

10 TEACHING MISSION TO CHILDREN

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'Coming, coming, yes they are . . .' and as the kitchen table was reached my father had landed on Afric's shore! Missionary hymns, *Echoes* and *Echoes Prayer List* were part of our breakfast and from earliest days I can remember places like Chitokoloki and Narsapur; even our house was called Kawama. I was one who absorbed mission by the simple process of osmosis and thank God for this. If this process cannot be employed then we are thrown back essentially on the Junior Church/Sunday School or other institutionalized means as a way of teaching mission to children. This being so, we need to have regard to certain generalized principles and to face the need for careful planning if we are to make the most of preparation and production, for what may be at most a weekly slot of five minutes in an overall programme of one hour, or fifteen minutes in a Daily Vacation Bible School situation.

PRINCIPLES

Children have varied likes and dislikes. If we can discover these we can, like the Blue Peter programmes, major on the likes, avoid the dislikes and thus capture the interest of children.

We must ask ourselves whether we have an infectious enthusiasm for mission. Enthusiasm is a necessary factor in overriding the lack of interest and imagination in the attitude of others. It should infect not only children but also teachers and parents.

We must be willing to persevere in the teaching of mission to children despite the knowledge that our commitment will involve a hard regular slog and that it can be devastatingly costly in genuine preparation time.

In all our planning and teaching we will have to reckon with the arch enemy who has a particular interest in preventing young children from learning about mission; after all they are potential missionaries, potential pray-ers, potential givers.

What we do in childhood is often vividly remembered in later life. We should therefore aim to fill the minds of children with beautiful memories

that feature triumph, answered prayers and exciting progress in winning people for Jesus Christ.

PLANNING

Just as the gardening manual sets out a programme of work to cover all the months and seasons of the year so it can be useful to have in mind a long term plan for setting out the work to be accomplished in teaching mission. Such a plan encourages an orderly approach: there will be motivation to keep going, controlled changes to sustain interest, a gradual building up of knowledge and a pride in achievement. Just as the builder follows a prepared plan in putting together a house that is made up of many constituents ranging from hardened bricks to delicate tiles so the plan for teaching mission will involve a whole range of varying constituents that come together to provide a building 'fitly framed'.

If children begin at Junior Church when they are 4 and leave when they are 10 we may need to think in terms of a 6-year plan. The programme set out is merely an attempt to give some idea of the way in which our thinking could develop. Although the long term nature of such a plan may appear to be over-structured and even forbidding it has definite advantages: the teacher is given time to glean material from distant parts and acquire a knowledge of the needs and problems of different countries on an ordered and progressive basis. It is of course important that such a plan does not become a bondage of formal rigidity. Every opportunity for flexibility and topicality of approach should be taken, eg the substitution of whatever country is in the news over a particular 'happening' or of a 'live' missionary or national who happens to be on tap.

PREPARATION AND PRODUCTION

A 5-minute slot for teaching mission is very short. Material must therefore be well presented if an impression is to be made, and this demands much preparation time. Some ideas that have proved helpful over the years include:

The provision of a missionary table

Contents can include photos of an ongoing project, a doll from the country, maps, newspaper cuttings, stamps, missionary magazine pictures and cuttings, curios, examples of the language and other bits and bobs. Further interest can be engendered by attaching informative labels to each object. A picture of the missionary or a national with the name and name of country clearly displayed or attached to a map with a piece of coloured

string is also helpful. Children can be issued with a questionnaire about the missionary table. Early birds can complete this before Sunday School or it can be completed whilst parents are chatting at the end of the morning or evening service.

A simulated visit to a particular country

Passports can be made and a colourful national costume of the month can be worn by one of the children. Simulated customs, practices and attitudes can give additional flavour and interest can be heightened by helping the children to prepare a meal in the home of the teacher or at the church, using recipes from the country itself.

A signature chorus and/or a signature verse

This can preface the mission slot: it will help the children to orientate themselves to the new activity and provide a sense of continuity in the 5-minute slot.

Action

Children love action and we need to imagine all sorts of actions in which the children can involve themselves. The project for the month can be shown and read each week: eg all the children hold up their Bible and say 'Bibles for A.F.R.I.C.A, Africa' (cf EVERTON). Simple scenes from missionary stories can be dramatised or mimed.

Competitions

Simple crosswords, deciphering a code, unjumbling letters, colouring, free story, free drawing, filling in the gaps, collecting information, guessing the number of caterpillars Kahemba caught in her tin for the family dinner, will all encourage the interest of the children.

Variety

It is helpful to change the channel of getting the matter across; ie use a few slides one week, a poster the next, a drama the next, a recording the next, a puzzle the next . . . and so on, preferably finishing at a point where the children would prefer to go on listening. Toy monkeys, rubber snakes etc can be used to attract the children's attention and help them to remember a certain point.

INTEREST AND ACHIEVEMENT

Opportunity should be taken over the years to introduce as many different personalities as possible to the children so that their interest is sustained. They need to know that a missionary is not just a preacher but that he can also be a doctor, nurse, teacher, pilot, dentist etc. Children may well respond to adopting a child, sponsoring a radio programme, financing the digging of a well, paying for the printing of a scripture syllabus, saving for Scripture Gift Mission booklets to be sent out to Indonesia or to Christians who visit prisons. Children enjoy collecting, so they could collect toy cars for the London City Mission, safety pins for a hospital, pencils for a school etc. In modern times a missionary extension ministry for children can be organized by the enthusiast using videos, magazines and books especially geared to children.

A sense of achievement can be inculcated if the teacher is able and prepared to go to greater lengths by offering missionary knowledge certificates and badges for special detailed effort. The following notes may be of help in developing ideas along these lines.

MISSIONARY KNOWLEDGE CERTIFICATE AND BADGES

First Step

- 1 Write out Matthew 28:19–20.
- 2 Send a postcard to a missionary in Zambia.
- 3 Learn John 3:16 by heart so that you can use it to tell others about the Lord Jesus.
- 4 Draw the sort of houses a missionary would visit if he worked amongst eskimos or people in Hong Kong.
- 5 Ask your teacher what SGM means. Ask him for one of the booklets printed by the SGM for boys and girls. Read it and then give it to one of your friends praying that your friend will become a friend of the Lord Jesus too.

Second Step

- 1 Write out Romans 10:12–13.
- 2 Send a postcard to a missionary in India.
- 3 Learn Romans 10:9 by heart.
- 4 A missionary is going to Japan. How long will it take to fly from UK to Japan? (A travel agent will give you the answer.) Draw the sort of aeroplane in which he would travel.
- 5 Ask your teacher the name of the girl whose story moved the Bible

SAMPLE SIX YEAR PLAN for teaching mission to children

Year	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1	France	Zambia	Nepal	Israel	Mexico	SGM	Poland	Bible Society	New Guinea	FEBA	Thailand	Leprosy Mission
2	Italy	Zaire	N India	S Africa	Guatemala Honduras	Portugal	Roumania	Japan	Fiji	Tear Fund	Malaysia	London City Mission
3	Norway Sweden Finland	Nigeria	Central India	Botswana Mozambique	Jamaica Puerto Rico St Kitts Virgin Is	SGM	Czechoslovakia Hungary	TWR	New Caledonia	HCJB	Philippines	In Contact
4	Germany Austria	Angola Chad	S India	Ecuador	Trinidad Tobago	Spain	Russia	Japan	Aborigines (Australia)	Senegal	Hong Kong	SU
5	Ireland Spain	Tanzania Kenya	Pakistan	Iran Iraq	Venezuela Guyana Colombia	GLO	Albania Greece	Brazil	N Africa Guyana	Zimbabwe	Taiwan Korea	Wycliffe
6	Portugal Greenland	Ethiopia Botswana	Afghanistan	Lebanon Syria	Ecuador	OM	Yugoslavia Bulgaria	Argentina	N Africa	Chad	China	MAF

Society to start its work. Where did she live? What did she have to do before she could have what she wanted? How does the Bible Society help people all over the world?
etc

Extra Badges

Readers' Badge

- 1 Read *Star of Light* by Patricia St John.
- 2 Trace a map of Africa showing in red the country of Morocco.
- 3 Answer the following 5 questions about the book . . .

Echoes Badge

- 1 Name 3 places where there is a mission hospital.
- 2 Who looks after a bookshop in Japan?
- 3 Name 2 schools for missionary children.

Collectors' Badge

- 1 Collect 10 stamps from 3 different countries.
- 2 Collect 3 letters from 3 different countries.
- 3 Collect 3 pictures of missionaries from missionary magazines.
etc.