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November 23, 2009

# Practical Tools

Vern Sanders

## Suffer the Little Children...

### Train up a Child

One of the bloggers that I read regularly, **Michael Smith**, had this to say in a recent blog about providing an opportunity for young people to assist in worship:

*If no one had seen some potential in me or taken a chance and given me the opportunity to serve I would not be a worship leader today. The older I get the more I am thankful that God put people in my life that did give me a chance. I am thankful I attended a church that took a chance, putting me on stage to lead a portion of the service.*

*It is the responsibility of the church and its leaders to mentor others in the specific tasks of leading others.*

*Today at the church I serve, ClearView, we are trying to be intentional about raising up worship leaders. We are investing in the musical training of children and we are giving our youth an opportunity to use the talents they are learning to lead their peers. A year ago we made a more intentional commitment to invest in the lives of middle school and high school students, to work with them and mentor them to help them become worship leaders. In just 11 months I have been able to witness youth go from being followers of an adult worship team to leaders of their own team. They have risen to the challenge and expectations presented to them. It took a commitment from the church and the passion of a leader, Alexis Cruz, who was willing to see potential and invest time.*

I must confess that I have been the beneficiary of a (small) church that had the grace to allow me to assist in worship as a youngster...when I was clearly not the most competent of players. And, more importantly, I must confess that I have also taken the position as a lead musician in churches, that children are not ready to assist in worship (as leaders...I am not talking about children's ensembles right now) until they are much more competent than I was in a similar situation.

Part of my (lame, imho, I feel now) rationale was that things are different now, and congregations have much less tolerance of less than professional music. Part of my rationale was that less experienced worship leadership is unpredictable...one never

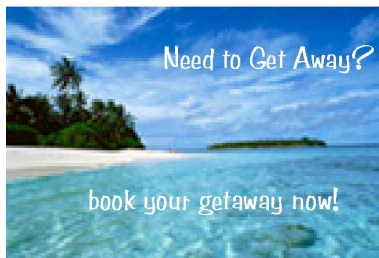
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knows what is going to happen. But a big part of it was that, in a bigger church, there are plenty of options, and so children often get squeezed out because of the large adult talent pool from which to choose.

In my current church, however, things are different...(actually, in a lot of ways, but that's a different story...).

*[I've said this before, but I'll repeat it for emphasis: when I had the opportunity to go back to being a church musician after I retired, I decided that I would only do it for the specific reason of giving back...to mentor and share what I know...in smaller churches. It requires a different mind set to choose to work in a smaller church, but, for me, the change has been refreshing, and I feel that I am able to contribute on a number of different levels now...not just being the "head" and administrivitor of a large program.]*

Last Sunday we had two young (high school aged) people playing in the worship band - a drummer and a bass player. They are brothers, ironically...but perhaps not surprisingly-their parents (as well as the bass player) sing in my choir. The bassist was there because our regular player is out of commission for a bit recovering from a knee replacement. The drummer is in regular rotation with an older fellow.

The point is...these kids are good. They listen, play sensitively, and...most importantly...they've got a great attitude. There's no drama, no lip, and no pretense. They're there to play, to contribute...to lead worship. Were it the case that it was true for all the adult players I've had the pleasure (sometimes) to serve with over the years.

So...God bless small churches, because they have a unique opportunity to allow children to grow in musical service for and during worship. A small church gave me the opportunity when I was just 10, and, without that chance, I wouldn't be sitting here writing these words to you today. So suffer the little children to assist in worship. The child you encourage today may just be the worship leader tomorrow.

## Final Thoughts

Stepping into the "way back" machine, my home church was Lutheran (Augustana Synod) in the central valley of California. The church seated perhaps 150 at most, but they sang each and every hymn (congregational favorite? by far: **Beautiful Savior**) in 4 parts...the liturgy too. That's just how it was. The choir of 20 or so was in the loft, with a Baldwin organ and a spinet piano, which frequently were played at the same time (2 people) during hymns. When I started, at the age of 10, as the substitute organist, I had never had an organ lesson (I'd been playing the piano for 6 years), and couldn't reach the pedals. Nobody seemed to care (except little old perfectionist me...). We sang the same **All Glory Laud, and Honor** arrangement every Palm Sunday of my recollection (I have no idea who the writer was, but it was a Schmitt, Hall & McCreary publication, printed on green paper...remember those days?). Sadly, the neighborhood changed, and the congregation doesn't exist today. The church building is now occupied by a different faith, after the diocese (many years after I went away to college and never came back) sent a pastor in to "shut the small congregation down" since it was no longer smart to keep the doors open. I remember and miss those people to this day...

Blessings.



**Vern Sanders**

***Vern has served in some form of church music and worship leadership for 40 years in a variety of denominations both in the US and in Canada. He is currently Director of Music at First Presbyterian Church, Templeton, California. He regularly consults with churches and church leaders. Click on his name above to email him.***

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