Inter-America: Church leaders celebrate strides in working with children

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Inter-America: Leaders challenged to cater to children with special needs in their congregations

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The church needs to be more welcoming and caring for children with special needs. This was the core message presented by Barbara J. Newman, a church and school consultant from Children’s Learning Center Network.
Church leaders and teachers from throughout the 21 unions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inter-America celebrated their successful achievements in working with the many thousands of children in churches throughout the territory. The special event took place yesterday at Camp Kulaqua in High Springs, Florida.

Dressed in their native costumes and special sashes, children's ministries leaders sang as they marched and reported on the number of children they minister to, as well as the number of small groups, community activity programs, vacation bible school attendance, baptisms and more.

"I am so happy to hear of all your hard work and your enthusiasm and dedication to our children each week," said Dinorah Rivera, children's ministries director for the church in Inter-America, as she spoke to the more than 500 gathered. "God is truly blessing our beautiful multi-cultured territory and we praise God for the opportunity to serve Him."

Inter-America's Children's Ministries Leadership Convention will be held until July 15, 2012.

To view a photo gallery of the event, visit www.flickr.com/photos/interamerica

For updates on Inter-America's Children's Ministries Leadership Convention, visit us at www.interamerica.org
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**July 11, 2012 - High Springs, Florida, United States...Libna Stevens/IAD**

The church needs to be more welcoming and caring for children with special needs. This was the core message presented by Barbara J. Newman, a church and school consultant from Children's Learning Center Network and guest speaker during the second day of Inter-America's Children's Ministries Leadership Convention, taking place this week at Camp Kulaqua in High Springs, Florida.

According to the latest figures, the number of children with disabilities and special needs has increased in the United States. Today, about one in every 88 children has a physical or mental challenge, said Newman. In the 1980s, the ratio was one in every 10,000, she said.

"You will have people in your community who have autism or Asperger's Syndrome because ratios are also increasing all around the world," Newman explained. "You must welcome and accommodate these children with learning and intellectual challenges and their families in your churches."

There are families who most likely stay home on Saturday mornings instead of bringing their children with special needs to a church, explained Newman. "We must change that," she challenged.

Newman shared ideas on how to better connect with the needs of each child with a disability as they come through church doors. She pointed to resources available from a Christian perspective, the need to appoint a special coordinator in each church and develop an individualized plan for the entire church to understand and embrace families with special needs children.

It's about seeking the opportunity of reaching those who need of Jesus. "I believe the church loses when we don't embrace people with disabilities," said Newman.

Lilly Elwin from the Bay Islands, Honduras, agreed that the churches they oversee as children's ministries coordinators and directors are missing that link to reaching families with special needs children.

"I can think of at least three churches with children who have mental disabilities," said Elwin, who lives on the island of Roatan. Elwin oversees children's ministries in some 17 churches on the three islands comprising the Bay Islands.

Elwin fears that there may be more families who don't attend church because they have a child that may not be as well behaved as members may be used to.

"We lack more education in understand and embracing these families in our churches," explained Elwin as she and her fellow children's ministries leaders echoed the sentiment. She is thankful for...
the sessions offered by Newman and vows to create more awareness and share the new knowledge with the dozens of leaders in her territory.

For resources on embracing families with special needs children, visit cm.interamerica.org

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