017. 304 pp. [Minister/Parent] Boyd asserts that children's spiritual formation is rooted in the imagination; consequently, he accesses ancient Ignatian practices to construct a practice of guided prayer he calls imaginative prayer. With the guidance of parents, Boyd asserts, children can experience a unique prayerful connection with God that is not merely intellectual. After initial explanatory material, Boyd presents six units of weekly guided imaginative prayer on core topics: God's love, loving others, forgiveness, God as king, the good news of God, and the mission of God. Each unit has six sessions, with detailed instructions for parents who wish to have an ongoing conversation about the experiences of prayer they share with their children. Boyd intends this material to offer a yearlong spiritually formative path for children ages five to thirteen.

Caldwell, Elizabeth. *I Wonder: Engaging a Child's Curiosity about the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. 160 pp. [Minister/Parent] In Caldwell's view, it is important to avoid teaching children to read the Bible one way when they are young, only to attempt to retrain them as adults. Instead of answering the difficult questions of children simplistically, she calls adults to teach children *how* to read and wrestle with the text for a resilient understanding that empowers a lifelong exploration of the Bible. Beyond "wonder," she equips readers with other practices and tools for this co-exploration. Her examination of story and how children's Bibles and parents edit and present those stories (and how they ought to do this) is insightful.

Keeley, Robert J. *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008. 158 pp. [Minister/Parent] Faith presented superficially is incomplete; there must be a broadness to a person's faith that speaks to the whole of the person. Keeley explores what it means to develop a "three-dimensional faith"—one that affects a child's head, heart, and spirit. In doing so, he presents six ministry principles that are crucial to faith development in a child. These range from the importance of a community of faith to the impact that meaningful worship has on a child's spiritual formation. Throughout this work, Keeley offers practical advice that is applicable to parents, ministers, and volunteers on how to purposefully nurture the faith of a child.

Stonehouse, Catherine. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 240 pp. [Scholar/Minister] The author begins with the assertion that "spiritual formation during childhood is too important to simply perpetuate programs and hope for the best" (p. 11). This book moves past traditional approaches to Christian education that are based on educational psychology and human development. Instead, Stonehouse asserts the benefits of a traditional approach within an overall theological framework. She develops an integrated approach to faith formation informed by the whole person. Though Stonehouse emphasizes the importance of the faith community—and especially the parents—in the spiritual formation of a child, she does not consider the presence of one or the other to be enough. Instead, the author proposes that the journey consists of experiencing God with each other through a variety of modes so that the full blessing of the path is lived out.

Yust, Karen Marie. *Real Kids, Real Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. 210 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Yust explores the concept of bicultural identity to understand the spiritual formation of children. Children inhabit two worlds, the secular and the religious, in which they must be acculturated. Acculturation is the process of inviting children into the stories, values, practices, and rituals of a community as identity formation (p. 29). Parents and ministers have a responsibility to identify and/or create opportunities for spiritual formation while empowering the agency of children. Yust emphasizes the essential role of prayer, specifically contemplative prayer practices, to attune children to God's Spirit. In so doing, children are prepared to engage the secular culture, rooted in their Christian identity, and propelled by the Spirit to enact Kingdom compassion and justice. In addition to theory, Yust provides many examples of the various activities she proposes, creating an accessible work for scholars, ministers, and parents.

Theology of Childhood

Bunge, Marcia. "A More Vibrant Theology of Children," *The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University*, 2003. [PDF](#), 9 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Bunge describes and rejects several simplistic and anemic views of children prevalent in today's society and moves the conversation forward by constructing a more accurate and complex view based on six important biblical concepts.

Bushnell, Horace. *Christian Nurture*. Forge Village, MA: Murray, 1888; reprint ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. 351 pp. [Scholar] First published in 1847, *Christian Nurture* is a foundational work in ministry with children. The thesis of this book is "That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself [sic] as being otherwise" (p. 4). Bushnell casts aside much of Calvinistic doctrine and rejects the need of children to experience a crisis conversion as the result of evangelistic fervor. He emphasizes that "qualified" parents and "established" congregations are responsible for the spiritual nurture of children and gives instruction for that nurture. He also warns that nurture can fail when parents fall short or churches create a "poisonous" atmosphere.

Couture, Pamela D. *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000. 144 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Couture asserts that our pastoral care of vulnerable children is “an ethical lens through which we can focus the general work of pastoral and practical theology” (p. 13). The unfortunate habit of many churches has been to periodically throw financial resources at the problem of childhood poverty. Instead, Couture maps various poverties and identifies two larger categories: material poverty and a poverty stemming from tenuous connections. She shows that shared responsibility for children besides our own offspring and healthy relationships with those children build the only sustainable path from poverty for vulnerable children. This work is essential for ministries seeking to minister alongside marginalized populations.

Fewell, Danna Nolan. *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003. 243 pp. [Scholar, Minister] Fewell, a Hebrew Bible scholar, engages texts from the Hebrew Bible involving children in hopes that readers will read “the Bible for the sake of our children” and “engage in the more arduous work of repairing our world” (p. 40). Sanitized stories for children are not her aim but rather careful readings that deal with intractable social justice issues. Building on years of engagement of these difficult texts, Fewell constructs midrash in the shape of story, play, essay, poem, and dialogue to allow the reader to hear the text anew and “interrupting” it to ask the hard questions necessary to reshape the world for vulnerable children.

Jensen, David H. *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005. 154 pp. [Scholar] Jensen constructs a theology of childhood he intends to serve as a “basis of an ecclesial ethic of care for all children” (p. xii). He highlights the vulnerability of children and the potential this virtue represents for learning, relationships, and spirituality. Acknowledging his contemporary context, he finds childhood vulnerability too often abused by others—typically adults—who violently force children into victimhood. Jensen marks a path through three means Christians ought to address this vulnerability: Scripture, doctrine and practice. Ultimately, he finds four essential practices of vulnerability in the lives of children and the church: baptism, peacemaking, sanctuary, and prayer.

Mercer, Joyce Ann. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2005. 292 pp. [Scholar/Minister] At its primary level, the whole of this work emerges out of a desire to push back against “the way in which children constantly receive ambivalent messages from the society and from the church about their worth and their welcome” (p. 2). In doing so, Mercer takes both a theoretical and a practical approach to the theological development of children in considering how they are shaped spiritually. Not only does she examine and challenge the accepted practices of faith communities in relation to children from the perspective of feminist theology, she also presents strategies to counter those practices in a way that does not allow the prevalent one-size-fits-all, consumerist model of many faith communities to remain the dominant influence.

Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J. *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. 220 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] As a practical and feminist theologian, Miller-McLemore considers the complexity of raising imperfect children in an imperfect world. In this context, the topics of childhood innocence, guilt, and knowledge must be considered and debated. Miller-McLemore reviews the varied historical Christian perspectives of children, demonstrates their contributions and details their flaws and their consequences. In the process, she develops a coherent theology of children that acknowledges their agency in this world. Finally, Miller-McLemore acknowledges the crucial role of both parents and faith community in the spiritual formation of children.

Pais, Janet. *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991. 172 pp. [Scholar, Minister] Having suffered childhood abuse, Pais speaks on behalf of children experiencing abuse. Her construction of a liberation theology for children serves to rehabilitate adult attitudes and behaviors toward children. Pais avoids a simplistic disposal of the “Father” image of God but rehabilitates the metaphor so as to establish God as a parent who models “mutuality, respect, unity, and wholeness” instead of authoritarianism (p. 3). She shows how the gospel can be healing for both the abused and abuser. Finally, Pais calls the church to enact a theology of liberation for the sake of children.

Historical Theology of Children

Bakke, O. M. *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Brian McNeil, trans. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. 348 pp. [Scholar] Bakke's work, translated from Norwegian by Brian McNeil, closes a gap in the literature that has essentially ignored researching children. He explores the Greco-Roman culture, New Testament backgrounds, and Patristic writings to describe the early church's perception of children. This proves to be difficult. Bakke finds that, with the exception of John Chrysostom's *De Inani Gloria*, "there are, in fact, no writings that introduce concern for children and their needs as a subject on the theological agenda" in antiquity (p. 13). Therefore, Bakke dives deeply into the Patristics for snippets shedding light on ancient views of children. A review of the historical context is a necessary first step. In Chapter 2, he introduces the key concept of *logos* or the ability to reason. Ancient society had three levels of persons: 1) free men who had *logos*, 2) women and older men who had the potential for *logos*, and 3) slaves, barbarians, and children who lacked *logos*. Society dishonored children by often using them as a metaphor for a lack of *logos*. With this understood, Bakke explores difficult childhood topics in the early church: education, children's participation in worship and sacraments, a child's role in the family, infanticide, sexual relations, and more. He examines the spiritual standing of children, parental roles, and the increasing worth of children as Christianity expanded.

Berryman, Jerome W. *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace*. New York: Morehouse, 2009. 276 pp. [Scholar] Berryman, a scholar whose practice has broadly influenced ministry with children, turns from the practical to the theological in this work. Surveying the work of twenty-five theologians, he considers attitudes toward and practices with children in six eras of the church. He locates several themes. In each era, Berryman finds ambivalence; there are both "low" views (i.e., children are depraved) and "high" views of children (i.e., children are gifts from God). The other themes include ambiguity and indifference. After his historical analysis, he constructs a theology of children based on his view of children as a means of grace; children are a means God uses to bring salvation.

Bunge, Marcia, ed., *The Child in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 467 pp. [Scholar/Minister] To provide insight into biblical perspectives on children, Bunge gathers a set of eighteen essays from world-class biblical scholars. Her contributors exegete relevant texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament; others present thematic essays that cover larger biblical concepts about children and faith. Though the Bible is not a book about children, a careful reader finds that children are more present and important in Scripture than often thought. Bunge and her coeditors—Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa—also include a selected bibliography of scholarship addressing children in the biblical text.

Bunge, Marcia J., ed. *The Child in Christian Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. 513 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Bunge has compiled an essential collection of scholarly essays that present the historical span of the theology of children from the New Testament to contemporary thought. Each essay considers the perspective of an important Christian thinker fairly described by an expert in that field. The work has a tremendous diversity in voice and application.

Doctrinal Theology of Children

Aland, Kurt. *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* G. R. Beasley-Murray, trans. Library of History and Doctrine. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961. 120 pp. [Scholar] In his famous written exchange with Jeremias (see below), Aland denies any early practice of infant baptism by the church. He agrees that it is indicated by Patristic writers, but only from the third century and later. Before this, Aland sees the practice as an isolated observance. As to Christian baptism being an equivalent of Jewish proselyte baptism, Aland claims that Jeremias has no convincing evidence. Finally, Aland refutes Jeremias's contention that the *oikos* formula in the household conversion narratives in Acts necessarily includes children.

Harwood, Adam, and Kevin E. Lawson, eds. *Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017. 232 pp. [Scholar/Minister] For centuries, the salvific and ecclesial standing of children have been the subject of much debate. This book tackles these issues from the perspective of five major faith traditions: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran,

Reformed, and Baptist. In the introduction, Lawson poses four common theological questions concerning children and sin, salvation, church membership, and doctrinal instruction. Five authors, each representing one of the faith traditions, explores the four questions in contributed essays. In addition, each essay includes responses from the other four authors, drawing readers into a conversational debate that serves to deepen the reader's theology of children. Lawson's closing essay builds on the common beliefs of the five traditions and charges leaders to consider ministry *to, for, with,* and *by* children.

Holmes, Urban T. *Young Children and the Eucharist*. New York: Seabury, 1972. 123 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Holmes, an Episcopalian theologian, connects theology and Scripture with work from psychological and educational theorists in his discussion of children and communion. His discussions of human development and its linkage with the development of faith are insightful. He goes beyond stating that participation in communion is acceptable for children; he asserts that their participation is key to Christian formation. Holmes presents a theology of communion, an explanation of the connection of the family to the child's experience of communion, and suggestions for the practice of communion with children.

Jeremias, Joachim. *Infant Baptism: The First Four Centuries*, David Cairns, trans. Library of History and Doctrine, (London: SCM, 1960). 112 pp. [Scholar] In one of the longest scholarly exchanges about infant baptism (with Kurt Aland, above), Jeremias asserts that infants were baptized from the very beginnings of the church. He cites the household conversion narratives in Acts, compares the rite to circumcision, makes inferences from New Testament passages, notes ancient inscriptions, and quotes excerpts from Patristic writers.

Jeremias, Joachim. *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, Dorthea M. Barton, trans. Studies in Historical Theology 1. Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962). 92 pp. [Scholar] Jeremias writes a rejoinder to Aland (above).

Jeschke, Marlin. *Believer's Baptism for Children of the Church*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000. 157 pp. [Scholar/Minister] From his perspective as a Mennonite scholar, Jeschke constructs a coherent theology for the practice of believer baptism for children growing up in the

church and for children not raised by believing parents. He acknowledges the reality and importance of conversion experiences in the biblical and contemporary world yet finds dramatic conversion to be a poor model for the faith development of children. Jeschke demonstrates instead that children should grow up among the faith community in such a way that no radical conversion of lifestyle is necessary. His work makes respectful, uncomplicated use of the biblical text and works coherently with his theology of the church and theology of salvation.

McKnight, Scot. *It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018. 128 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Although raised a Baptist, McKnight is now a practicing Anglican who supports infant baptism. Although many deny that Scripture says anything about infant baptism, McKnight persuasively builds a case, reasserting some of the arguments Jeremias (above) raised earlier while constructing new theological connections. The book stands as a clear statement of practice for Anglicans and a helpful explanation of the logic behind infant baptism for outsiders.

Children and Worship

Castleman, Robbie. *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship*. Expanded edition. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. 139 pp. [Minister/Parent] This work is built upon the premise that church is about more than being physically present; it is about worshiping God—regardless of one's age. As the title explains, it is primarily directed toward parents desiring to help their children discover what it means to worship God and how to do so. Castleman uses her own experiences to shape a work that acknowledges the challenges that can accompany worship yet reflects on the blessing that comes from experiencing worship through the perspective of a child. She offers practical tips that encompass the different liturgical components. While apparently simplistic, these practices are ultimately incredibly tangible ways to help one's child encounter God in a way that moves one toward an intentional relationship with their Creator.

Chapman, Kathleen. *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003. 186 pp.

[Minister/Parent] Chapman explores the idea of worship as the bond that secures a lifelong relationship with God and how that relationship could and should be nurtured at a young age. Chapman supports this assertion through a brief reflection on the traditional approach of Christian education that shortsightedly aligns information with spiritual formation. Instead, it should be viewed as a step in understanding who God is and why we worship God. In doing so, children are then provided with a discernible way to worship God. This work includes practical examples of ways to implement authentic worship within one's congregation as well as language to demonstrate the value in such a practice.

Gobbel, A. Roger, and Phillip C. Huber. *Creative Designs with Children at Worship*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981. 106 pp. [Minister] Though published in 1981, this work is much more forward-thinking than its dating implies. The authors present the idea that worship should not happen *for* children but rather *along with* children. Additionally, there is an affirmation of the spiritual vibrancy and capability of children that is foundational to present conversations regarding faith development. This book also examines how to practically engage children in acts of worship both from the theoretical standpoint and through the discussion of tangible examples.

Ng, David, and Virginia Thomas. *Children in the Worshiping Community*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1985. 156 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Convinced that "children have a place in congregational worship," Ng and Thomas explore the vital importance of children both belonging to and participating in the faith community. Informed by their covenantal theology, the authors maintain that children are equal members of the body of Christ by right of the sacrament of baptism. With full agency, they engage wholeheartedly in worship. In fact, as maturing humans, worship is vital to their identity formation, a major developmental task of adolescence that begins in childhood. After emphasizing a theology of belonging in congregational worship, the role of worship in the home is also explored. The authors reflect primarily on the Deuteronomic texts, emphasizing that the home is where children are first taught to worship, united in family worship, and called into communal worship. These practices benefit children and adults alike. In addition, the bulk of this book equips parents and church leaders to

effectively engage children in worship at church and home. Practical suggestions for teachers and parents in training children, worship planners in engaging children, and ministers in pastoring children equips all for the important task of intergenerational worship.

- Pottebaum, Gerard A. *To Walk with a Child: Homiletics for Children, A Guide*. Loveland, OH: Treehaus Publications, 1993. 170 pp. [Scholar, Minister] Writing from a Catholic perspective, Pottebaum covers the essentials of homiletics for children for ministers of the word of any faith family: the spirituality of children, homiletic principles for children, and homiletic practices for children. In his view, worship is optimally an inclusive event, where listening to the spiritual perspectives of children makes worship richer for all generations. Pottebaum describes healthy group processes to accomplish this. Ahead of its time when written, this book remains relevant.
- Stewart, Sonja M., and Jerome W. Berryman. *Young Children and Worship*. Louisville: John Knox, 1989. 328 pp. [Minister] Although the authors feel it best for children to be in corporate worship, awareness of the practice of children's worship brings the authors to create plans appropriate kinesthetic worship experiences for young children connected with biblical stories. After an explanation of the rationale for such worship, they present plans for about forty different stories.
- Vanderwell, Howard, ed. *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*. Herndon, VA: Alban, 2008. 225 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Why is intergenerational worship important? Vanderwell highlights two cultural realities facing our congregations: 1) people are living longer and 2) adults ought to honor the spiritual agency of children. In this edited volume, the writers create a theology of worship as an intergenerational faith community. They define intergenerational worship as "worship in which people of every age are understood to be equally important" (p. 11). A unique feature of this book is an intentional focus on marginalized participants in congregational worship and a call to creatively engage every person at their age and stage in life. Combining theory and practice, readers find helpful snapshots of congregations practicing intentional intergenerational worship. As an Alban Institute publication, leadership and change management skills are reinforced as chapter contributors are from a variety of ministry callings, including worship and preaching

ministry. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter provide ample conversation starter material for church leadership teams seeking to create a culture of intergenerational worship.

Practice of Children's Ministry

Beckwith, Ivy. *Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010. 157 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Beckwith challenges the reader to reframe the way one thinks about children's ministry in churches. However, she also recognizes that there is a feeling of uncertainty surrounding how to do this. Therefore, the author explores three characteristics—story, ritual, and relationship—as a means of encouraging spiritual formation in children providing both theological reasoning and practical application. With story, Beckwith asks the reader to make space to allow the God-story to merge with community and faith in a way that invites active participation in one's faith. Ritual is equally as intentional; it is about “the shared experience [that] draws the community together around the sacred” (p. 71). Beckwith examines the transformation resulting from children being drawn into the worship community as active participants. Her work also explores the potential positive outcomes and the challenges that might accompany a deliberate shift in mindset toward an intergenerational ministry perspective.

Berryman, Jerome W. *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991. 179 pp. [Scholar/Minister] How do children come to know God? Are they capable of thinking theologically? Do children have the capacity to think existentially? Berryman tackles these questions and others as he ponders the religious growth of children. Children are creators, created in the image of God, the Creator of all things. This unique aspect of humanity over the rest of creation leads Berryman to create a model of religious education that values imagination and creativity. This model, “Godly Play,” honors the spiritual agency of children and the work of the Spirit in meaning-making. In quiet and reflective spaces, children are invited to imagine themselves in the Biblical story, wondering about their relationship with God. Then, children are invited to use art and other creative media to explore new insights stirring their imagination. The emphasis on creativity crosses the

developmental language barrier that often hinders children from expressing their spirituality. Though this model is rooted in the richness of the Montessori method, *Godly Play* generates much needed theoretical conversation among religious educators and provides a practice that embraces the spirituality of children.

Breeding, MaLesa, Dana Hood, and Jerry Whitworth. *Let All the Children Come to Me*. Colorado Springs: Nexgen, 2006. 143 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Too often the differently abled are marginalized or excluded from our churches. Breeding, Hood (now Dana Pemberton), and Whitworth explore the importance of including all with differing abilities into a church's ministries. The intentionality of a special needs ministry is analyzed from an inclusion standpoint with special attention being given to practical application within a ministry setting. This work is full of helpful, practical content, some of which requires contemporary users to update its language for the shifting sensitivities of vocabulary in this dynamic field.

Bruner, Ron, and Dana Kennamer Pemberton, eds. *Along the Way: Conversations about Children and Faith*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2015. 256 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Intending to generate conversations at local congregations, ten scholar-practitioners collaborate in a dialogue about children and faith. The book covers a broad spectrum of issues in four sections: Catching up with the Conversation, Children at Home, Children and the Faith Community, and Our Children's Ministries. Although rooted in the Stone-Campbell Restoration tradition, reviewers from other faith perspectives and other faith groups have found this to be a useful resource for dialogue and education.

Csinos, David M., and Ivy Beckwith. *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013. 208 pp. [Scholar/Minister] Many churches struggle to envision children's ministry apart from age-appropriate educational ministries and programmed events that focus on teaching children *about* God instead of forming a relationship *with* God. These practices have also led to a disconnect between the children's ministry and the rest of the congregation. Csinos and Beckwith cast a different vision of children's ministry that honors the agency of children and their relationship with God. They lay a theological foundation for children's ministry that is more

than teaching children about God, it is discipling children in the way of Jesus. To do this well, the authors assert that children must be invited into the story of Scripture and the intergenerational faith community, while participating in God's mission of reconciliation.

DeVries, Mark, and Annette Safstrom. *Sustainable Children's Ministry: From Last-Minute Scrambling to Long-Term Solutions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018. 234 pp. [Scholar/Minister] DeVries and Safstrom, practitioners and consultants in children's and youth ministry, explore many practical issues that face children's ministry leaders. Early in the book, they confront the "workhorse syndrome" in which ministry leaders take on too much responsibility and fail to create systems and teams to share ministry tasks. Throughout the book, with wisdom, wit, and experience, they coach children's ministers in leadership habits that will sustain their ministry and their careers. First, they explain the necessity of communally discerned vision, mission, values, and goals for children's ministry as well as regular and objective ministry evaluation. Then, DeVries and Safstrom offer a systemic view of ministry leadership, one in which simple processes for ministry tasks such as recruiting, attendance taking, and follow-up communication create sustainable solutions. In addition, they recognize the importance of mentors, Christian community, and spiritual nurturing for children's ministers long-term career health. *Sustainable Children's Ministry* is a rare book that addresses the ministry responsibilities of children's ministers and offers practical solutions, while remaining enjoyable to read.

Holmen, Mark. *Building Faith at Home: Why Faith at Home Must Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007. 203 pp. [Minister/Parent] This book is part of the D6 (Deuteronomy 6) movement that champions the role of parents in the faith formation of children. This particular work explores this belief from the vantage point of family ministry with expanded reflection on how a church can respond to it. Holmen not only discusses the historical context that has led to this movement, he also presents reasons as to why a congregation's perspective should change. All in all, this book provides a framework under which a congregation can endeavor to empower parents.

May, Scottie, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell. *Children Matter: Celebrating their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. 374 pp. [Scholar/Minister] The coauthors of this book weigh different metaphors/models of ministry and find that the ideas of pilgrimage or a dance with God are the most useful. After a conversation about the theology and development of children, they explore ministry with children in various contexts: community, faith community and family. The authors then consider key practices: story, curriculum, worship, learning and teaching, and specialized ministries.

Stonehouse, Catherine and Scottie May. *Listening to Children on the Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2010. 172 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Stonehouse and May, leading voices in the research of children's spirituality, utilize several qualitative research projects to explore children's emerging views of God and experiences with God. Aptly titled, this book dives deep into the conversations that Stonehouse and May had with children as part of their research. Like Westerhoff, they view children and adults as "copilgrims" on the spiritual journey. As such, the act of listening when children reflect on their spiritual journey is formative for all. Utilizing conversational snippets and drawings from their research with children, they explore how children know God, experience God, and follow Jesus, effectively showing children's capacity for spiritual reflection. They conclude that parents and intergenerational faith communities play a vital role in nurturing children's deepening spiritual awareness with intentional spiritual conversation.

Westerhoff III, John H. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Third ed. New York: Morehouse, 2012. 190 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Westerhoff originally wrote *Will Our Children Have Faith* in 1976 and revised and expanded it in 2000 with updates to each chapter that address the areas in which his thinking had advanced. He revised the work once more in 2012. Despite its age, it remains enduringly relevant in the world of children's ministry because it provokes ministers to examine their own Christian education paradigm and ask if that model is knowledge-centric or faith-nurturing. This multifaceted question relies not only on historical, social, and cultural contexts but also on an understanding of the ways in which a community of faith

impacts its people and its context. Westerhoff explores the ways in which educationally shaped strategies have historically minimized experiential influences. Furthermore, the author discusses the need for relational encounters as a catalyst for faith development because “the next generation may have faith but only if the present generation in the church is faithful in living that life of faith with them” (p. 143).

Intergenerational Ministry

Allen, Holly Catterton, and Christine L. Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012. 330 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Allen and Ross make the case that intergenerational ministry, which “fosters intentional cross-generational opportunities,” is an essential and effective method to “nurture Christian learning, growth, and formation” (p. 74). They explore the Biblical, theological, and theoretical support for intergenerational Christian formation, including social learning theory and sociological research. In particular, they review several empirical studies that support the conclusion that both children and adults glean spiritual insights from intergenerational opportunities (p. 173). Often congregations struggle to pursue intergenerational ministries, a difficult transition that requires outside-the-box thinking to reshape tried and true activities. Helpfully, Allen and Ross offer over 100 pages of focused discussion on the practical application of intergenerationality in congregations, equipping the readers with the tools to create a culture of intergenerational Christian formation in their own faith communities.

Allen, Holly Catterton, and Jason Brian Santos. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2018. 272 pp. [Scholar/Minister] This collection of essays comes from the 2017 InterGenerate Conference. The two primary questions driving this work consider the *why* and *how* of intergenerational ministry—a shift in mindset for many congregations. Therefore, the authors reflect on ways in which a framework can be created that celebrates and builds upon the strengths of each generation. Furthermore, *InterGenerate* merges both research and practical experiences in order to articulate what it looks like for each age

group to be meaningful participants within their faith communities as part of the whole.

See also: Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner, "A Reader's Guide to Intergenerational Ministry and Faith Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3 2 (2017): 59-78. It can be found at <http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol3/iss2/4>. This work presents a review of prominent and helpful works in intergenerational ministry, much of which focuses on children.

Child Care and Parenting

Kimmel, Tim. *Grace Based Parenting: Set Your Family Free*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004. 260 pp. [Minister/Parent] Kimmel, aware that parents often set impossible standards for themselves, begins by helping the reader see traps that often cause well-meaning parents to fall short. He urges parents to understand that God covers their mistakes—and those of their children—with grace. Parents must value relationships and protect them with rules, but ultimately relationships are more important. Parents and children learn by making mistakes and experiencing the grace of God when they make them. Kimmel leads readers through a list of parental virtues and the practices that make them come alive in the act of parenting. These practices empower healthier children to move toward resilient lives.

Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. 242 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] A parent and a professor of practical theology at Vanderbilt, Miller-McLemore describes parenting as a spiritual discipline that forms parents and children. Parenting is a spiritual vocation. The spiritual practice of caring for children does not seek to transform the home into an otherworldly sanctuary but deals with a household and schedule overfilled with the messy, mundane realities of life. She does not see life as arbitrarily divided between secular and sacred; instead she asserts that parents must "sanctify the ordinary," be aware of God's perpetual presence, and walk alongside their offspring mindful of their children's—and their own—transforming spirituality. Wise parenting requires a gradual transfer of power, responsibility, and action from parent to child.

Purvis, Karyn. *The Connected Child: Bringing Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007. 264 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Recognizing that children come from various backgrounds is important within ministry. Equipping oneself to understand the differences that emerge from those backgrounds is crucial. *The Connected Child* offers just that. It examines the unique challenges that often accompany adoption—specifically the development of attachment—and how the needs of the adoptive or foster family often differs from standard practice. The value in this work further lies in its ability to create a framework that is simple to understand and presents both the theoretical and practical aspects of trauma-informed care. It covers topics such as appropriately navigating learning and behavioral disorders to creating non-threatening boundaries that are adapted for the child’s unique situation. While this may not appear at first glance to be a typical ministry book, it is an excellent tool for parents and ministers to use in creating an environment that allows for the message of Christ to actually be heard, by all, regardless of background.

Stevenson-Moessner, Jeanne. *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. 134 pp. [Scholar/Minister/Parent] Stevenson-Moessner, an adoptive parent and a pastoral theologian, creates a rich practical and theological account of the grief of childlessness, the drama of waiting for a child, and the challenges and blessings of adoptive parenting. She creates an interdisciplinary work that draws on biblical metaphors of God as an adoptive parent and the church as a family offering belonging through “fictive kinship,” a creation of family not bound by blood. Her work is helpful to adoptive parents and to those who wish to thoughtfully walk alongside them but indispensable to ministers, social workers, counselors, and other professionals.

Collected Essays

The Children’s Spirituality Summit

Kevin Lawson best describes the origins of this conference: “In the summer of 2000, several children’s ministry professors from North America attended the first International Conference on Children’s Spirituality held in Chichester, England. Following that experience, a half dozen of those who attended the international conference gathered informally at the North

American Professors of Christian Education (NAPCE) conference in Toronto, Canada, to discuss the experience and explore the possibility of a North American gathering of Christians doing research and teaching in the area of the spiritual life and nurture of children. With the help of a planning grant from The Louisville Institute, the first conference was held in June 2003 at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois."¹ After several meetings as the Children's Spirituality Conference—Christian Perspectives, the Society moved the conference to Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, as the Children's Spirituality Summit in 2016. First meeting on a triennial basis, the leadership of that group is now planning meetings on a biennial basis. Selected papers from this conference are assembled by editors to present emerging scholarship and practice in the field of children's spirituality. Over the years, this has become one of the most productive conferences on children's spirituality.

Ratliff, Donald, ed. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2004. 424 pp. [Scholar] This book has been re-issued in a second edition released on June 13, 2019: Kevin Lawson and Scottie May, eds. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019.

Roehlkepartain, Eugene, Pamela E. King, Linda Wagener, and Peter Benson, eds. *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006. 543 pp. [Scholar]

Allen, Holly Catterton, ed. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008. 400 pp. [Scholar]

Tolbert, LaVerne, ed. *Exploring and Engaging Spirituality for Today's Children: A Holistic Approach*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014. 345 pp. [Scholar/Minister]

Espinoza, Ben, James Estep, and Shirley Morgenthaler, eds. *Story, Formation and Culture: From Theory to Practice in Ministry with Children*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018. 312 pp. [Scholar]

¹ Kevin Lawson, "Preface: The Children's Spirituality Conference—Christian Perspectives: 2003, 2006, 2009," *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, Holly Catterton Allen, ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), xi.

Keely, Robert, and Mimi Larson, eds. *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. Upcoming. [Scholar]

Faith Forward Conference

First imagined by David Csinos in 2009, the Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity (CYNKC) Conference met for the first time in Washington, DC in 2012. About 450 scholars and practitioners were present. The conference met again in 2014 and 2016, each time producing an anthology of work by conference participants on various subjects within the fields of ministry with children, youth, and families.

Csinos, David M., and Melvin Bray, eds. *Faith Forward: A Dialogue on Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity*. Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2013. 287 pp. [Scholar/Minister]

Csinos, David M., and Melvin Bray, eds. *Faith Forward Volume 2: Re-Imagining Children and Youth Ministry*. Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2015. 192 pp. [Scholar/Minister]

Csinos, David M., ed. *Faith Forward Volume 3: Launching a Revolution through Ministry with Children, Youth, and Families*. Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake, 2018. 208 pp. [Scholar/Minister]

Essential Books for Children's Ministry

Everyone who ministers with children should ideally have—at a minimum—the following books in their library. We have listed them in alphabetical order; more descriptive detail is found in the pages above.

Jerome W. Berryman. *Godly Play*.

Marcia J. Bunge, ed. *The Child in Christian Thought*.

David M. Csinos. *Children's Ministry That Fits*.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. *Let the Children Come*.

John H. Westerhoff III. *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

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Jennifer Reinsch Schroeder (DMA, Michigan State University) is the Children's Minister at North Atlanta Church of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia. She has served in ministry for 15 years and has a deep desire to see children recognize their full potential as part of God's kingdom. She has an MDiv Equivalency from Abilene Christian University with plans to begin work on her Doctor of Ministry degree at ACU in 2020. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Michigan State University, a Master of Science in Family Life Education from Lubbock Christian University, and both a Master of Music and Bachelor of Music from the University of North Texas. Additionally, Dr. Schroeder holds Texas State Teaching Certificates in the areas of Special Education (All-Level), Music Education (All-Level), and Early Childhood through 4th Grade (Generalist). Dr. Schroeder lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Greg and their four children—Jack (2012), Lillian (2013), Harvey (2013), and Matilda (2013).

Ron Bruner (DMin, Abilene Christian University) has served as the executive director of Westview Boys' Home in Hollis, Oklahoma, since 1999. He co-edited *Along the Way: Conversations about Children and Faith* with Dana Kennamer Pemberton. Bruner co-edited *Owning Faith: Reimagining the Role of Church & Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers* with Dudley Chancey. As an adjunct in ACU's Graduate School of Theology, he teaches Children's Ministry. Because of his interest in practical theology—especially in the fields of intergenerational, children's, and youth ministry—Bruner edits the e-journal *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*. He and his wife, Ann, enjoy life with their three adult children and five grandchildren.

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