ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF NON-SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN’S TRAINING PROGRAMS USED BY CONSERVATIVE, LOCAL, BAPTIST CHURCHES IN MICHIGAN

by

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The intent of this study was to discover those elements which pastors and Christian education leaders considered important in a successful non-Sunday school children's training program. It also measured parent satisfaction with those selected elements within the context of their own church children's program. Such information could assist churches and parachurch ministries to improve existing programs or encourage the development of new materials which would provide local Baptist churches with greater depth in training children from their church and the community at large. The data may also assist churches in evaluating their current ministry programs and the degree of parent satisfaction.

Many local churches have successfully supplemented their educational programs with a variety of children's training programs. These parachurch resources have extended the church's reach into the community at large. There are a number of such ministries. They have provided new avenues of training children in moral and religious values.

Baptist churches have been selected for this study. Although a wider multi-denominational study might have its merits, it is believed that this focused study would provide information not generally available from other sources. The study would also provide a more homogenous research. Generally conservative in nature, Baptist churches are usually more likely to be independent and individualized.
The research was multi-staged, with Survey One being a convenience sample of 25 Baptist churches of which 17 responded. Survey Two targeted Baptist associations identified as conservative or fundamental and having at least 50 member churches in Michigan. Six associations met the criteria, representing a total membership of 737 churches. A computer program, using a simple random selection method, allowed all 737 churches to be eligible for selection and selected the churches to receive the survey. A statistical sample affected a net of 301 churches. Pastors and Christians education leaders responded to Using the data from the first two surveys, Survey Three focused upon children's programs named by 25 or more churches. Awana Clubs International was the only program used by at least 25 churches. Survey Three was essentially a satisfaction measurement directed toward parents. Five surveys, mailed to each of the 61 churches, were distributed to families whose children were part of the training program. Net results represented 59 churches with a total of 294 surveys with 166 responses returned.

The primary research question was, "What elements are considered important by local Baptist pastors or Christian education leaders in non-Sunday school children's training programs." The purpose of the study was to evaluate a series of pre-selected elements in four categories: administration, operation, content, and flexibility. A secondary question asked parents, "Are you satisfied with your children's ministry in achieving those important elements?"

Responses from pastors in the first two surveys were generally similar, though there were some areas of disagreement, especially with Bible translations. Pastors responded that a large number of elements, primarily in the content category were less
important than I would have expected. Differences were more noticeable between the senior pastors and their church staff and ministry workers.

The third survey focused upon identified children's ministries and the degree of parent satisfaction with the local church's ability to achieve those important elements. Also in the survey, parents were asked to rate the importance of a number of elements which pastors had considered as less important or unimportant. Parents responded to the list quite differently. To the parents, many of the elements were considered important to very important.

Interpretive comments included pastors of Survey One with pastors of Survey Two. The first survey received responses from an older, more experienced group of church leaders. They generally regarded the elements from a more supportive position.