

KID – What It Looks Like in “Our Neck of the Woods”

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Come with me to Lacombe, AB, where College Heights Christian School and our constituent church, College Heights SDA Church, sit across the road from each other. This is our spiritual hub for group religious activities and the *Kids in Discipleship* program. On Sabbath, you see dozens of children and youth engaged in Sabbath School, going up front for the children’s story, and participating in Children’s Church. During the week, you see many of these same children and youth at school, engaged in multiple ways of absorbing academia and the numerous other things teachers do every day to help them learn to let their lights shine for Jesus and be contributing citizens in the world.

But wait! During the school day something else is going on at the school that makes you stop and wonder why a class of 5th and 6th grade students are eagerly grabbing their Bibles and running outside after their teacher. Where are they going, and what are they going to do with those Bibles *outside*? As you stand back and watch, you see that the teacher is leading this chatting, laughing, rambunctious group down the back hill to the pond – everyone is still holding tight to their Bible. (I hope none end up in the pond!) And then you see them stop and gather around, intent on what the teacher is saying, followed by flying hands as the Bibles are whipped open and texts are searched for. Kids are reading and talking about the text and what it means to them, and how it applies to their lives. This goes on two or three more times as the teacher leads them in a Prayer Walk around the pond – stopping at different locations chosen by a student and searching for more verses in the Bible. On the way back to the school, the activity changes and you see, at the next stop, kids sitting and lying around on the side of the hill. The teacher is asking students to pray silently and then listen for the voice of God. Are you surprised to see a couple of hands go up after the teachers asks them if they heard God speak to them, and then to hear those students share what they heard God say? No one is making fun of them; everyone listens and takes this time seriously. You find out later from the teacher that the walk had purpose – this one was about prayer. Students were led through the concept of prayer – praise, confession, asking, thanking, and then listening and being still. They loved it! They want to do this more often! Has the teacher hooked them? Yes! Just one more way to lead our children and youth into a discipleship relationship with Jesus. The next time you see them, they may be participating in community service or an outreach project, or discipling younger students at school. You may even see them sitting alone with their Bibles – TAG – experiencing Time Alone with God. These are “kids in discipleship.”

Now that the kids are busy at school, you might be wondering what’s going on across the street at the church. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. This is so great! Do you want to know why? It’s because the parents are gathering at homes and other meeting places in Lacombe, participating in the twelve sessions of *Footprints for Parents & Mentors*, learning and growing into spiritual mentors for their children and for other children they may come into contact with. The small group leaders are equipping the parents by helping them grow into a deeper relationship with Jesus and giving them spiritual mentoring tips for their homes. After these twelve lessons are completed, the church is planning to offer the 24 small-group sessions - *Footprints for kids* - where parents/mentors and their children will learn to have a deeper relationship and be able to trust, follow, and share Jesus. Then, you will see it happen all over again. Parents who were

group participants in the *Footprints for Parents & Mentors* will become group leaders and offer new groups for parents to join and begin their journey with the *Footprints for Parents & Mentors*. Cycle after cycle, learning to be a disciple and then discipling – just like Jesus did with his followers long ago.

I like being a part of “our neck of the woods.” We’re a growing, learning body of Christ who are making it a priority to help teachers connect with their students, and parents connect with their kids while they are still young to ensure a positive connection with their Savior for the rest of their lives. Why are we doing this? First, it’s because Don McLafferty prayerfully accepted God’s call to create a way to connect with the hearts of each one of our children (*Inside Out*, p 13). Supporting that decision is research which tells us that more and more of our youth are leaving the church today - more than 50 percent, according to Dr. Roger Dudley in *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*.¹ The Barna Research Group discovered that by the time a person reaches 13, they have already formed their spiritual identity for the rest of their lives.² Daily we intentionally choose to be a Kids in Discipleship community because we want our kids in our church community to experience a discipleship relationship with Jesus for the rest of their lives. It is the best life-skill we can give them. Don’t you agree?

Resources:

¹Dudley, Roger L, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-Year Study*, Hagerstown, MD., Review and Herald, 2000.

²Retrieved August 17, 2011 from: Kids in Discipleship - http://kidsindiscipleship.org/about/why_children