

The Value of Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry

By David Boyd

Senior pastors and children's pastors often ask me, "What do you think about Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry, formerly Missionettes?" There are mixed feelings about these ministries in some circles. Perhaps a pastor had a bad experience with one or both of these ministries. Perhaps they moved to a church that has these ministries and they know little about their value, purpose, strengths, and weaknesses. Let me articulate my experiences with these ministries, including their strengths and weaknesses.

Let me start by saying that I love Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry. I began these ministries 20 years ago in my first church as children's pastor. I've served in 3 churches in those 20 years, and Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry exploded in all 3 churches. These churches grew substantially through these ministries. Why? What makes these ministries so different? Let me explain.

On Sunday morning the churches where I served had Sunday school, children's church, and nursery ministries—all helped us attract and keep families. I believe in these ministries wholeheartedly. I also recognized that our church needed to have high quality children's ministries because each visitor would be comparing us to other churches. While other churches had something for kids on Sunday morning, Wednesday night; however, was different.

Few churches offer something for kids on Wednesday night. Thus, with a good Wednesday night program, you have something unique. Many families are looking for a church with something to offer their kids. Other families may have a religious background, but no longer go to church. They may not allow their children to go to church on Sunday, but they will allow them to come to a club on Wednesday. Once their kids join these ministries, the parents are gradually drawn in through the outings, awards nights, and parents' events.

A second reason why these clubs are such a success is that they meet the needs of the growing number of single parents within our society. In our culture, nearly 50 percent of the kids may live in homes without a father figure and even more have a dad who is never there. Moms are looking for a place where godly men can impact their sons. Similar reasoning can be said for girls in National Girls Ministry. Thus, these ministries meet the needs for which many families are looking.

A third reason why these ministries are so attractive is the separation into boys and girls classes. Kids this age prefer this—yet rarely get that opportunity. Yes, it is more difficult having two groups and especially finding quality male leadership. However, it is a wonderful benefit when it happens.

In the three churches where I served, we averaged 250, 350, and 525 boys and girls on Wednesday nights. It didn't start that way. Each church began with about one third that amount.

One senior pastor always asked, "Where are all of these visiting adults coming from on Wednesday nights?" I would inform him that their kids had been coming for 6 to 8 weeks.

"Reach the lambs and the sheep will follow" was the slogan for that church. In the 9 years I was at that church, it grew from about 650 to 1,250 in attendance. Most of those were families with kids. If every person in your town knew that you offered these great ministries, your classrooms would always be full.

What are the weaknesses with these programs? Why do some programs seem to succeed and others fail? Has the new curriculum made these programs better?

First, the greatest weakness of any program is the leadership. If you fill a ministry with godly leaders and train them, these ministries will usually flourish. Unfortunately, the wrong person with the wrong attitude may be leading the ministry. A militant type leader who fails to plant his ministry beneath the vision and leadership of the pastor can hinder Royal Rangers. National Girls Ministry leaders can sometimes strive so hard to disciple a child that they can send others away who don't measure up. Your leaders in these ministries need to be led. You may not know everything about how their ministry works, but you do know how to raise up godly leaders.

Unfortunately, many pastors blame the ministries for what is actually poor leadership. Pastors may move from one church where these ministries failed and immediately decide that the ministries at their new church should be replaced. This would be like removing the church board at your new church because of the poor church board at the last church.

Let's look at other weaknesses of the ministries. Royal Rangers used to be biblically weak, and contained a difficult lesson plan for leaders to follow. As the senior commander and children's pastor, I usually helped by putting together easier devotionals for the men and laying out standard class outlines for them to follow. The new program being launched has a fantastic lesson plan with biblically solid lessons.

National Girls Ministry used to be overly difficult for the girls. It was too much like school and not enough like a club. Consequently, from 4th grade on, the numbers of girls in the program would dwindle instead of increase. The program has been rewritten. They have done a wonderful job of keeping it biblically sound and yet adding the fun that keeps the girls coming back. Now we see girls inviting their friends like never before.

One weakness usually mentioned about these clubs is that they seem expensive. But, ask yourself, "Expensive compared to what?" If the church has an evangelist come and stay for adult revival services, churches willingly pay for travel, lodging, food, and a healthy honorarium. The cost of one revival would probably fund your Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry programs for most of the year. Churches often don't value investing in children. Kids wear uniforms and earn badges. These can be expensive, but at every awards ceremony, parents came who didn't normally attend our church. These awards were big events in the children's lives, drawing in parents and relatives. Many of these parents got saved, and even more of them began attending our church.

Kids love being a part of something. They are proud of a uniform, whether it is an official T-shirt or a vest full of badges. What they wear signifies they are a part of something. Think of what you know about gangs in the inner cities. The colors they wear to belong are actually a uniform. It may be a red beret or a red headband or a leather jacket. The uniform signifies that they are a part of something bigger than they are.

Occasionally I hear people say that they don't like the camping side of Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry. First, the way the new programs are written, camping doesn't have to be included for a boy or girl to progress all the way through. But camping is one of the most valuable tools in reaching the heart of a child. How valuable is a father-son fishing trip? A father-son canoe trip? How about a mother-daughter hayride or a hike through the woods? All of these are camping-type events. All of them are great times when men and boys or women and girls spend time with one another. Camping is a great way of getting kids out of their normal environment and letting them learn from nature. Every Powwow I ever led I called a father-son campout. Why? Because I always had unsaved dads accompanying their boys to Powwow. We've had many dads and moms saved at Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry events. While there may be some men and a few boys who don't want the mess of sleeping in a tent, or cooking on a fire, most see the value in hiking, fishing, canoeing, or roasting a marshmallow—all of which sound awfully close to camping. This aspect of these programs is frequently mentioned when a single mom finds out about these ministries and sends her son or daughter.

I was children's pastor in Adrian, Michigan. In that church today are 20 to 30 families that came into that church because of Royal Rangers or National Girls Ministry. The community learned about these programs, kids invited friends, visitors came, parents followed, and our church grew. In Adrian, the Wednesday night program went from 200 to 500 in attendance.

What is my suggestion for pastors and children's pastors? These ministries are wonderful, especially for today's society where families are divided and looking for role models for their kids. They are great clubs because of their emphasis *on* the outdoors, not in spite of it. If you have these ministries in place, spend time getting to know the leaders. Invest in them. Hear their heart and let them hear yours. Learn about these ministries by going to some of their events. Fund these ministries just like you would any other outreach arm of the church.

Are other ministries easier and cheaper? Possibly. Like any curriculum, you can always find a cheaper one, but does it bear as much fruit? I've looked at them all. Royal Rangers and National Girls Ministry are the best there are anywhere. I am also thankful these programs are Pentecostal. I've seen many kids and adults filled with the Holy Spirit around a campfire.

If you haven't started these ministries, contact your district office. They have lots of resources. Recruit leaders with a passion for kids. Let the district help you train them. Get some training yourself. Choose a launch date and get started.

Here at the National Children's Ministries Agency, we are willing to answer your questions and help you in any way.

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