

# GOOD NEWS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Ms. Augusta\* is the new principal** at one of the most diverse schools in the city. She followed a principal who was a member of our church. This previous principal had allowed our church to hold a Good News Club, or after-school Bible club, at the school for the previous two years. Would the new principal look favorably on the club too, even though this school's population is approximately 30% Muslim? We did not know God was already at work.

Ms. Augusta had visited her home country the summer before starting school. Just before returning to the States, a friend hugged her goodbye and whispered prophetically, "When you become principal at this school, you will have someone come into your office one day. This person will ask you if he can do a Bible club in your school. You should say yes."

Ms. Augusta told this story to the Bible club leader from our church when she asked if we could continue the Bible club in her school. Goose bumps, chills, and tears were all part of the reaction when Ms. Augusta assured her, of course, she would allow the Bible club to continue at her school.

Our church is one of thousands around the country to adopt a school to start an after-school Bible club called Good News Club (GNC). GNC is a ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), an international, Bible-centered organization that has been in existence for over 80 years. Last year alone, CEF reached over 19 million children in more than 200 countries, with over eight million children making professions of faith. Their goal is to have a gospel witness in every single country in the world, and they are close to that goal now.

The purposes of Child Evangelism Fellowship and Good News Clubs are to evangelize and disciple children and establish them in a local church. The main question asked is: "Can we actually do that in public schools?" Yes, you can. In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Good News Clubs v. Milford Central School* that Good News Clubs can meet in public schools in the United States after school hours. The decision stated that Bible clubs, such as the Good News Club, must be given the same access to school facilities accorded any other non-school-related outside group.

How does this work? It works on two sides—the church side and the school side. On the church side, it begins with prayer. Pray to see if your church has the heart and the bandwidth to begin a ministry like this. Honestly, some churches have the desire but not the capacity to do this kind of ministry. Pray for a committed team of volunteers with the time and gifts needed to reach and teach children one day a week after school. This is a tremendous opportunity for retired teachers, stay-at-home moms, homeschoolers, or college students.

Team members will be trained in child evangelism by CEF. The training is excellent and will raise the level of your church ministry also. Volunteers will also be screened according to CEF child protection policy. Club time is designed to make kids look forward to every week and to bring their friends with them. Using songs, Scripture memory, a missions story, and review games to accent an exciting Bible lesson using materials from CEF Press, the students receive Bible teaching for real life. Each Club meeting includes a clear presentation of the Gospel and an opportunity for the children to trust the Lord Jesus as Savior.

If your church already has a relationship with the school, the GNC may simply be another way the church is present at the school, albeit after school hours. When our children's pastor asked the principal of a local school about the possibility of starting a Bible club, she gave it about two seconds of thought and said yes. Why? Because our church was already engaged in providing support to teachers, resources to students, and being a uplifting partner to the school. The club was the natural next step in our relationship.

A new church plant in our area is very interested in starting a club at the school where they meet currently. In a wise move by the pastor and leadership, they decided to take some time to develop a partnership with the school first. They want to serve the school during the day. Then he will mention the club. Providing backpacks and school supplies will open the doors to sharing the gospel at some point.

If your church does not have a relationship with a local school, the Good News Club may be the open door to help your church see the needs of the community around them. Christa is the children's ministry director of a local Baptist church. She told the pastor who wanted to hire her that the one stipulation was the church had to start to reach out to schools around the church. The pastor saw this as a great opportunity for his church and loved her focus and determination to make this happen.

One week after Christa joined the church staff, she received a call from someone asking if her church would start a Bible club at the elementary school two miles away. When she met with them, tears filled her eyes as she described how God had been in this from the beginning. Now, her church is starting a second club at a new school less than a mile away.

Good News Club is not easy. Ministries inside the church face little bureaucracy, require little training, and carry only a slight risk. Good News Club involves all of those and more.

More than likely, your church has an open door you didn't even know existed in that school your children attend. What's more, the school may be begging for help because of diminished funding. They need a partner, and that partner could be you. But, as they say, if it were easy, everyone would be doing it.

Lisa is an energetic fourth grader at Ms. Augusta's school. Her constant smile is only slightly smaller than her brilliant, inquisitive eyes. She absorbs everything around her and craves adult attention. She was in heaven for five weeks at our Good News Club. For the first five weeks of last year's club, she was

the only student who showed up. But this didn't dissuade five GNC team members from giving the club their full attention every Thursday.

To be fair, it did feel odd for five adults to be there to teach one child. Honestly, the team wondered whether the club might have come to an end at the school. But they decided to give it a few more weeks. They encouraged Lisa to invite her friends, and they talked to teachers in the school and encouraged them to mention the club to their students, too.

The next week two more kids came, then two more, then three more. Before the year was over the club consistently averaged 12-20 kids each week. And then, one week, after the Bible teacher taught the Bible lesson and concluded with a brief invitation to trust Christ as Savior, Lisa got up and walked to the back to talk to Ms. Rhonda.

Every single team member had the same thought. "What if we had quit? What if we had said it wasn't worth it? What if we said it was too hard and too much time?" God had gone before that team to work in Ms. Augusta's life and in a team leader's life to start this club in the first place.

And God has gone before you and your church too. You have Good News for public schools too.

**About the Writer:** Jeff Nichols is Tennessee state director for Child Evangelism Fellowship.

## Suggestions for Starting a Good News Club

- + Pray for God to open the right door with a local school. Then pray some more.
- + Think PARTNERSHIP. Your church can be a tremendous asset to the school during the school day.
- + Contact your local Child Evangelism Fellowship Director. To find one near you go to [www.cefonline.com/locations](http://www.cefonline.com/locations)
- + Recruit a team of volunteers within your church who are available one day a week after school.

Go to [www.cefonline.com/ministries/goodnewsclub](http://www.cefonline.com/ministries/goodnewsclub) to learn more.



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