



## Monday-to-Friday child care

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Learning to share toys and be kind to one another are some of the first lessons toddlers are taught when they enter child care. They are lessons their centers' directors and the staff of the churches that house the centers may need to revisit as many have entered an uncomfortable relationship characterized by some in the profession as "years of benign neglect," "indifference" and "animosity."

The problems can stem from shared bulletin boards to shared budgets, said participants at the May 12-13 "Who Cares for the Children? Child Care Research Summit" co-sponsored by Baylor University's Center for Family and Community Ministries and Buckner Children and Family Services Inc. The event was held to release the latest findings from a study on weekday church-based child care conducted by a team led by Diana Garland, dean of the School of Social Work. It is only the second national study conducted on this topic and the first in more than 25 years.

"We've had child care for 25 years and we're looking at starting over," said the Rev. Sterling Severns, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. "We want to create an intentional community with our child care center where we develop families who will look on mission as a way of life.

"It doesn't matter if they are ever in our pews on Sunday," he said.

Many at the event told a similar story – their churches began their weekday programs 20 to 30 years ago as more and more women entered the workforce believing it would be an effective evangelism tool to grow the church and that it would create a much-needed revenue source. The first part of that assumption just didn't happen.

"I think we believed that if we opened the Monday-Friday centers, the families would show up in pews on Sunday," Severns said. "That

doesn't happen, and that's been where some of the animosity began."

Debbie Britt is the children's pastor at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., and said the church is just transitioning from the mind-set that the center should make money. Started 50 years ago as strictly social ministry, it was only about seven years ago that the church embraced the center as part of its mission, she said.

"Part of my job is to educate the church that just because they're not in the pews on Sunday morning doesn't mean they're not part of our church," Britt said.

The Rev. Dorisanne Cooper, pastor of Lake Shore Baptist in Waco, Texas, said her church had just concluded an intensive self-study of its weekday child care program of 25 years. In that process, Cooper said the church was "reminded of the call to care for children," but nonetheless, the center is struggling financially.

"Is this a call? Yes, but it's also a business," she said.

The child care summit offered three workshops with discussions from the perspective of the child care program director and the pastor and a third reporting facts and findings from the research. Almost 50 attended the event, some from as far away as Virginia, Georgia and throughout Texas.

"Our desire was to generate the kind of conversation we're hearing in the workshops today," said Jon Singletary, director of the Center for Family and Community Ministries and assistant professor at the Baylor School of Social Work.

"It's a time of transition or re-envisioning for many churches as they look at their weekday programs. We want to encourage pastors and church leaders to imagine how they can extend their ministries to church families to the families of the children in their weekday programs," he said.

While many are struggling with this question, Kelly Moore, director of the child care program at Trinity Lutheran in Tyler, Texas, said the program at her church is strong and credits that to the pastor's vision for the program.

"You need a pastor lifting up your child care center before the congregation, keeping it out there. It helps create that sense of community and the church's pride in it," she said.

"I tell people we are like Sunday School on steroids," she said. Compared to one hour in Sunday School once a week, child care teachers have 8 to 10 hours a day, five times a week with the children to teach and model Jesus's life.

Some common areas of concern emerged among the pastors and child care program directors. These included shared space, incorporation, financial structure, governance and accountability and providing a living wage for teachers.

One of the more disturbing findings of the Baylor Social Work study is that the families who need quality, affordable child care the most are least likely to get it.

"... Church-based child care programs serve significantly more children in higher income families (\$80,000 per year) and significantly fewer in families with incomes of less than \$20,000 per year," the research report stated.

This is true for Severn's church in downtown Richmond. "Our center families are affluent, but in our church on Sundays we have several refugee families. The one thing they tell us they need is affordable child care, and yet they don't find it at our church. How do we bridge that gap?"

Diana Garland in her keynote address at the summit said that we "have to go after the families who need us the most – to the children on the margins. I don't see how we can provide anything but the very best for God in our midst."

"I think we're guilty, as a nation, of child neglect," Garland said. "Children are poorer than any other group in the country, and the fundamental experience of poverty is hopelessness.

"We need to operate from a theology that *all* children are *our* children."

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