

# CHILDREN'S MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT



Platte Woods UMC  
Platte Woods, MO  
June 24-26, 2011

Children's Ministry Architects  
Consultants: Lynn Barger Elliott and Theresa Fauser

## **BACKGROUND**

Platte Woods United Methodist Church ("Platte Woods") is fully committed to live by its mission statement *to build an outwardly focused Christian community of full participants in a life of grace*. Located in the suburbs of Kansas City, Platte Woods has been a powerful presence in the Northland since they first began services in 1958. From the small group gathering that met in a rental home in Parkville, MO in 1958, the church has grown and expanded to a membership of 2,500, placing it among the top 1% of Methodist churches in Missouri. The church is well known in the area and has a reputation as a large church that offers a wide variety of opportunities as well as a congregation that gives generously to the community. As the church is moving in the direction of becoming fully engaged with the community, the church members, staff and pastors are eager to be prepared for dynamic growth. Platte Woods' goal is to double its current worship attendance in the next 10 years.

Platte Woods recently participated in the Healthy Church Initiative program, an in-depth consultation process in partnership with the United Methodist Church. Platte Woods is using discoveries made during this process to generate even more faithful and fruitful ministries in the name of Christ. Listening group members described Platte Woods as giving, mission driven, community focused and vibrant.

In an average week, 870 people attend one of the church's 4 worship services. Each service has its own identity and style. This fall, Platte Woods will launch a new worship venue on Sunday evenings in order to motivate future growth and target a specific demographic. There is much excitement about this new adventure and the opportunities it provides for all age groups. Currently, there are approximately 540 birth through 5th graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, approximately 171 children participate in Sunday School. Additionally, an average of 80 children participate in Wednesday evening activities.



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The church has a 2011 budget of \$1,882,308. For the year 2011, the children's ministry has a budget of approximately \$97,900 which includes the program budget and staff salaries, but does not include additional fundraising and donations. In addition, the childcare program has a separate budget of \$45,205 and provides services for Sunday mornings and most evenings. Through recent additions and expansions, the children's ministry has large and welcoming classrooms and recreation facilities. These facilities are utilized by the Sunbeam preschool program, Parent's Day Out (PDO), childcare and all major children's ministry programs including Sunday School and Wednesday night activities.

The primary children's staff is comprised of a full-time Director of Children's Ministry and a part-time Children's Ministry Assistant, who rounds out her full-time job with administrative support to the SunBeams and PDO. A full-time Director of Sunbeams, a full-time Director of Parent's Day Out and a part-time Childcare Coordinator are also under the supervision and responsibility of the Director of Children's Ministry. The Sunbeams, PDO and childcare each have separate part-time hourly staff that report to their respective directors/coordinators.

The current Director of Children's Ministry has served in this position for 13 years. She was a long-time member and volunteer at Platte Woods before coming on staff in her current role. During her tenure, she has broadened the scope of opportunities, increased the volunteer base and provided stability and consistency. Likewise, the Children's Ministry Assistant has been on staff for 11 years and the Childcare Coordinator for 24 years. Longevity is evident in many of the other staff positions as well.

There are approximately 30 adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major children's ministry programs with a total of approximately 80 volunteers serving regularly in some capacity. Many of these serve on a rotational basis once a month. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year. Additionally, youth are utilized in many areas as key volunteers. Consistently, listening groups echoed a consensus that more volunteers are needed in every aspect of children's ministry.

The current children's ministry offers 3 weekly programs: Children's Sunday School, CIA (Christians in Action) and Wednesday at the Woods. During an average week, it is estimated that 171 children attend Sunday morning classes and approximately 80 attend Wednesday at the Woods.

Children's Sunday School meets weekly at 9:30 a.m and utilizes a traditional Sunday School model with age-divided, self-contained classrooms for 3 year olds - 5<sup>th</sup> grade. A lead volunteer teaches in most classrooms from a provided curriculum and rotating



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volunteers assist each week. This is THE hour for children's ministry on Sunday mornings. Many parents said:

- "We love the children's program here. It is one of the things that drew us to the church."
- "I've been happy with Sunday School."
- "My kids love Sunday School."

Christians in Action (CIA) meets at 11:00 on Sunday for grades K-5<sup>th</sup>. It has an average attendance of 12 children. This program has been recently reformatted and is led by corp group of youth volunteers and is supervised by 2 adults. All grades meet together for a time of music, games, lesson and activities. For many in the listening group, the existence of CIA was news to them. "It is the best kept secret." For others, knowledge of the program and opinions varied: "What they are doing there is good. Kids like interacting with older youth." "My son hates CIA so he doesn't go anymore."

Wednesday at the Woods is a church-wide weekly program. Families have the opportunity to gather together for a buffet dinner and fellowship before dividing for their separate activities. Children ages 3 yrs-5<sup>th</sup> grade participate in age-graded choirs followed by a selection of weekly activities including crafts, dance, open gym and Bible study. This is a dynamic and growing program, augmented by the offering of adult education classes which are open to the public, such as Parenting with Love and Logic.

In addition to the regular children's ministry programming, Platte Woods offers weekday ministry opportunities to children including Sunbeams, Parent's Day Out and childcare. These programs meet the needs of not only Platte Woods' members, but the community as a whole. Both Sunbeams and PDO are recognized in the community and are thriving successful programs.

The children's ministry at Platte Woods is positioning itself for a transition in leadership. Ann Bartholow, Director for Children's Ministry since 1994, will be moving into a new role at the church, working in the Older Adult Ministry. As the children's ministry moves into this next phase of ministry, Children's Ministry Architects (CMA) was invited to do an initial assessment of the ministry and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. We met with 47 individuals in 11 focus groups or one-on-one meetings and had 2 written reports from persons who could not be there. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

## **CHILDREN'S MINISTRY IN CONTEXT**



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One lens we like to use for understanding children’s ministry is the idea of the “three rents.” It has been our experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not insure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by children, parents, staff and the congregation at large.

Children’s ministries that “pay these rents” tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. And those children’s ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement.

Rent #1: NUMBERS—A significant percentage of children need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the Session and the staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the children’s ministry is typically *more likely* to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established. For most of the programs at Platte Woods, you are “hitting it out of the park.” If anything, the complaint is that your numbers are so high, which ushers in the need for more volunteers and more programs to help families connect, so they don’t feel lost.

Rent #2: PROGRAMS—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, the children’s ministry needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective children’s programs that give both students and parents “something to talk about.” You are able to pay this rent with programs like VBS, SunBeams, PDO, and Faith in Action.

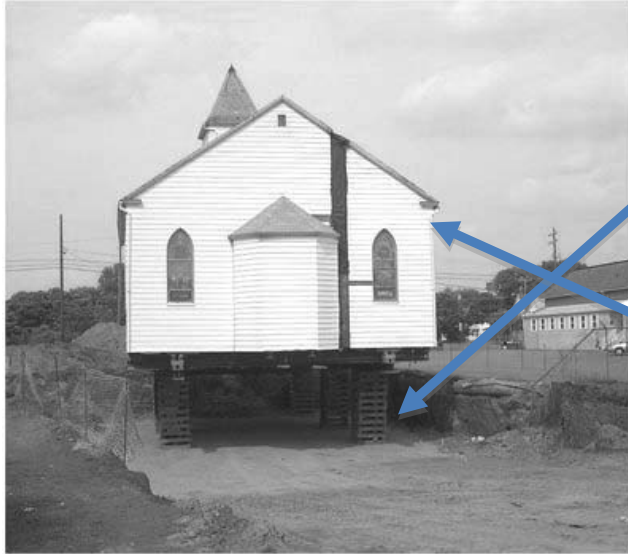
Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the children’s staff, volunteers and the kids themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents. Enthusiasm is evident in most of your programs, but so is volunteer fatigue. This will need to be attended to as future growth is considered.

The good news is that the Children’s Ministry program at Platte Woods is “paying its rent,” which allows others to trust the program to be creative and to make changes. As the leadership of the children’s ministry goes about the process of developing its long-range vision, the children’s ministry will face parallel tasks: building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the children’s ministry’s future effectiveness *and at the same time*, maintaining a children’s program that builds the enthusiasm of children, their families, the staff and the church at large.

We picture this parallel challenge this way:



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1. Laying the New Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the ministries' *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. Continuing to Worship on Stilts: Maintaining the *current* ministries in a way that builds the enthusiasm of children, Children's, families, staff and the

As the children's ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, four rules of thumb will be helpful to keep in mind:

1. **\$700 a Kid**—With a budget of approximately \$97,900 dedicated to the children's the ministry, the church has a capacity to engage 140 children. (Over the past several years, the program has received additional \$20-25,000 in donations.) With a weekly participation level of close to 180, the ministry is significantly under-funded. It is neither adequately funded to do effectively do what it's already doing, nor to grow into new avenues of ministry.
2. **1 Adult for Every 5 Children**—We like to think in terms of "spans of care," recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church's Christian nurture of more than about five children on an on-going basis. Given this rule of thumb, with 30 weekly adult volunteers, the ministry is not set up to adequately engage and care for the 180 children it serves weekly. A sustainable volunteer force for 180 weekly participants would be 35-40 weekly volunteers.
3. **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 75 Children**—With the full-time equivalent of 1.5 staff, Platte Woods is on track to engage 112 children on a weekly basis. In other words, the staff in place is drastically understaffed and does not have the ability to meet the basic needs of the ministry. In light of the church's hopes to increase attendance and to engage more children in the ministry, it must add staff support. Conventional wisdom would suggest that volunteers can be natural substitutes for children's staff, but this perspective ignores the reality that, for volunteers to be effective in carrying load-bearing responsibility for the ministry,



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there needs to be staff with sufficient band width to coordinate, train, and troubleshoot with volunteers.

4. **12% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the children’s ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 12% of the worshiping congregation. With an average worship attendance of 870, Platte Woods is could expect to see 105 children coming through its doors each week. With an average attendance of 170, Platte Woods is exceeding the target.

A summary of the above norms indicates that the children’s ministry is greatly understaffed and underfunded and cannot accomplish levels of excellence in its current ministries. These ministries, in addition to any future endeavors, are not likely experience significant, sustained growth (either in breadth or depth) beyond its current levels without additional investment in staffing and volunteer development.

## **BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CHILDREN’S MINISTRY**

We have found that the most stable approach to staffing a children’s ministry is to build a staff of three very different kinds of people and competencies:

- **THE ARCHITECT:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan (CMA has begun playing that role with this assessment process).
- **THE CONSTRUCTION FOREMAN:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work “on the site,” who manages the complex components of the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that appropriate number of “laborers” are in place for each stage of the project.
- **THE LABORERS:** Those people charged with specific responsibilities for particular pieces of the building project.

One of the challenges facing the children’s ministry is that everyone on the current children’s staff seems to have a primary identity as a “laborer,” one who works on the craft of ministry to children. No one is filling the architect role at this time. Little time is invested in crafting and casting the vision for the ministry.

Many adults in the listening groups expressed a desire to see their future staff spend more time in the architect and foreman’s role, investing in the vision of the program and the development of volunteers for a broader and deeper impact. Our observation is that the children’s ministry will become more effective under the leadership of a Director who



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can implement the mission and vision of the church and team ministry leaders who have responsibilities for specific ministries.

## **Assets**

### ***Strengths to protect in the current children's ministry***

#### **Something to build on!**

A history of stable ministry has created a solid foundation upon which to build the next era of Children's Ministry. The consistency and strength of Anne Bartholow's leadership has provided parents and children with a level of comfort, trust and familiarity within the program.

- "Ann is a hard worker. She loves kids."
- "My kids have grown up with Ann."
- "Teenagers still run up and hug Ann when they see her in the halls. She made a difference to them."

#### **Long-Term Volunteers**

Several volunteers have committed decades to serving faithfully in the children's ministry. We heard from several parents that these volunteers have significantly shaped the spiritual development of their children. These volunteers are not only eager and willing to serve, but they love serving week after week. Many serve in more than one volunteer role. They just can't seem to get enough!

- "[As a teacher] I always feel appreciated."

#### **Rooms to grow**

The spacious and well-equipped children's ministry classrooms signify to members and visitors alike that children are important at Platte Woods! The electronic check-in system was pointed to by several members as a hallmark of the recent advances and improvements being made in the children's areas. More than adequate supplies, equipment and resources were evident in each of the ministry areas. The facility is equipped to enable the congregation's future anticipated growth.

#### **Success comes in small packages!**

Sunbeams preschool has developed quite a name for itself in the community. It is recognized as a strong and highly desirable preparatory experience for preschoolers. Public school educators in the listening groups commented on how prepared Sunbeam kids are when they enter school. Parents commented on the how much they "loved the program" and that it is "an amazing place!" Parent's Day Out (PDO) is also highly successful, reputable and widely utilized drop-in daycare program. The convenience and flexibility of the program are its greatest strengths. Both of these programs offer access



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and are the “front door” experience to Platte Woods for hundreds of families in the community. This accessibility can and should be leveraged for future church growth.

- My kids have loved Sunbeams preschool.
- It’s an amazing place with wonderful teachers.

### **We love Wednesday at the Woods**

There is something for everyone on Wednesday nights! This intergenerational, church-wide gathering offers a time for families to fellowship and to connect over dinner before going to their separate ministry programs. The creative arts opportunities are impressive with multiple dance troupes, three children’s choirs and a developed craft program. These programs are balanced by robust Bible studies for early and older elementary children. The energy and enthusiasm that surround Wednesday nights make it one of the most successful and talked about pieces of the children’s ministry program.

### **VBS is awesome!**

Vacation Bible School engages hundreds of children, parents, adult and youth volunteers every summer. Well- integrated themes create a week of fun and effective ministry. We heard numerous times, “The kids love water day!” VBS attracts non-church families from Sunbeams, PDO and the community. This attraction can be leveraged to maximize outreach and evangelistic opportunities. The ability to provide quality VBS at no cost is a gift to the community and a blessing to families.

### **Ready...set...change!**

Participants in the listening groups demonstrated an openness and receptivity to change. While completely supportive and appreciative of current programs and staff, members are looking to the future with eager anticipation. They are ready to embrace change and they desire to be open to the plans God has for the children and families of Platte Woods.

### **Supportive pastoral staff**

What a blessing to have a senior pastor that “gets it!” Pastor Steve recognizes and acknowledges that “children’s ministry is the most important thing we do.” That level of support and validation from senior staff can serve to encourage and inspire the children’s ministry team of staff and volunteers as they navigate the transition in leadership and create new programs to support future growth.

### **Committed parents**

Platte Woods children’s ministry has a base of parental support with great breadth and depth. For example, committed parents began a “grassroots” movement that led to the inception of an Early Childhood Council. This council was instrumental in addressing



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security issues in the preschool area that led to the purchase and implementation of the current computerized check-in system. Parents are also responsible for the development of the Trunk or Treat event as well as the Wednesday night dance program. Many of these same parents can be seen volunteering in the halls or classrooms on Sunday and Wednesday. With 49 people attending the listening groups, a high level of commitment and support is obvious!

### **Willingness to utilize youth**

The youth who are serving in the children's ministry are viewed as real assets. There is a willingness to equip and utilize youth for a wide range of ministry opportunities. Their integration into children's ministry benefits both ministry areas (children and youth) as the spiritual formation of both parties is enhanced through their service.

## **Challenges**

### ***Obstacles to Moving the Children's Ministry Strategically Forward***

#### **Crisis of Capacity**

The most glaring reality that Platte Woods must face in its children's ministry is its lack of capacity to do much beyond what it is doing. Like a person trying to stay warm with a 4 foot by 4 foot blanket, the program simply doesn't have enough infrastructure to provide all the coverage that is needed for the kind of programs the church would like to see. There is little question that the children's ministry would like to do more. But doing more of what has been done is not likely to produce dramatic results. Realistically, the children's ministry has simply not had enough staff to create and sustain the kind of effective program the church is looking for. In fact, many of the other challenges we are about to mention stem from the fact that the staff simply doesn't have time to "lead the dance" and work on "build the dance floor" at the same time.

We frequently heard the phrase, "We just need..." Whether the sentence ended with "more volunteers," or "a little training" or "better curriculum," there seemed to be a fantasyland assumption that there was some mystical "you" out there who could take the time to do such things. The children's ministry staff is not short on ideas. But new ideas will not likely make any significant difference in the children's ministry unless the staffing capacity to implement those ideas is increased.

#### **Worship**

A prevalent theme throughout many of the listening groups was a strong desire to create meaningful worship experiences for children. Parents offered varied opinions as to what those worship experiences might look like, but common to all of the suggestions was an underlying need to create space for children of all ages to encounter God through worship. Members expressed an interest in children engaging in worship through music,



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as acolytes, by assisting with liturgy and participating in communion. Though parents welcomed the opportunity to provide training and guidance to their children with regard to worship, many felt ill-equipped to do so.

### **Safe and Secure**

There is an ongoing concern for the safety and security of our children. Platte Woods has taken many important steps towards providing the a safe environment. The staff is committed to continuing this trend. Listening groups mentioned elements of safety as a key issue. Some things they said:

- “We don’t feel comfortable (leaving our babies).”
- “Safety issues aren’t always taken seriously.”
- “The building is unsecure. Our youngest kids are the most vulnerable.”
- “Anybody can come in and out of those doors.”

This issue is multi-faceted. The main issues are cited here.

- Doors left unlocked on Sunday mornings allow unwanted intruders to enter the children’s areas.
- The welcome desk is occasionally left unstaffed by volunteers who are prepared to handle unfamiliar situations.
- “Because We Care” policies need to be more carefully enforced.
- The security tag system needs improvement. The system is underutilized and security tags are often not checked by teachers at pick-up.
- Communication during emergencies and emergency drills needs to be improved.
- Adequate emergency lighting is needed in all children’s areas, hallways and staircases.
- Proper supervision for children’s programs must be ensured. Youth leaders need to have adult supervision and support. Two adults should be in each room at all times.

### **Music**

Though great effort and energy are poured into the children’s choir programs, they lack professional guidance that would steer them in a direction of greater efficacy and age-appropriateness. The committed volunteers would benefit from a leader with strong musical skills and the ability to apply those skills to develop a creative and vibrant music program for children of all ages. Some parents said the current music program lacks enthusiasm and relevancy. Listening group members shared these concerns:

- Song selection is not age-appropriate or relevant. “Cherub choir-singing same songs over and over again.”
- Format and structure of the program leaves older children disinterested in participation.
- There are missed opportunities to use the music venue as a teaching time.



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## **Anemic Volunteer Systems**

Several comments were made regarding the volunteer process:

- “Such a large church but we have so few volunteers.”
- “I feel bad that I don’t teach Sunday School, but I don’t know enough.”
- “No one ever asked me to volunteer”
- One member offered to volunteer and was told, “Thanks, but I don’t think this is where you’re needed.”

The good news is, there are lots of volunteers already in place, and plenty of potential volunteers. What’s missing is an intentional plan to identify, recruit and equip them.

A fresh approach will help dispel the wide-spread misconception that there are only a very limited number of volunteers who fill all the necessary roles. There is also a growing cynicism about the ability to successfully recruit people with a passion for children’s ministry. Fresh recruitment tactics, creative training delivery methods and strategic relationship building and support are needed to build a volunteer base capable of sustaining the current programs and planning for future growth.

## **Patchwork Curriculum**

Curriculum selection and implementation lacks intentionality and direction. Many programs seem to be operating without a clear curriculum or with teacher selected materials that have no connection with an overarching discipleship pathway for children birth-5<sup>th</sup> grade. Volunteers expressed frustration over inadequate teaching materials as well as lack of instruction on how to use the materials they were given. Listening group members expressed a desire for cohesiveness between the weekly ministry programs as well as a long-range discipleship plan that clearly identifies scope and sequence and/or core competencies as children move from birth-high school.

“I feel intimidated to go and teach a group of third graders.”

### **Make it memorable**

With the exception of VBS and the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade overnight event, groups struggled to identify key events or programs that created significant and lasting memories for their children. Opportunities for families to fellowship together, with each other and with the community are in short supply. Often these opportunities are missed because of a lack of communication and promotion.

- “Time to take things up a step.”
- “Raise the bar.”

## **From here to there**

Some listening group members reported that their students were “lost” once they promoted to student ministry. One parent said she had a “1<sup>st</sup> grader, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and one



going into the abyss.” She later clarified that the child was going into 6<sup>th</sup> grade and would be moving into the youth ministry program. Likewise, parents of younger children are equally concerned that their children will be lost in the transitions. As children move from nursery to preschool, preschool to elementary school, and elementary school to middle school, attention needs to be given to celebrating these Rites of Passage. Rites of Passage events should create anticipation and enthusiasm in children by helping them celebrate where they’ve been and where they are headed. The absence of these Rites of Passage leads to a ministry that feels stagnant and irrelevant.

### **Collaborative ministry**

Ministry areas at Platte Woods, and even departments within the children’s ministry, operate as separate silos. Children’s ministry, Sunbeams, PDO, student ministry and family ministry operate in isolation from each other though much could be gained through collaboration. Collaboration is needed in the planning and execution of events, the discussion of a continuous discipleship pathway from birth through HS graduation and the sharing of vital resources. The inclusion of pastoral staff in the collaborative discussions could yield fruitful results as pastors became aware of opportunities to be visible to large groups of kids and families at special events and major children’s programs.

### **The bridge is out**

Sunbeams and PDO have hundreds of kids and families involved in their weekday programs. This is fertile ground for Platte Woods and children’s ministry. But several listening group participants talked about “missed opportunities” to help connect these families to the church. They mentioned inadequate promotion of VBS to weekday families, missed opportunities for church staff to be present at Sunbeam/PDO events and lack of follow through when families visit the church. Participants commented:

- “Our programs are just stuck over here on the side.”
- “We get a lot of new families in this area... this is the time to grab them and get them focused on church.”



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) Designate the next 16 months as a time of infrastructure building and ministry-wide vision casting for the children's ministry. Target September 2012 as the date for a sustainable structure and clear vision for the expanded impact of the ministry at Platte Woods.
- 2) Ask the Leadership Council to endorse an intentional 16-month strategic design process for the children's ministry, as proposed in this report.
- 3) Appoint a five-person "Renovation Team" which will take responsibility for implementing the strategic, long-term changes recommended in this report over the next 16 months. The Children's Ministry Renovation Team will be charged with two overarching responsibilities:
  - a. Work with staff to attend to the immediate pressure points in the children's ministry.
  - b. Establish a consensus for the direction of the children's ministry and develop its long-term infrastructure.

### **Task A: First, address the immediate pressure points**

*Issues that should be addressed in order to create an atmosphere conducive to change and growth.*

#### **1) Transitional staffing:**

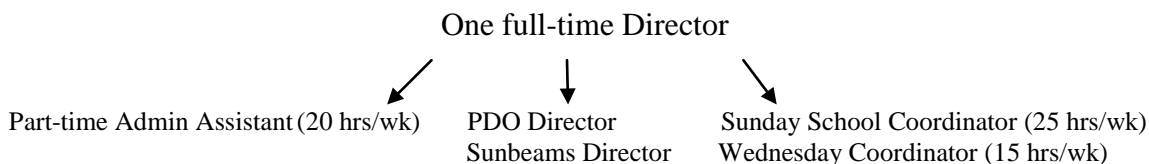
- a. Designate a day in September as a churchwide opportunity to recognize and celebrate the ministry of Ann Bartholow. In gratitude for her service and in preparation for her next era of service to Platte Woods, extend to her a 4-month sabbatical (through January 1, 2012) to visit other churches and gather information about Ministry to Older Adults.
- b. Recruit an interim team of (part-time, paid) leaders to oversee the following areas of ministry until the next Director is hired:
  - i. Sunday School (9:30 and 11:00) – 15 to 20 hours
  - ii. Wednesday at the Woods – 15 hours
  - iii. Special Events – 10 hours

#### **2) Long-term Strategic Staffing:**

Propose a clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan for the children's ministry which will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of children. Name measurable landmarks for when the church should consider hiring additional staff.



- Based on the summary of the norms, as well as the desire for a Director who can cast a vision and equip others to work towards that vision, CMA would recommend the following staffing structure:



- In response to future growth, additional part-time staffing could include:
    - Music Ministry Coordinator
    - Creative Arts Coordinator
    - Children’s Worship Coordinator
    - Recreation Coordinator
- 3) Begin the search process for hiring a new Director of Children’s Ministries with a targeted starting date of January 1, 2012.
  - 4) Review building and supervision safety policies and processes with the Security Team and implement any recommendations immediately.
  - 5) Solidify plans for 2011-2012:
    - a. Confirm a calendar of weekly events and special events through August 2012.
    - b. Confirm volunteers for 2011-2012
    - c. Confirm curriculum selections and ensure that all has been ordered

***Task B: Create a Long-term, Sustainable Infrastructure for the Children’s Ministry***  
*(The 16-month responsibility of the Children’s Ministry Design Team)*

**INFRASTRUCTURE TASKS THAT BUILD STABILITY**

- **Control Document Development:** Develop a children’s directory (including staff and teacher information), an 18-month calendar, volunteer application processes, major event notebooks, and preventative maintenance calendar.
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that the following policies and procedures are updated, affirmed and practiced by all staff, and child care providers and volunteers:
  - Volunteer application and screening



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- Because We Care
  - Steps in the case of an emergency (tornado, fire, non-authorized child pick-up, etc)
  - Copyright licensing for music and videos
- **Attendance:** Create a process to review attendance records and to follow up with those who have been absent for more than 2 weeks.
  - **Schedule a Children's Ministry Visioning Event**  
To create an environment that creates consensus about the direction and results of the children's ministry, a 3-day visioning event should be calendared and held within three months of this report with an open invitation extended to all interested parties. The result of this event will be a decreased amount of doubt about the ministry's short and long-term success and an increase in the commitment, joy and volunteerism levels. The event should produce these four vital visioning documents:
    - a) An easily articulated mission statement which is aligned with the church's mission and delineates the CM's target audience
    - b) A statement of Platte Woods children's ministry core values
    - c) A set of three-year revolving goals, with measurable one-year benchmarks and next step actions to reach the one year revolving goal.
    - d) A children's ministry organizational chart of who is responsible for what, (including future ministries), putting all parties involved at ease about shared ministry responsibilities.
  - **Marketing:** Establish normative processes for celebrating the joys and successes of the children's ministry throughout the church (bulletin boards, worship announcements, videos, websites, FaceBook, etc).
  - **Communications:** Develop a game plan for improving the communications between staff, volunteers and parents surrounding the children's ministry. Consider whether the marketing and communications strategies would require additional staffing and other funding.
  - **Children's Ministry Manual:** Develop a manual for the children's ministry that would include the most recent directory, an 18-Month calendar, job descriptions, three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and comprehensive notes for every major ministry event.
  - **Christian Formation Plan:** Create an integrated template for curriculum, encompassing all aspects of the children's ministry programs including a design for Sunday morning, Saturday and Sunday evening, Wednesday at the Woods programming and special events like VBS.



- **Welcoming Environment:** Develop a process for creating a welcoming environment, including the evaluation of the current signs as well as updating the church's bulletin with accurate information on the location of all children's ministry programs. Maintain the volunteer staff at the check-in station and continue to evaluate the process for ease.
- **Major Event Notebooks:** Create a planning notebook for every recurring event of the children's ministry that can be passed from one chairperson to another in subsequent years.

## DEVELOPING AND NURTURING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- **Identifying, Recruiting and Equipping Volunteers:** In line with the church's model of volunteer participation, establish a structure to identify, recruit and equip volunteers to be effective, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers and leaders in the ministry.
  - **List of Volunteer Needs:** Create a comprehensive list of volunteer needs for the 2011-2012 program year.
  - **Volunteer Job Descriptions:** Identify all volunteer roles within the children's ministry program and create written results-based job descriptions for each.
  - **Volunteer Database:** Create a volunteer survey and enter the names and information into a database of potential volunteers. In addition to the surveys, a list of 100 potential volunteers is created.
  - **Recruitment:** Develop and maintain an application and screening process for all volunteers. All weekly and major event coordinators through August 2012 have been recruited at least 3 months in advance.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer workers at the beginning of each school year and major event. Share the vision for the time frame, answer questions about the focus, brainstorm about the future and leave them excited about what God can do through this event.
- **Ongoing Volunteer Training and Development:** Schedule quarterly fellowship and training opportunities throughout the year, as well as opportunities to publically recognize and thank volunteers.



## DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **Creative Fall Kick Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, family-based, incredibly fun Fall Kickoff event to launch the children's ministry in the fall of 2011. Use that event to cast the vision, share information and build enthusiasm about the year ahead.
- **Connecting Families:** Plan quarterly fellowship events for families, providing the opportunity to create memories together as a church family, to reach out to families who attend Platte Woods but are not connected, and to invite new families to Platte Woods Children's Ministries.
- **Music for Children:** Create a task force to explore musical opportunities for children within the classroom, worship services and the Wednesday at the Woods programs.
- **Children and Worship:** Create a task force to explore and recommend multiple opportunities for children to experience worship, lead worship for others and to grow in worshipping skills. Include consideration of a format for children and parents to explore communion together.
- **Pastoral Staff Presence:** Maintain weekly communication with the pastoral staff, inviting them to be present at major events within the Children's Ministry, PDO and SunBeams.
- **First-Timer Process:** Develop a process for welcoming new families, children, and guests to the church so that they feel warmly welcomed. Develop a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the church.
- **Bridges:** Create an overall plan for building bridges between major transition points in the children's ministry program (i.e., birth, entering the 2 year old classroom, starting choir, entering 1<sup>st</sup> grade, leaving 5<sup>th</sup> grade) that engage children, youth and parents.
- **Rites of Passages:** Create traditions for various rites of passage, like the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders receiving Bibles or the 5<sup>th</sup> graders having a sleep over.
- **Discipleship Plan:** Create an integrated template for curriculum, encompassing all aspects of the children's ministry programs including a design for classes on Saturday and Sunday night, Sunday morning, Wednesday nights and other children's ministry programs or special events. Provide an opportunity for parents, staff and church leaders to gather together for a curriculum planning retreat. The outcome would provide the church with a scope and sequence plan for a faith journey through the Platte Woods' Children's Ministry.
- **Discipleship Pathway:** Construct and publicize a deliberate discipleship plan that allows student and parents to understand where students are in their spiritual



journey and to determine what programs, ministries and family activities will meet their individual needs (i.e. Sunday School, Worship, CIA, Choir, Bible Study, Faith in Action, VBS, etc). Develop a metaphor and picture-representation of the spiritual journey that reflects the discipleship pathway that is being embraced by the greater church and allows for the integration of the various ministries.



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## **PROPOSED TIMELINE**

*The following timeline provides Platte Woods with a plan that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term children's ministry.*

*Many churches choose to use the services of CMA to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like CMA to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas, particularly for the 16-month transition, we are available to help. The "estimated days" following each month is an estimate of how much time CMA thinks it would require to accomplish these tasks.*

### **July 2011**

#### **Focus: Celebration of Ann's Ministry/Transitional Staffing/Fall Preparations**

- The Leadership Council has endorsed a 16-month infrastructure renovation plan for the Children's Ministry.
- A team has been recruited to plan churchwide events to celebrate the ministry of Anne Bartholow.
- An Interim Ministry Team has been hired and coached into their responsibilities, including the planning of the Fall Kick-Off, curriculum ordering and teacher recruitment.
- CMA has been contracted to facilitate the Children's Ministry Visioning Event and to provide ongoing coaching for the Interim Ministry Team.
- All security issues have been brought before the Security Team and solutions with deadlines are agreed upon.
- A volunteer training event has been scheduled to take place before Sunday School begins.
- A letter has been written to the entire congregation informing them of the upcoming recognition and celebration of Anne Bartholow's ministry, the plan for the interim as well as the Director search process.

### **August 2011**

#### **Focus: Preparations for the Fall**

- The Interim Ministry Team continues the planning of the Fall Kick-Off, curriculum ordering and teacher recruitment.
- The Interim Ministry Team meets with the pastoral staff to determine strategic times of pastoral presence in the Children's Ministry programs.
- Major event teams have been recruited to plan the Fall Kick-Off, Trunk or Treat, and Santa's Workshop.
- All major event notebooks are updated and distributed to the teams.



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- A Children's Ministry Visioning Event is calendared for early fall.
- A Children's Ministry directory, calendar, and 2011-2012 volunteer opportunity survey are prepared for distribution at the parent orientation. These resources are also on the website.
- The volunteer application is updated and the process for background checks and appropriate paper work is confirmed.
- All volunteers have experienced a surprisingly fun, team building training session on classroom basics that clarifies their roles, inspires them to grow in their own faith and equips them to serve the children of the church.
- Monthly coaching of interim team continues.

## September 2011

### Focus: Anne's Farewell/Fall Program Launch/Renovation Preparation

- Anne's ministry has been honored with a huge, magnificent celebration with generations of children coming back to Platte Woods as a testimony of her ministry.
- A Fall Kick-Off event has taken place which leaves the parents informed and confident in the interim ministry plan, and aware of volunteer opportunities. Calendars, directories and surveys are distributed.
- Twenty-five surveys were returned. The information was recorded in the volunteer database and all interested potential volunteers have been contacted.
- The Renovation Team has been formulated, received this assessment and become oriented to their unique roles and responsibilities over the next 12 months.
- The search of the next Director is launched.
- A process for reviewing attendance and following up absent children with has been created.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## October 2011

### Focus: Compliance Documents/Volunteer Development

- The Director Search continues.
- Key control and compliance documents are in place: Because We Care Policy, Safety policies with specific emergency standards applying to the Children's Ministry, volunteer applications, background check forms, and copyright licenses for music and video have been obtained.
- A children's ministry visioning workshop has occurred involving staff, volunteers, members and parents and has produced four key visioning documents:



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- A Children's Ministry Mission Statement
- A statement of Platte Woods Children's Ministry Core Values
- A set of three-year practical revolving goals with one-year benchmarks
- A clear organizational structure for the children's ministry.
- Steps for ongoing training and support for the Children's Ministry volunteers is in place. A fellowship event for the volunteers is scheduled for Nov/Dec.
- A list of all volunteer opportunities has been created.
- Results-based, written job descriptions for all volunteer positions in the children's ministry have been developed.
- The majority of the pressure points in the report have been addressed.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## November

### Focus: Communication/Preventative Maintenance

- A strategy for sharing children's ministries' stories regularly with the congregation has been created.
- Normative processes have been established for effective and timely communication with families. As many forms of communication as possible including updating the church's website, the church newsletter, bulletin, Facebook, mass texting, bulletin boards, phone tree, etc. have been utilized.
- Budget is reviewed and proposed for 2012.
- The visitor follow-up process is reviewed, firmed up and staffed for effectiveness.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## December 2011

### Focus: Gratitude to Volunteers/Preparation for 2012

- All volunteers are publically recognized and for their service and a small gift is given on behalf of Platte Woods.
- Plans for a New Semester Kick-off for the Children's Ministry are in the works.
- Curriculum/Discipleship Design Retreat is scheduled with CMA for Jan/Feb.
- Final interviews have occurred and the Director is selected.
- Two family and/or parent fellowship events are calendared for 2012 and planning teams are recruited.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## January 2012

### Focus: Thanks to Interim Team/Welcome to New Director



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- Welcome events are scheduled for the new Director.
- The director has been oriented to the renovation process as well as the myriad responsibilities of the children's ministry.
- The Interim Team is recognized for their superb leadership through the transition of leadership.
- A mid-year check-in meeting has taken place with all volunteers to deal with issues that have arisen, receive feedback and make the necessary adjustments.
- A VBS planning team is recruited to plan this summer's VBS. There will be a chair, who will head it this year and a Vice-Chair, who will head it in 2013.
- Based on attendance tracking, reasonable participation goals for the children's ministry events and weekly programs have been set, and there are promotion strategies for meeting these goals.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## February 2012

### Focus: Music/Worship/Curriculum and Discipleship

- A task force is created to assess the opportunities for professional music leadership within the Children's Ministry and a proposal is made for future staffing to address this opportunity for growth and worship.
- A task force is created to explore and recommend multiple opportunities for children to experience and lead worship. Attention will be given to communion instruction for parents and children.
- A game plan is in place for a deliberate system that allows children and parents to understand where children are on their spiritual journeys and determine how the Children's Ministries can help meet their individual needs.
- Work has begun on the 2012-2013 children's ministry calendar.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## March 2012

### Focus: Volunteer Recruitment/Curriculum Plan

- A Children's Ministry curriculum retreat has taken place and a draft of a curriculum planning template (2 years old through 5<sup>th</sup> grade) has been completed.
- The 2012-2013 calendar is confirmed.
- A list of all volunteer needs for 2012-2013 has been created and a master list of 50 potential adult volunteers has been developed, including people from a variety of age groups.



- Recruitment of all volunteers and major event coordinators for children's programs for 2012 has begun.
- Rites of Passage to celebrate and mark the important transitions in a young person's life have been developed.
- All children's programs and events have been evaluated in light of mission statement, and plans are in place to leverage off of strengths and shore up missing elements.
- Curriculum has been selected and reviewed based on the curriculum template. An overall curriculum plan for 2011-2012 is complete.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## **April 2012**

### **Focus: Transition of Leadership/Bridging Events**

- The structure for a more established and sustainable Children's Committee has begun, to be put into place once the Renovation Team completes the renovation process.
- Recruitment of all volunteers and major event coordinators for children's programs for 2012 continues.
- Bridging events and efforts between programs are considered and two are implemented for May/June.
- An event is planned to celebrate the hard work of the children's ministry volunteers.
- The planning team for the Fall Kick-Off is recruited.
- Monthly coaching continues.

## **May 2012**

### **Focus: Staffing/Volunteer Recruitment**

- The current staffing structure has been reviewed and recommendations have been made in regards to long term staffing to meet future growth.
- A Preventative Maintenance Calendar has been created for the children's ministries that will help it regularly deal with on-going "behind the scene" ministry maintenance.
- Plans are underway for the Renovation Team to turn over the reins of leadership to a Children's Ministry Team who will be charged with the task of ongoing, hands-on support for the children's ministry staff.
- All volunteers needed through December 2012 have been recruited.

## **June 2012**

### **Focus: Preparation for Leadership Transition/Fall**



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- Information for the children's and leaders directories has been updated.
- Volunteer Surveys, to be distributed in September, are updated.
- Monthly coaching continues

## **July 2012**

### **Focus: VBS**

- The VBS leadership team is applauded for their successful event.
- Pictures and experiences of the event are shared with the congregation.
- A manual for the children's ministry has been completed (in 3 ring binder and electronic form), including
  - Visioning Documents
  - Children's Directories
  - Volunteer Directory
  - Annual Calendar
  - Job Descriptions
  - Curriculum template and record of resources used for the current year
  - Budget
  - Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year through August 2013
  - Compliance Documents (volunteer applications, music and video copyright licensing, etc.).

## **August 2012**

### **Focus: Leadership Transition**

- A high-energy training event for all volunteers takes place.
- All volunteers have been instructed in safety policies.
- The Renovation Team and Children's Ministry Team has met to check on the progress of the revolving goals and each one's one year benchmark.

## **September 2012**

- The work of the Renovation Team is celebrated by the staff and congregation.
- Another year is kick-off with an enthusiastic parents' meeting.
- A new set of three-year goals and one-year benchmarks has been developed.
- CMA visits to wrap up the renovation process and orient the Children's Ministry Team to their responsibilities.



## PROPOSED SEARCH TIMELINE

Below is a *proposed* time line for Platte Woods's search for a *Director of Children's Ministries*. The dates can be adapted. These are our best plans, but God may have others!

Though we have seen it take less time, our experience is that a five-to-six month time table seems to be most realistic. We have also seen searches take a few months and up to a year. However, we are optimistic that, given the unique advantages your position provides, the right candidate should emerge by using the following timeline:

### Target Date **Sept 2011**

### Action taken

A new staffing structure and job description is approved by the Leadership Council. (CMA/COO)

A job posting, marketing letter, and posting list are created. (CMA and COO)

Upon approval of all documents, the search begins and the COO begins to receive and review resumes. (CMA and COO)

A marketing piece is emailed to 2000+ childrens ministry contacts and 200+ follow up phone calls to key contacts are made (CMA)

Position is posted on 20+ college, seminary and children's ministry websites (CMA)

Qualified candidates in resume files are invited to submit resume (CMA)

20+ Children's Ministry/Christian Education professors are contacted and asked to distribute the job announcement (CMA)

Resume files on youth ministry job boards are reviewed and qualified candidates are invited to apply (CMA)

### **October 2011**

Preliminary phone interviews begin with qualified candidates (CMA/COO)

List of 30 potential candidates is created (CMA/Search Team)



Top 5 candidates are selected and reference-checking begins (COO)

Reference calls completed (Search Team)

Team is selected and trained to interview candidates (CMA)

Phone interviews with preferred candidates scheduled (Search Team/COO)

Phone interviews completed (Search Team/COO)

2-3 candidates selected for on-site interviews

**Nov 2010** On-site interviews for up to 3 candidates are scheduled (CMA/Search Committee)

**Dec 2010** Search Team recommends top candidate to Leadership Council

**Jan 2011** New Director for Children's Ministry receives start-up orientation and begins ministry at Platte Woods UMC.

