

Report of the Children, Youth and Family Task Force



Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
January 2001

CHILDREN, YOUTH, and FAMILY

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE REPORT

Introduction

Ministering to Children, Youth and Families (CYF) was identified in LOPC's December 1999 congregational survey as a top priority for LOPC's future to serve those in our community and to attract and retain new generations in faith and service to God. The Session established the Children, Youth and Family Task Force to identify ways that LOPC can enhance and expand our current strengths in serving children, youth and families in our community.

The Session specified the following Objectives for the CYF Task Force:

1. Develop a vision for intergenerational participation and strong support for children, youth and families.
2. Identify needs of LOPC members and the local community relating to children, youth and families.
3. Summarize the history of past and current programs and activities, including allocation of staff and financial resources.
4. Evaluate current programs and activities in light of the needs assessment.
5. Evaluate successful programs outside LOPC and develop a plan to expand and enhance LOPC's CYF programs.

Our CYF Task Force worked through these Objectives to formulate recommendations to Session, with hope that our ideas will guide LOPC's programs for the future.

Children, Youth, Family Vision for LOPC

This vision statement was developed by a large, diverse group in May 2000, and agreed to by the affected staff and committees in LOPC.

“LOPC is an inclusive, Christ-centered community that reaches out to families in all their diverse forms and at every stage of life.

We care for children, youth, and families on their life journeys by integrating worship, education, nurture, friendship, faith development and service to others through dynamic, intergenerational ministries.

Our aim is to spiritually enrich and strengthen our young people and families to serve as Christ's example in the world around us.”

Recommendations

The task force recommendations take the form of a series of statements or goals that generally identify the direction that LOPC should move in order to meet the overall Children, Youth and Families Vision. These goals are shown in italics. Beneath each stated goal are examples of ways that may help the church move toward that stated goal, and in turn toward meeting the overall CYF Vision.

The examples beneath the italicized goals are not prescriptive mandates, but suggestions for consideration that came out of the task force research and discussions. The actual methods adopted to achieve the goals are left to LOPC's staff and committees.

1. *Children, youth and families' participation in worship services and worship leadership is critically important to communicate that they are welcomed, included, and important in our church family*
 - Children, youth and families can serve as greeters and ushers during our scheduled worship services, and possibly as guides for visitors and even parking lot attendants
 - They can read Scripture, provide music and choral leadership and offer other forms of leadership in worship
 - Based on our research, we believe that children, youth and families will respond well to a contemporary family-friendly service with lively music
 - Our survey responses indicated that many families would respond well to a Saturday or Sunday evening service
 - The Worship Committee could work closely with the Children's Ministry Committee and Youth Committee to identify additional ways in which children, youth and families can be involved in worship
 - The language of the worship liturgy can be constructed so as to draw in children and youth, and address the world from their perspective and point of view
 - Care can be taken to ensure that sermon illustrations and points of application include younger worshipers and families
 - Children and teens are responsive to lively music and video. A youth band, intergenerational choir, liturgical dance, drama, and handbells are possibilities to pursue. These efforts need to be developed by staff, with direct input from the children, youth and parents

2. *Young people and families must have meaningful involvement opportunities to serve the congregation, to serve others and to serve God through participation in effective mission*
 - Develop family oriented mission trips and projects, both at the church and away
 - Incorporate the importance of mission into the Christian Education program
 - Draw the children and youth fully into the volunteer opportunities of the church, with the possible development of a children and youth "Gifts from God" version
 - Create opportunities for children and youth to share their mission experiences with the church through a variety of media
 - The Mission Committee could develop a special team under its committee structure to deal specifically with involving children, youth and families

- Take advantage of mission opportunities in our own church, for example, youth assisting with church school, Vacation Bible School, and children's music; and children and youth assisting and participating at the Senior Center

3. *Our children, youth and families are effective ambassadors for LOPC in attracting other young people and families into God's service*

- This role must be made intentional and enjoyable
- The task of working as ambassadors must be facilitated by the church through "bring a friend or neighbor" activities such as the Harvest Festival, Advent Workshop, and certain youth activities
- Develop a plan and involve church leaders in training the congregation that welcoming visitors is a priority of LOPC
- Teach our members, including children and youth, to be on the lookout for visitors at all times, so that they can be welcomed and guided
- The Seedlings and Singles programs, including the Single Parent Support Program, should be intentional avenues for outreach to invite non-members to participate in LOPC activities and service opportunities
- LOPC needs to continue to strongly support the Seedlings program. This program should be examined for how it can be better connected to the church
- Currently LOPC does not have a program for college age students, yet there are many college students in our local area. We currently provide no formal follow-up for our Senior High program "graduates." The CYF Task Force recommends that LOPC offer service opportunities to college students, especially during summer and holiday periods. We should also offer fellowships, and maintain meaningful contact with our Senior High graduates. For example, one church uses an "adopt-a-college student" program where any member (other than the parent) volunteers to stay in contact with a student during his or her college years, whether the student remains in the local area or goes far away to school

4. *The church must provide multiple opportunities for the spiritual growth of children, youth, and families*

- We recommend an increased emphasis on small group ministry, particularly for families and youth. These groups will provide a place for families and young people to share, support one another, and pray. Areas of focus could include Bible study, relationship development and support, service to others, leadership development, assistance with younger children's programs, etc.
- Small group meetings need to be flexible in terms of scheduling times and places
- Group Life should consider offering a series of Bible study lessons for parent and child, possibly once third graders receive their Bible from the church in March
- A family discussion of church lessons is a desired goal. LOPC should consider tying the weekly sermon to the children's lesson at special times of the year such as Lent, Advent, etc.
- All pastors need to be visible and involved with children, youth, and family programs, not just the incoming associate pastor of CYF. This can be as simple as greeting our young people personally in informal settings to leading them in worship, spiritual growth, and in mission

- LOPC should consider assigning an adult mentor to each member of the annual Confirmation Class. Members of Session would be strongly encouraged to be mentors. Mentors and confirmands will follow a program that will be clearly outlined by Youth Ministries

5. *The Sunday morning children and youth programs must be engaging for the participants, inspiring them to want to come to church*

- Sunday morning is the optimal time for establishing who we are as a church and it is essential that children, youth and families understand clearly that they are welcome and valued
- As part of teacher training, volunteers need information and guidance on how to follow up with children in a caring way. The primary role of church school teachers should be to build relationships with children
- LOPC should continue Godly Play as an effective means of spiritual growth for children, and enhance the more traditional church school program to better meet the children's needs. Both Sunday morning Children's Education programs need strong support in staffing and staff time allocation
- Some of our programming, such as Godly Play, have proven effective in truly engaging children, and its methodology could be explored more fully in other educational contexts
- Care could be taken not only to welcome new children and youth, but also reach out to their parents in a special way by providing accompaniment opportunities
- A special welcome packet could be sent home with visiting children so that their parents are fully informed regarding the ministry of the church, and know that the children and parents are welcomed
- As much as possible, church staff, and especially clergy, should consider the importance of calling the children, and their parents, by name, as we know this increases their sense of being valued
- Lively music and movement are critical to children and youth. Considerations should include intergenerational music, contemporary music, drama, liturgical dance, handbells, and video productions

6. *Working parents, single parents, two-income families, blended families, and families of all types respond well to programming that takes into account their busy schedules and diverse needs*

- Consider a LOGOS type intergenerational program, which begins with a group dinner, then is followed by activities such as Bible study or music
- Consideration should be given to integrating parenting classes, single parent programs, family relationship building and other activities into an overall plan for spiritual growth for children, youth and families
- There is an increasing need for childcare at church-sponsored programs. We believe that whether there is childcare is sometimes the deciding factor on whether people attend a function or participate in a program. A childcare coordinator position may be needed

7. *LOPC should involve increasing numbers of lay leadership through the development of creative and flexible volunteer opportunities*

- Children and youth benefit from consistency in leadership. It would be ideal to set up a model where lead teachers commit for a school year, with assistant teachers rotating. The feasibility of this needs to be examined further
- Effort should be made to develop leadership that focuses on relationship building and ministry to children, youth and parents
- Utilization of lay leadership must be examined to ensure that volunteers do not “burn out,” perhaps restructuring roles or creating additional roles for class preparation, etc
- All parents should be asked to serve as volunteers, with a specific expectation given
- In the Youth program, volunteers and interns are needed to serve as small group leaders
- Consider recruiting role model Christian college students to help with the Senior High program, role model Christian high school students to help with the Junior High program, and role model Junior Highers to help with children’s programs
- Volunteers need training in the Bible, the curriculum, listening and teaching techniques, how to effectively help young people grow spiritually, how to relate to them, how to lead, safety and legal requirements, appropriate behaviors, awareness of abuse, special needs, diversity and other topics
- The way church school lessons are developed and executed and the way teachers are trained should be examined to ensure that the curriculum is delivered in a consistent fashion as intended
- Effective recognition of volunteers will affirm our appreciation for their time, effort and love

8. *Communication is critical to the vibrancy of the children, youth, and family programs. LOPC must actively and effectively utilize all available avenues to communicate to the congregation and community about CYF activities, programs, and ministries*

- The worshiping community should be made aware of the subject matter being taught in the church school classes. Bulletin announcements could highlight, the topic for that Sunday. Handouts for parents could be taken home from church school classes for further family discussion
- Two-way communication should be made easy and effective. People should be able to obtain up-to-date information, ask questions, give comments, and register for programs and activities on LOPC’s website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Communications with pictures and graphics must be sensitive to the diversity of various family forms and ethnicity
- When children and youth participate in LOPC’s programs, those who have personal contact with them such as a teacher, staff, intern, or small group leader should follow-up. For example, a one-time visitor should be invited to return. A child or youth who regularly attends but misses several weeks should be called because of concern, if that is appropriate

9. *Awareness, excitement, and anticipation must be created at each transition in the life of a child through young adult. These transitions should be celebrated*

- Fifth graders need to be exposed to the Junior High program long before they “graduate,” and similarly, the Junior High to Senior High, and Senior High to College
- Events could be planned for fifth and sixth graders together and eighth and ninth graders together during the Spring before promotion
- Parents also need to know what they and their “graduating” child can anticipate in the next stage of life at LOPC, and how they can be involved and supportive

10. *The facilities and equipment of our church need to be dramatically upgraded in order to provide excellent ministry space for our children, youth, and families*

- The task force brainstormed ideas, then divided them into “first level” and “second level.” These two levels are not so much an indication of importance, but rather what we felt could practically be done first, without capital improvements

First Level

Better signage and better lighting all around campus

A bright, welcoming nursery

Optimize existing storage space

Large screen projector

DVD player

Digital video and editing equipment

Adequate and safe outdoor play areas

Cleaner bathrooms and children’s rooms

Second Level

An Education Building with light, bright classrooms

Children’s and Nursery facilities away from the parking lot

Toilets in young children’s’ rooms

More and better-organized storage space

A large, multi-purpose room (possibly a new Fellowship Hall) that could be used as a gym, with a kitchen, piano and plenty of storage, also wired for sound and light. There is a need for large meeting space for youth with sound, video, special lighting and clean site lines

Flexible space (sound-proof partitions to make rooms larger or smaller as needed)

Technology, including an audio system, built into the classrooms, meeting rooms and libraries

Outdoor play area for older children and youth

Climate control in classrooms and sanctuary

A comfort room in the Sanctuary (currently the use of the bride’s room is inadequate) that has enough seating to accommodate LOPC’s growth of young families and a baby changing facility

Office space for staff, including Seedlings, and interns

Work space for volunteers

Bright, spacious, functional library facilities for CYF

Plan for Implementation

The CYF Task Force will ask Session to receive their report as a guide for the future direction of LOPC programs and ministries for children, youth and families. The Task Force will then report their findings and recommendations to the congregation. At this point, the CYF Task Force will have completed its work.

Input on how to implement the CYF Task Force recommendations will be sought from the congregation as part of a multi-year, ongoing process to move LOPC toward its Vision for Children, Youth and Families. LOPC's Committees, Teams and Staff will consider member and community input. The responsibility of designing, implementing, and evaluating programs resides in LOPC's leadership structure—Committees, Teams, and Staff. The Session, on a regular basis, will evaluate progress towards reaching the CYF Vision. This ongoing process will cycle through the following steps: plan to move LOPC closer to the CYF Vision, communicate the plan by informing members and the community and obtaining their input, implementing desired enhancements, and evaluating the effectiveness of programs and use of resources.

Since LOPC is currently searching for an Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families, major staffing considerations related to the Task Force's recommendations would be evaluated once this new person is on staff.

Respectfully submitted by the Children, Youth, Family Task Force

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Thank you also to: Bettie Graves, Rosie Ockels, Lorraine Lyon, David Patch and Sara Brown for their assistance in summarizing the history of our CYF programs, and to Di Pagel and the Strategic Planning Team for their counsel along the way.

Have implementation questions, comments or input??

Please contact Susan Ferone, Children's Ministry Committee, or Roger Squier, Youth Ministry Committee, or the church office.