

Taking the **GOOD NEWS** TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by Cheryl Chadwick

Imagine the joy

in watching a room full of excited children hearing the Good News of Jesus! Their enthusiasm is contagious as they sing and do motions to high-energy Christian music. They laugh and lose their breath as they participate in a relay race that teaches them a Bible verse. They take a seat and listen attentively to Bible and missions lessons through vibrant illustrations projected on the wall. Finally, the children get back on their feet for an action-packed review game that helps them remember and apply the eternal biblical truths they just learned.

Where do you think this room full of excited children is located? Children's Church? Vacation Bible School? No, this is all happening as part of a Good News Club (or GNC) in the gymnasium of a public school!

The concept of Good News Clubs was developed by Child Evangelism Fellowship, a ministry dedicated to reaching children for Christ. GNCs are becoming increasingly more common across America with over 6,000 clubs formed since the early 2000s. The SBC of Virginia reaches thousands of children each week through 42 clubs sponsored by 30 SBCV churches.

GNCs' purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel, disciple them in the Word of God to strengthen their moral and spiritual growth, and get them involved in a local church. Many Christians may be surprised to learn that churches can spread the Gospel at a public school. Thanks to the Supreme Court's decision in 2001, Christian clubs are allowed to meet after hours in public schools on the same terms as other community groups.

"We have the opportunity," says Mat Staver, founder and president of the Liberty Counsel, "to take the undiluted Gospel into the public school." GNCs present a powerful and remarkable opportunity we should not take for granted."

"Serving in Children's Ministry 20 years, I've been involved with many beneficial children's programs. But the Good News Club is different," says David Short, children's pastor at **Spotswood Baptist Church in Fredericksburg**. "The Good News Club isn't a program, it's a movement. Spotswood started its first GNC five years ago with six children at the first meeting. There are currently 1,000 children each week attending GNCs in the Fredericksburg area in over a dozen public elementary schools. The only way to explain the Good News Club phenomenon in Fredericksburg is to say that we are witnessing a great movement of God."

Michael Fitzgerald, senior pastor at **Clifford Baptist Church in Amherst**, shares the same excitement. "I have been the pastor at this church for 33 years, and this is one

of the greatest ministries I have seen." Clifford Baptist's GNC has seen many children saved and a number of them baptized. The church has also started a van ministry to pick up GNC children for Sunday services, and some of the children's families have become regular attenders.

Bermuda Baptist Church in Chester has also sponsored a Good News Club. "GNC is the vehicle that allows the Gospel to be shared in our public schools," shares Pastor Pete Hypes. Even teachers have seen a difference in the children. "[I have seen] firsthand," says the school's art teacher, "the difference that the Good News Club has made. It has blessed our children over the past three years with Bible stories, songs, fun activities, and prayer. [The volunteers] have taught the children the importance of respect, forgiveness, and goodwill towards others, and this has had a positive effect on how they relate to their peers at school."

Enon Baptist Church in Chester runs two weekly Good News Clubs, reaching 150 children. Scott Gilchrist, associate pastor for children, recognizes that because the majority of children are not connected to a church, GNCs provide a great opportunity to share the Gospel with



children who may not otherwise hear it. In the past three years, Enon's GNCs have had 30 children come forward to discuss their salvation and 20 to 30 children have visited the church. Enon has even had the blessing of baptizing three of its Good News Clubbers.

"Most recently," says Pastor Gilchrist, "we gave Bibles to every child in the club. It was absolutely wonderful to see the joy in the kids' faces and voices as they held their Bibles. Kids who had never had a Bible came back the next week and excitedly talked about how they had been reading it. To have some of the children say that they had read some of it with their parents, which they had not done before, was the best. It has been awesome to have all of the kids singing out praises to the Lord at the beginning of every club. One of the memories that I will always hold is the prayer culture that has developed. There was a teacher from one of the schools who was diagnosed with cancer. At the end of club, several of the students got together, formed a circle, and just started praying for her to be healed. This was not led by adults; it was led by the elementary children. We have many parents who stay and sit with their children through the club and become regular attenders."

Monumental Baptist Church in Petersburg has been involved with a Good News Club that meets in the mornings before school begins in Prince George County. Duane Guridy, associate pastor of music, shared a story from one of the volunteers. This volunteer will never forget the time a fourth grader told her that she had been begging her parents and grandparents to take her to church but they never would. She asked if the Good News Club could "count" as her church. This volunteer has also had the pleasure of helping a student accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. "God has done so many amazing things in our club," she says, "and even though I may groan when the alarm goes off at 5 AM on Friday morning, there is no place I'd rather be."

Nansemond River Baptist Church in Suffolk, which sponsors GNCs at four elementary schools, saw up to 12 children make a personal decision for Christ in one year. These children have been vigilant in spending time with God each day through a "quiet time quest." Nansemond River uses its clubs as an outreach tool by inviting each unchurched family to church services and special events.

One of the most recent SBCV churches to get involved in the Good News

Club ministry is **Parkway Baptist Church in Moseley**. Although Parkway just started its club this past October, they already have 40 children attending. Even better, within the first few weeks, two children prayed to make Christ their Savior, and many others came forward to ask questions and reaffirm their faith.

Not only are the participating churches energized through the clubs, the children and families impacted are excited and grateful. One mother said her son loves getting up every Friday to go to GNC. Since he started attending, his manners have improved, and he has even taught his parents things about God. He loves his new friends at GNC, and it's the highlight of his week.

A third grader who attended GNC recently made the comment, "I like [Good News Club] because we get to learn about God and how he died for us. Plus, it's just fun." Another child, who comes from a difficult home situation, said about GNC, "These are the best days of my life!"

For children from Christian families, learning about God at GNC helps them realize they are not the only believers in their school. For other children, GNCs are the first opportunity they've had to hear the Gospel. After hearing the story of Jesus, one eight-year-old

asked, "What is a cross?"

GNCs provide churches with cost-effective outreach and discipleship opportunities, and help is readily available from Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) if you are interested in participating in this great mission opportunity. "CEF can provide a strategic plan, materials, training, support, and mentoring," says John Luck, the state board chairman for CEF. "[CEF] can also contact the school, provide liability insurance, and conduct background checks for your club."

If you are ready to see children's lives changed and churches grow through Good News Clubs, contact Amy Haines (contact information below).

Let's share the Good News of Jesus Christ with children and their families!



RESOURCE

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