

**THE IMPORTENCES OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY AT ALL SAINTS CHURCH OF UGANDA
KYOTERA KAKOMA ARCHDEACONRY WEST BUGANDA DIOCESE**

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DECLARATION

I, Mubiru James hereby declare that this research is my work and that it has not been submitted to any institution for the award of a degree in Divinity.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

MUBIRU JAMES

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this research report entitled “The Importance of Children’s Ministry in All Saints Church of Uganda Kyotera has been done under my supervision and guidance and is now ready for submission for examination to Uganda Christian University with my approval.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

To my wife Catherine Mubiru, thank you for caring for our children and everything at home in my absence.

To my Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Henry Katumba Tamale. Thank you for sending me back to school.

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I wish to acknowledge all the persons who in one way or the other assisted me in the completion of this study. Special appreciation goes to my supervisor Prof. Peter Nyende for his effort to speedily read and comment on my drafts.

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ABSTRACT

This study labored to give the importance of Children's ministry in All Saints Church of Uganda Kyotera and found that; children's ministry helps in the following;

knowing the truth about God, the continuity of the Church, Church growth, source of Joy and develop Children among others therefore, pastors should try their best to do this ministry well through training Children's teachers, building Children's Church, having a curriculum, and having a budget to facilitate this ministry.

The study has established that the number of children at All Saints Kyotera Church of Uganda and West Buganda Diocese at large is growing but the children's ministry is not given sufficient support from the clergy because they are attending to the bigger issues of the church. There are still many people in the congregations who treat children as second-class human beings who should not be heard. Children ministries are viewed as welcoming of children, but most respondents understood the significance of children only as recipients of Christian education and care. Clergy cannot provide examples of how their churches are sanctuaries of vulnerable children that need compassion and the majority of the clergy and Christians are unsure of how their church is blessing children.

The study focuses on revealing the principal aim of the children's ministries in the Church is to teach children about Jesus. However, the children's ministries also emphasized discipline and morals. All the churches that were the focus of this study had children's workers who were trained and were receiving continuing ministry training. The Church had developed a curriculum for children's ministry, capacity building was done for children's ministry workers, and music was incorporated into the children's ministry curriculum. Media and visual aids were used in teaching children and bible games were incorporated in the children's ministry curriculum. However, resources for curriculum implementation were inadequate.

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a village church where the wardens' work was to chase the children out of the Church so that the adults could worship God without disturbances from the children. Children could sit on the verandas of the church without anyone helping them to learn anything about God. As children, whenever we could go for Sunday services with our parents, we could be sent to rest under the trees in the Church compound as the adults could be attending the services. While under the trees, no one could care about or minister to us.

Sometimes, during rainy seasons it could rain on us or they could put us in the church vestry which could contain twenty people and put there more than two hundred children. I remember one day four children almost fainted due to overclouding in the church vestry. Such treatment made us hate the churchwardens because they were the ones to chase us from the church and we hated the church too due to mistreatment.

One day when Bishop Keefa Kanya Ssemakula visited our Church for the first time in 2003, he told his wife to meet the children and talk to them and encouraged the church to come out with children's ministry. He was not happy with how the children were treated. He asked the children the main role of the churchwardens and the answer from the children together was to chase away children during worship. To make matters worse, children could come first, very early, and sit down in the churches but the old Christians could come very late and there the chasing away of children could begin.

When the Bishop requested his wife to attend to the children, she asked whether they could find where to worship from. She asked any volunteers to help her and I volunteered to do it with her.

The children were very happy that day to the extent that they cried when the Bishop was leaving because they wanted to continue with his wife. They cried calling Maama Bishop, Maama Bishop. It touched my life and since then I could organize the children every Sunday and sing with them Christian songs. I had no idea of how to do children's ministry but I could try to do it like "Maama Bishop did it."

Children loved me and spread the information about what happened and in around three months children were more than two hundred.

When the parish priest realized this, he started giving me skills on how I can do it better and it became my Sunday routine. This was a pastor's target to earn something from them and he started telling the adults to give offertories to their children and whenever we could collect the money it could go to the treasurer but helped nothing to the children's church. According to the pastor I was not supposed to earn anything since I never went for training and according to church hierarchy "there is no children's pastor" said the Parish Priest. Of course, I never started doing that ministry on grounds of earning anything but I was inspired by the happiness the children got when the Bishop's wife attended to them so I continued to enjoy their joy and happiness.

Children started calling me Jesus because I could always point them to Jesus and teach them about God's love for mankind through Jesus Christ since I had memorized John 3:16 which says "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This was repeated every Sunday.

The more the children loved me the more their parents loved me and came closer to me; they started supporting my ministry and me as a person. They helped me to study up to secondary level four and pledged to pay for me for a lay reader course but the Bishop gave me a bursary to study S.6 after hearing about what I was doing in children's ministry.

I continued with my education and I gave the glory back to God for he saw my faithful work rendered to children and work rendered to children and the Lord educated me through the Bishop. I felt good and I asked God if he wanted me to serve in his vineyard till 2014 when I had the call and joined the ordination course at Uganda Martyrs Seminary Namugongo.

Children's ministry at All Saints' Church

I learned a lesson from my personal experience and when I became a parish priest I tried my best to organize my children's ministry at my parish.

We organized age groups

3-6 years with two teachers

7-9 years with two teachers

10-12 years with one teacher

We have five trained Sunday school teachers and five helpers so each age group has a warden who helps them when they want to go and ease themselves.

The teens also have their programs and the youth but my focus is on children's church.

The age group of 3-6 is around five hundred when the schools are going on since we have many schools.

The age group 10-12 is around four hundred children during school time.

During the holiday the number is low but during school time we are more than one thousand two hundred.

We do not have a well-organized Children's church but we use the Kyotera Township Primary School ground and classrooms which is the Church school at the Parish under my supervision.

The number of children's church teachers is very low compared to the number of children but we are trying to have more helpers since we cannot afford to pay more than five teachers and when they are not paid something we cannot utilize their talents well for we do not own them for they just help us but when paid, we can give them instructions.

We are using the church of Uganda provincial curriculum and since I am the children's Champion in my Diocese I always get materials from the provincial youth and children's department which we use.

I also get time to select memory verses that the teachers can use to teach the children.

I choose my wife to be part of the children's church but for her, she is not paid but willing to serve with me in that department.

My parish has a uniform for children's ministry and always represents the Diocese at Namugongo Martyrs Children's Day. Am very proud of it and it has helped me so much during Bishop's visit for we do not lack confirmates.

Challenges with All Saints' Children's Ministry

The children enjoy their services when they are worshipping together with their fellow children rather than being mixed without separating them according to their age group.

The children's teachers enjoy their work though the allowances given to them are very little. There is a need for increments if we get resources and next year we are planning to have supporters at least each Sunday we shall have Christians to be Sunday quests to children's ministry to support it.

We lack a church where to worship for the classrooms seem to be schools not churches to the children so there is a need to have Sunday school organized places of worship at All Saints Church of Uganda Kyotera.

The instruction materials are very important since most of the children learn through listening, observing/seeing, and touching now they learn very well. Some weeks we lack instruction materials but it seems to be born when the instruction materials are there, the children enjoy them so much, therefore, we try to buy them but we lack funds sometimes.

Even parents take it seriously and very important to see their children enjoying and learning God's word and nurturing spiritually in the Lord. It is a joy to them so they try to support this ministry. The only need is to empire this ministry from the top church leaders to the bottom ones. That is the Archbishop, House of Bishops, House of Clergy, Lay readers, and the Laity.

Amidst all the challenges children's ministry at All Saints Church of Uganda faces, the work is wonderful, children enjoy it, parents love it and its impact on the church is seen and will be seen in fifteen years to come in abundance.

Purpose of the study

This research aims at creating awareness about the importance of Children's ministry among church leaders and those involved with children's ministry in the church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Children's ministry is a term that refers to the various ways that churches seek to teach, nurture, and serve children in the name of Jesus Christ. Children's ministry can include activities such as Sunday school, Bible study, children's conferences, and school chaplaincies. It is one of the ministries that has been neglected in the Anglican Church of Uganda hence leading to the exodus of children to the Pentecostal churches that have a well-established Children's ministry. Below is the importance of Children's ministry in our church if it is effectively conducted well.¹

Teaching Children

The central point of children's ministry is to make sure that children learn about God in an orderly way according to their age groups. It is key to understand that children learn very well when they are fed according to their age. The writer of the book of Hebrews encourages those preaching the gospel to feed milk to those who deserve milk and when they grow, they can now feed them adult food. In that case, children deserve milk food (gospel) if they are to understand or learn well about God (Hebrews 15:13-14).²

Children are slow to understand their listening time is low thus making it meaningless and injustice to combine them in the adult church thinking that they will understand what they are teaching in the adult church.

Children's ministry, therefore, if organized well enables children to understand what they are taught about God since they are fed according to their age groups.

Children's ministry is done by well-trained teachers (Sunday school teachers as they are called), children can learn about God truly because the teachers know what to teach, how to teach, and how to handle the children according to their age group.

¹Chukwudum B. Okolo. (1991). *The liberating Role of the church in Africa today*. Eldoret. P17-38
Amecea Gaba Publications

²Chukwudum B. Okolo. (1991). *The liberating Role of the church in Africa today*. Eldoret.
Amecea Gaba Publications p49-76

In the children's ministry, there is a following of the curriculum. If the curriculum is followed, it begins by introducing children to a particular topic, the definitions of key terms, the explanation of difficult words, and relevant examples. According to the culture of the community and age groups relevant illustrations are done for example, the story of Goliath and David's child may act as David and another one Goliath. When Goliath is defeated by a younger boy due to the hand of help from God, children can learn that God is powerful and he can win for us all the big battles we fear if we trust Him. In the adult church, there is no curriculum in most of the churches so children cannot understand well.

In conclusion, therefore, Hebrews 5:13-4 "Anyone who lives on milk being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Children are still infants and young to know good and evil so through feeding them milk, they go on growing from milk to adult food after knowing what is good and evil. Learning is a process in which one must follow process by process and stage by stage. Therefore, children's ministry helps children learn about God process by process and stage by stage the result is to know God truly thus children's ministry provides an opportunity for children to learn about God truly.³

Building tomorrow's Church

The continuation of the universal church is dependent on the ability of children ministry to reach out to them" (Felton 96). Family including children is considered to be a small church (outler 309). The early church also has an impact on whether parents bring their children to church. For children who were church as children, most of them take their children to church those who did not go to church during their childhood will not take their children to church.

It is very important to know that people who get opportunities to go to children's ministry during their childhood at least 60% of them attend church during their adulthood but only 75% who do not attend church during their adulthood do not go to church even when they grow old. This implies

³Dan Brewster. (2005). *A child, church and mission*. Compassion international: Makati Philippines p99-107

that the future church will only get 25% of the people born in Christian families who do not attend children's ministry during childhood and thus the church has no future.

According to Chris Howles, the Church of England is facing the challenge of the depopulation of the church because they neglected children's ministry some time back. Now some of the churches are turned into cinema halls and places of sexual immorality.

The church today must secure the future of the church through empowering children's ministry for once neglected the future of the church is in Vail.

One of the solutions to have a secure, strong, and well-organized church is through strengthening children's ministry because;

1. Children's ministry encourages children to be rooted in Christ and serve him.
2. Children's ministry develops children's minds to love God as the source of all blessings, protection, and comfort.

These factors make children dependent on God so coming to God is a sign of their dependency on God even during their adulthood.

In conclusion therefore children's ministry secures the growth of the future church because children grow up rooted in faith and therefore even when they are adults they still love to come to church because they grow that they grow up knowing that they are not independent but dependents on God.

Following God's command

"From the beginning, God commanded the people to reach out to children and children teach them God's commandments so that they may also teach their children and children teach them to their children..." Pass them on as a command to your children so they will obey every word of these instructions." Thus God commanded people to raise a godly generation.⁴

⁴Felton, G. Carlton. (1997). *John Wesley and the Teaching Ministry. Religious Education*. Winter p 24

Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations. All nations include the children, Matthew 28:16 “God and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey all that I commanded you.”

Children’s ministry therefore is a sign of the church’s obedience to God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The importance of children’s ministry is to teach the children to obey God’s command and also to tell their children in the future to tell their children to the goodness of the Lord, the word of God, and the commandments of God.

Any church that does not empower and facilitate or even without children’s ministry disobeys the Lord God because it is a command to teach God’s word to our children. In the same way, any parent who denies his/her children access to children’s ministry is disobeying God.⁵

God’s intention in teaching his word to our children is to raise a generation that knows him and fears and loves him. Churches therefore should make sure that they obey God and build strong children ministries and teach them the word of God.

The challenge we have is that most children’s ministries focus on installing only discipline to their children, only focusing on teaching them dos and don’ts neglecting God’s word.

Children’s ministry must be Christ-centered and focus on the word of God, not our own words, secular music among others.

In conclusion therefore a well-organized children’s ministry that teaches the truth; that is Christ centered word of God in the church is a sign that the church obeys God and his commands.

⁵Felton, G. Carlton. (1997). *John Wesley and the Teaching Ministry. Religious Education*. Winter p 69

Discipling Children

Children can be means of gospel transmission for example they can hear the word of God at church/in Sunday school and go back home and share that message with their parents and their fellow children thus contributing to the mission of the church (Mathew 28:17-20).

In Genesis 22:1ff, Isaac pre-figured Jesus' sacrifice. Though he was young the act of his father to God and offers him as a sacrifice prefigured Jesus Christ. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The super mission was done by God's son who was pre-figured by Isaac the son of Abraham the ground father of the faithful.

Jesus grew up as a child and began his ministry when he was a child his parents left him in Jerusalem where he read the scrolls that were in Isaiah 9:1ff of which he was the fulfiller of that scroll.

Joseph was a young man sold by his brothers but became a missionary in Egypt and later saved his family (Genesis 57:1ff). There is no doubt that when a child grows up in godliness he/she can be a missioner and carry on his godliness to others.

Shadrack, Mesearch, and Abadnego in the book of Daniel 1, 2,3:1ff they refused to defile themselves and became missionaries in another land. King Nebuchadnezzar recognized their God and ordered everybody in his kingdom to worship the God of Shadrack, Mesearch, and Abednego.

When children are rooted in faith during their attendance in children's ministry, they can carry/pass on that faith to other generations and they can be a change and bring a change to others.

In conclusion after looking at children who carried on godliness to other nations and Jesus Christ himself who was born as a child but incarnate and brought salvation to mankind, children today can pass that message of salvation to others, and through them, people may come to Christ thus receiving salvation. Therefore children's ministry can train children who can extend the gospel to others through evangelizing them what they have learned from children's ministry thus children's ministry helps the children understand their role in the church especially the role in mission helping the church to grow through missions and evangelism.

Other children in the Bible who did great in godliness include Samuel (1 Sam 3), and David (1 Sam 17) the younger servant girl who did a mission to Nadman (2 Kings 5) among others.

Developing children's gifts

Through knowing and sharing our gifts, we provide an example to the children of how God created us each to fit into the body of Christ.

Through singing in the ministry, the Sunday school teachers can observe those who are gifted in singing and they can begin to encourage and support them to develop that gift.

In children's ministry, children are given a chance to participate in readings, and playing in all these, the teachers can observe their children's talents and spiritual gifts and help them to develop these spiritual gifts.

In summary, children's ministry provides a nurturing environment that creates a warm, welcoming, and safe space where children feel comfortable expressing themselves and exploring their spiritual gifts. Encourage open communication and respect for each child's unique talents and abilities.⁶

In children's ministry, teachers celebrate and recognize the children's accomplishments and milestones as they grow in their spiritual gifts. Acknowledge their efforts and progress which can boost their confidence and motivating to continue developing their talents.

Children's ministry also encourages children to engage in prayer and reflection to discern and cultivate their spiritual gifts, provide guidance on how to listen to God's voice and seek discernment on how best to use their gifts for the greater good.

In conclusion by implementing all the above strategies and creating a supportive and enriching environment, a children's ministry can effectively nurture and grow the spiritual gifts of children to pray and reflect on their spiritual gifts depending on God, celebrating and appreciating

⁶Marcia J Bunge and William B. (2001). *The child in Christian thought*. Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing Company p117

children's achievements, fostering educational opportunities and providing a nurturing environment. All of these can help children to develop their spiritual gifts during their time in children's ministry.

Belonging to the church

Children's ministry foster relationships. Children's ministry prioritizes building relationships among children providing opportunities for them to connect and develop friendships. This is mainly achieved through small group activities, team-building exercises, and collaboration sessions.

Through collaborations and teamwork, children's ministry helps children learn to value and support one another. Activities such as group games, projects, and mission activities can encourage them to work together towards a common goal.

It creates an inclusive and welcoming environment where every child feels accepted and valued. This means embracing diversity, appreciating different backgrounds, cultures, and abilities, and ensuring that no child is left out or marginalized.

Celebrate multigenerational connections. Children's ministry facilitates interactions between children and adults in the church fostering meaningful relationships and mentorship opportunities. This is done through intergenerational events, mentorship programs, or encouraging children to participate in worship services alongside their families once in a while.⁷

Provide service opportunities. Children's ministry provides opportunities for children to actively serve and give back to their church community involving them in age-appropriate service projects, outreach, and missions can help them understand the importance of being part of a bigger congregation and making a positive impact on them.

⁷Glenn Miles. (2003). *Celebrating children*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press p2

Children's ministry encourages children to take ownership of their involvement in the church by empowering them to contribute their talents and skills to the community through leading worship (praise and worship), participating in skits, and reading lessons among others.

In conclusion, most of the time, the church organizes regular social events like on 28th December every year while remembering the children below three years who were killed on the orders of King Herod when searching to kill Jesus Christ. Children from different communities or churches may come to the parish headquarters with their parents and gather together to celebrate their day gather together to celebrate their day hence creating opportunities for building relationships, strengthening bonds, and fostering a sense of belonging within the church.

Source of joy

Through interactive and engaging activities, children's ministry can incorporate fun and interactive activities like games, crafts, skits, and songs that are age-appropriate and capture children's interest. These activities create an atmosphere of joy and excitement.

Through a positive and welcoming environment where children feel loved, accepted, and valued, children and parents enjoy that joy.

Meaningful Bible lessons that are full of biblical truth in a way that is relatable to children incorporating stories, objects, lessons, and group work or discussions help children understand and connect with the teachings leading to a sense of joy and growth in faith.

Children's ministry helps the church raise great skilled church leaders who can defend the faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jesus said; "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" Matthew 19:14. We need to teach children what we learn so that they can spread the love of Jesus Christ when we are no longer around in serving Jesus Christ. The church leader must show children the way and help guide them into adults who are devoted to the ministry in the church. In return, they will devote time to helping the church, and teach others the importance of ministering the church which will help the church to grow and spread the word of the Lord.

The starting point is that all humanity is loved and valued by God. The creator of the entire earth and all humanity looked at the world and declared ‘it is good’ and ‘God was very pleased’ (Genesis 1: 31). It seems that at All Saints Church Kyotera, this has not always been the case. We are still a long way from the ideal of valuing all people. However, the belief is that every person is created in God’s image

The Old Testament depicts children as fully human and made in the image of God, that they are gifts from God and sources of joy (Gen. 1:27; 21:6–7; 30:11; 30:20; 30:22; 1 Sam 1:11, 19).⁸ Therefore, parents and other caregivers are to respect them, enjoy them, and be grateful for them. We are therefore to recognize that children are distinct from adults in their maturity and ability and depend on adults for their nurture and protection. As a church, we must recognize our special responsibility for the care of children. Many passages in the Bible speak of children as blessings and gifts from God (Ps 127:3). The bible consistently refers to children as a blessing and a gift from God. “When we (in the church) regard children as vulnerable and worthy of care, we demonstrate our understanding that they are gifts to be protected and blessings to be welcomed and cared for.”

The New Testament depicts children as models of faith for adults. Therefore, adults are to listen to children and learn from them. Many Gospel passages turn upside down the myth, that children are to be seen but not heard. The primary role of children is to learn from and obey adults. In contrast, the New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and even examples for entering the reign of God.⁹

⁸Dan Brewster. (2005). *A child, church and mission*. Compassion international: Makati Philippines p 33

⁹Publishing Company Marcia J Bunge and William B. (2001). *The child in Christian thought*. Michigan. Eerdmans p 109

All children are God's children. In Mark 9:33–37, Jesus states that to welcome Him, one must welcome God's children. Then He took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.' This suggests that caring for children is a privilege that God entrusted to all adults, not just parents.

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God is surprising. He puts it clearly that greatness in his kingdom has nothing to do with societal attitudes and assumptions. One has to become like a little child if he is to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Welcoming the little ones means welcoming the Lord (Matthew 18:1-6).

Jesus taught against the exclusion of Children (Luke 18.15-17; Matt. 19.13-15; Mk. 10.13-16). Studies of children in antiquity clearly show that children were not in any way, close to adults, a concern nor a priority to society. For this reason, they were a marginalized lot. Such a nature was informed, as many are, by views of children which focus on their incapacities to the extent that their humanness is not reckoned with. This disposition of society towards children is seen with the disciples in the Gospels when they stop those bringing children to Jesus from doing so. As far as they were concerned children were to be excluded from the ministry of Jesus.¹⁰

A children's ministry helps the church to spread the word of the Lord. It teaches kids about their Lord and Savior which help them to feel included and loved. Children are going to be vulnerable to a lot of situations in their lives that will challenge their faith. With the ministry, they can be taught to have faith and follow Christ's teachings regardless of the number of hardships they will encounter in their life. It will lead to them returning to church during difficult times and encourage them to keep listening to church sermons.

¹⁰ Through the Eyes of a Child, pg. 171

Angela Shier-Jones says, “Communities fail where they do not respond graciously to the needs of children placed in their care. One of the things which we do not often think about is that a failure to provide grace as well as sustenance can cause serious harm to a child.” Jesus teaching in Matthew 18 is as challenging for us today as it was for the first disciples. Not only are we to look to children to see what is required to enter the Kingdom, but we must also consider that we will be judged on the way we welcome the child in our midst. Therefore, the nurture and welcome of children is a calling not just for parents or junior church leaders but for all those who would be Disciples of Christ.

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