

General Convention Children's Program

The General Convention Children's Program is so much more than just a place for children to be while their parents do church work. Having children on-site means the entire church community is present. It has been reported that the presence of the children impacts how Bishops and Deputies go about their work and gives meaning and context to the decisions being made.

Providing meaningful programming can impact the lives of our youngest Episcopalians, It is an opportunity that not only transforms the child but can impact the age of deputations by allowing parents/guardians of school age children to serve as deputies.



History

The first Children's Program was offered in 2003 at the 74th General Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Children from 5 years to 10 years of age were welcomed and provided substantive faith formation programming throughout the event.

At the 75th General Convention in 2006 in Columbus, Ohio, **2006-D058 Provide Child Care Facilities at General Convention** was passed in direct response to requests to expand the ages offered programming:

Resolved, That the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangement be directed to make age appropriate care and educational programs available for children birth to age twelve available for the duration of the 76th General Convention and all future General Conventions; and be it further

Resolved, That all dioceses and provinces be encouraged to provide similar services for conventions and synod meetings.

The program offered at the 76th General Convention held in 2009 in Anaheim, California consisted of a full program for children from birth to 11 years of age.

Children's Programming at 77th General Convention

A full Faith Formation Program for Children was offered throughout the 10-day General Convention. Programming was offered whenever official business was being conducted, typically from 7 AM to as late as 9:30 PM, as dictated by the General Convention legislative and hearing schedule. In total in 2012, the Children's Program was offered for 150 hours over a period of just 10 days.

Staffing

The Children's Program was comprised of a total of 72 staff (75% of whom were volunteers) offering 1,350 hours of time to the General Convention.

Children's Program Vision:

To provide an environment grounded in Safety, Security, Community, Mission and Fun for children attending the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

All were trained in Safeguarding God's Children and full background checks were performed on all staff. In addition, licensed, professional childcare providers were hired for the nursery and licensed nurses were hired to be on-call.

Staffing included the following positions:

- Overall Program Coordinator, Contracted by DFMS
- Local Program Coordinator, Diocesan Staff/Volunteer
- Licensed Nursery Caregivers, Paid based on enrollment
- Counselors, Volunteers based on enrollment
- Nurses, Paid based on enrollment



Program Elements

The Children's program was a partnership between the office of the DFMS Formation & Vocation Office and the local diocese. The Office supported the program design, operations, program coordinator, training and partial funding. The local diocese provided the staff, resources, training and partial funding. Planning began a full two years before Convention occurred.

The diocese recruited, trained and scheduled volunteers. Christ Church Cathedral housed a private chef who provided healthy delicious child friendly food. The "In Kind" donations of supplies and materials from individuals and congregations in the diocese is valued at \$3,600. Additionally, the diocese paid \$12,366 toward the program expenses. This is an unprecedented donation that has no precedent in past Conventions.

Youth counselors from Camp Way Cross helped design the program, which was experiential, interactive and grounded in our Episcopal identity.



Worship

For the first time the children had a reserved "soft space" at the front of worship. Parents were allowed to join their children and children not enrolled in the program often joined the gathering at the front. The location made it possible for visitors to spend time with the children after worship. Bishops visited and musicians would join the children and let them experience the instruments and answer any questions. There were several child readers and on several days the children helped with the administration of communion.

Space

One of the biggest challenges of coordinating the Children's Program is finding appropriate physical space. The rooms used by the Children's Program must be close enough to meeting spaces so that parents can conveniently drop-off and pick-up their children. The nursery had to meet local and state requirements regarding restrooms and running water.

There was never a time when the Diocese of Indianapolis said we can't do this....they not only rose to the task at hand but exceed all expectations. The diocesan team was creative, imaginative, flexible and caring, They approached the work as a ministry to with and for the Children, not as a task.

Ruth-Ann Collins, Staff Officer for Lifelong Christian Formation

Additionally, the nondescript hotel space had to be transformed into a safe, welcome space for children.

Team work was key in meeting these challenges. Lori Ionntiu, General Convention Manager, worked with the planning team to ensure we had four rooms: one for the Children, one for the younger children, a room that was converted to a nursery complete with rocking chairs and cribs, and a space for staff to take much needed breaks.

Partnerships

2012 marked the first year additional partners participated in developing the Children's Program. These included:

- Camp Way Cross (the diocesan camp): Marking the first year the Children's Program worked with the local camp, Camp Way Cross provided 10 individuals who worked as counselors.
- Episcopal Relief and Development: Using the Abundant Life Project curriculum, Cindy Coe, Episcopal Relief & Development Education Consultant, taught several sessions for the older children. The children also visited the exhibit hall and had an opportunity to meet Rita Mosquito in the ERD Booth. Each child received a t-shirt and Tool Bag full of gardening tools and instructions on how they along with their parents could bring the Abundant Life Project back to their congregations.
- National Episcopal Health Ministries (NEHM): Since the Children's Program is recognized as a "child care" program under federal and state regulations, nurses were required to be available during all operating hours. While this is a budget item of \$2,000, NEHM provided on call nurses for use for no cost and local nurses volunteered their time.
- Latino Ministries: Margarita Santana was trained as a Children's Program coordinator. Since General Convention adjourned, Margarita coordinated a Children's Program for 2012 Nuevo Amanecer, the first time a full children's program has been held at a Latino Episcopal conference.



Highlights of General Convention Children's Program

- Largest number of participating children (48)
- Children as young as 8 months old were in the nursery
- Inspired by their visit to the Episcopal Relief and Development booth, the children raised money to buy a net for the Nets for Life program.
- For the first time in the program, 3 generations of one family were able to be present: 8 month old Tiberius was there with his mother who was a deputy and his grandfather who is a bishop.
- Children visited the Indianapolis Zoo, Children's Museum, Camp Way Cross and got to go swimming
- In-kind donations from individuals, congregations, and diocesan groups totaling roughly \$3,600.

Expenses

Convention-related expenses	\$16,007.73
Travel and housing expenses	\$ 3,802.55
Total paid by DFMS	\$19,810.28

Expenses paid, Diocese of Indy	\$12,366.00
In-kind donations	\$ 3,600.00

Total Program Expenses \$31,146.00

Income

Registration fees	\$ 4,630.00
Total income	\$ 4,630.00