

KIDS' POWER & LIGHT!

THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY OF CARL LINDELIEN

STORY & PHOTOS BY BRUCE BUCKINGHAM



The kids at Cedar Lake Christian Assembly know the Holy Spirit isn't for adults only.

Sunday morning. Nestled between the lonely Mississippi bayous and Biloxi's carnival-like gulfside strip, Cedar Lake Christian Assembly sits under tall white pines on the north shore of Biloxi Bay. The eight-year-old structure is nearly popping at the seams. Behind the building, bulldozers are silent. On Monday they will roar into service, preparing the ground for new construction that will nearly double the size of the current facility.

Inside, hundreds of children gather in cramped rooms. With eager faces they await the beginning of their Sunday service—their anticipation matched only by curiosity for what the morning will bring.

There will be praise and worship. Bible teaching. Ministry.

And—puppets. Jugglers. Props. Surprises. With Pastor Carl, you never know.

It's time for "Kids' Power and Light!"

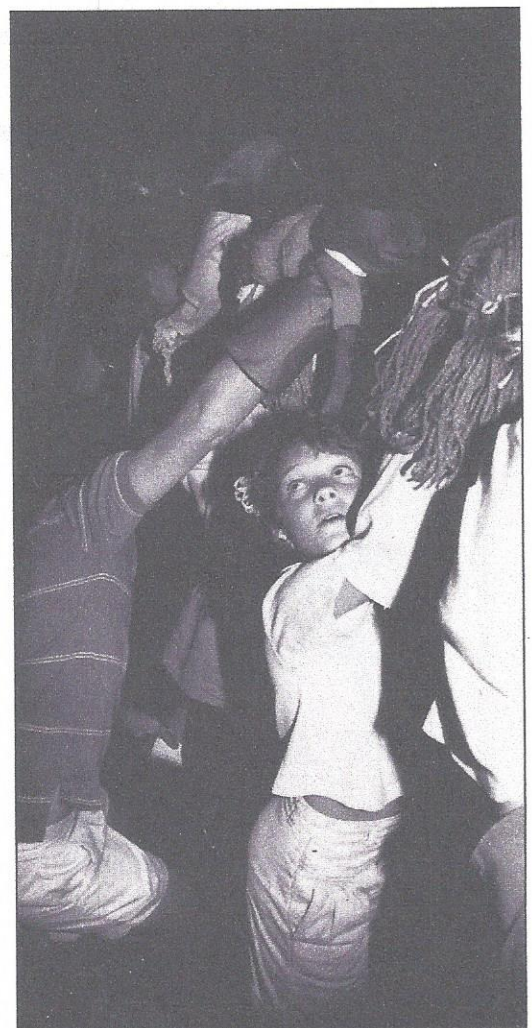
Carl Lindelien, 32, Cedar Lake's salaried pastor for children from birth to sixth grade, has prepared in fine detail the two Sunday morning services designed just for "his" kids. A painted scenic wall is the backdrop for the band, which consists of three preteen singers and three teenage musicians—a guitar player, a keyboard player and a drummer. On one side of the platform, a young girl operates the overhead projector used to flash the words of the worship songs onto a screen. In the back of the room, other youngsters adjust the dials on a sophisticated sound system controlling the band's instruments, speakers, pre-taped orchestration for special music, and Pastor Carl's microphone.

Sitting still in a hundred chairs are Carl's kids.

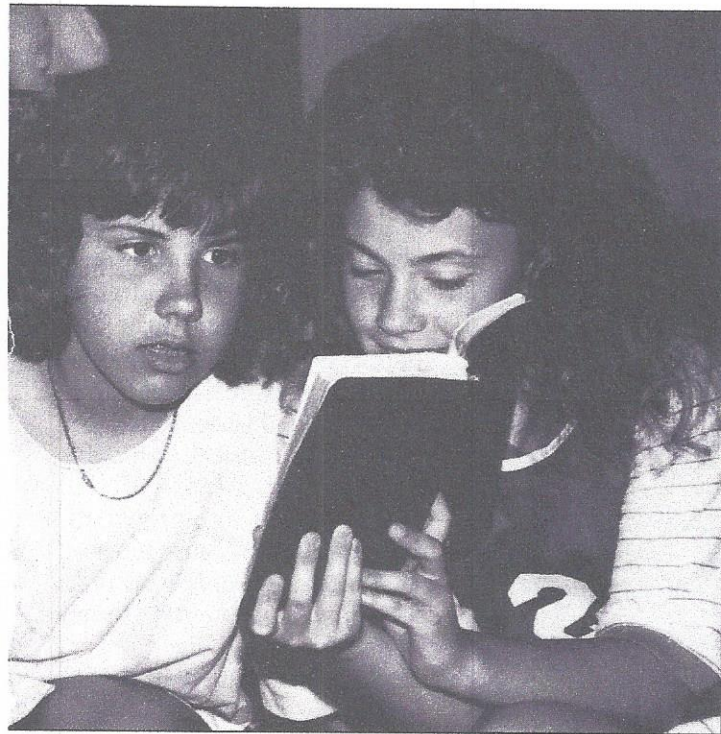
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"Who will teach our children the lessons of commitment to God?" Lindelien asks. "Children learn



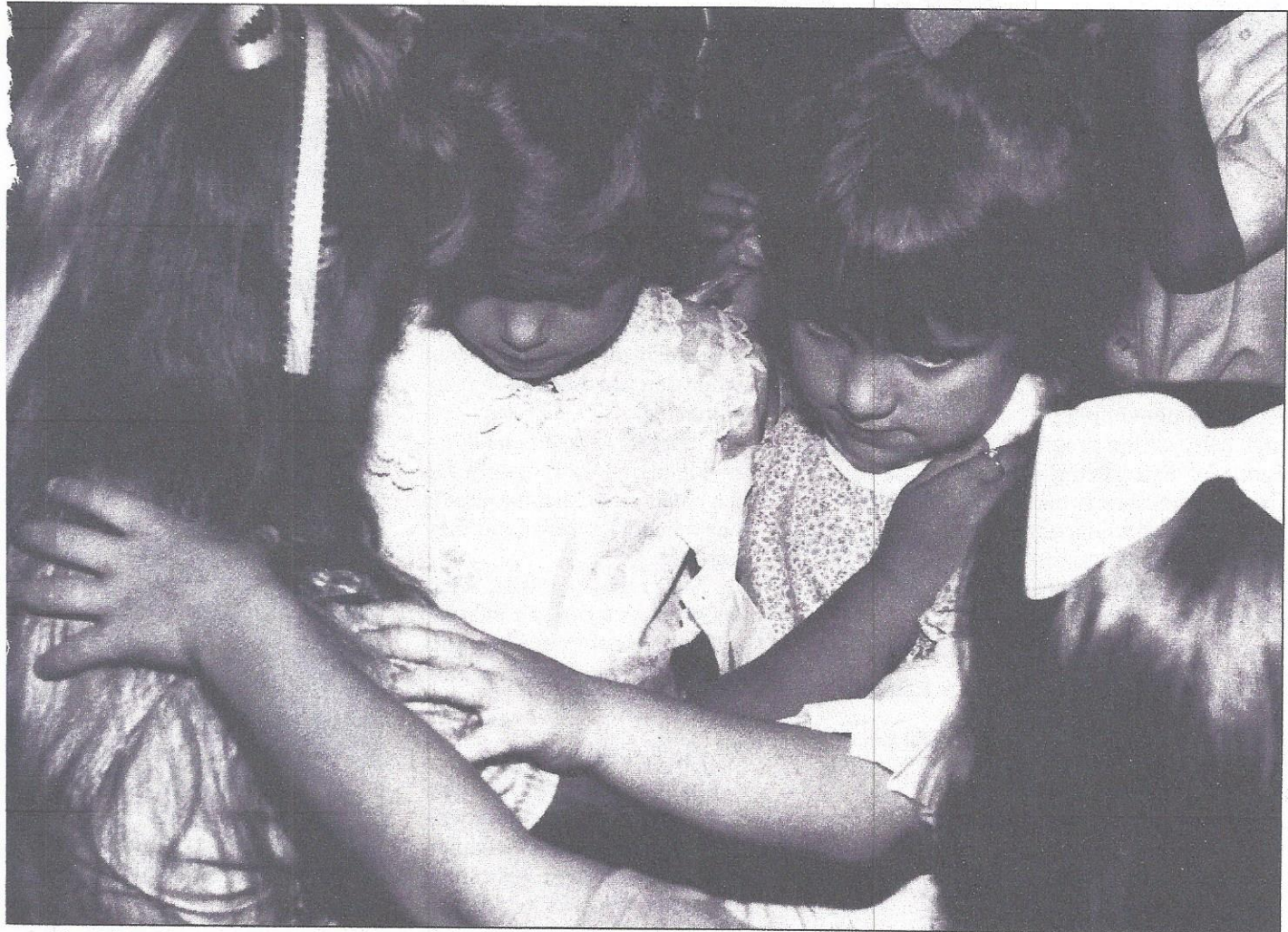
Every child participates in worship—often from behind the scenes.



from us. Everything we do and say is a lesson to them. If we aren't committed, our kids won't be, either."



In three years the church has grown by 25 percent. The number of children has grown by 150 percent.



The children learn early the power of praying for one another. "Prayer should never be routine, but spontaneous and alive," Lindelien says.



Children pray for the older brother on drugs, parents who are divorced, a father who is not a Christian. "We don't minister to just the kids," Lindelien says. "We minister to the entire family by ministering to the kids."

They are too enthralled, too involved with the program to act up or not to pay attention. This is *their* church. This is their time to worship God. This is their time to minister to each other.

They're not simply part of a huge baby-sitting program designed for their parents' convenience. They know the Holy Spirit isn't for adults only.

Lindelien conducts the Kids' Power and Light services—or KP&L, as the kids call it—with all the ingredients any pastor would use in a service for adults: worship, praise, Bible teaching, ministry time. But he presents them in a way that gets—and keeps—the attention of young minds and spirits.

Actually, most adults would walk away from a KP&L service spiritually refreshed. But

They're not simply part of a huge baby-sitting program designed for their parents' convenience.

Lindelien's services are uniquely designed to teach preschool and elementary-age kids about God while they are the most teachable, to impress the Spirit of God upon them while they are the most impressionable.

Lindelien loves them all, individually and corporately. He never talks over their heads. He has a heart for kids, and they know it.

"Every time Pastor Carl walks into a room of children," one parent confides, "the kids drop whatever they're doing and flock to him."

Key to Growth

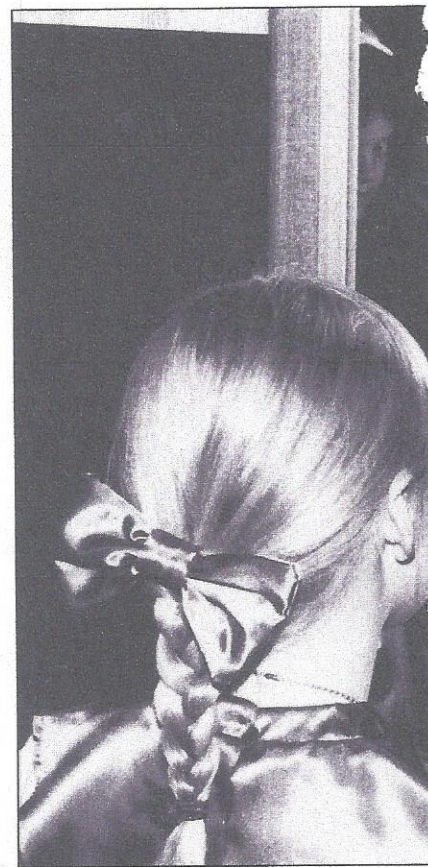
Lindelien first came to Cedar Lake Christian Assembly with his wife, Dede, and two daughters three years ago. His calling was clear: minister to kids. But he had no idea how much of an

impact his ministry would have on the congregation.

Starting simply, Lindelien began with a small Sunday morning service for children. Within a year he was working with 120-member children's choirs, a cast of more than 300 puppets, specialized drama teams, and professional lighting and sound systems that the kids themselves quickly learned to operate.

The church has grown to 1,000 members—an increase of 25 percent—since Carl first arrived. During that same three-year period, the number of children has increased 150 percent.

"It is obvious why people are coming and staying here," explains senior pastor Kenneth Broadus. "It is because of Carl's work and the emphasis



Reflections of God's love are seen in the eyes of the children. Lindelien makes sure

we are placing on the kids. The children's ministry is a vital key to our growth."

Broadus is perhaps Lindelien's greatest enthusiast. "When we were searching for a way to better our children's ministry, we knew the first step was to find the right person for the job," he says. "We needed someone who was a true minister to kids—not someone who was looking to climb the ministry ladder in hopes of 'graduating' to an adult ministry. When we found Carl, we knew we had found the right person. His ministry sets the tone for the rest of the ministries of the church."

The parents at Cedar Lake agree. Says one mother of four: "Before Carl arrived, our kids were watching television during Sunday school. His

ministry has made a tremendous difference in our children's lives."

Today Lindelien spends much of his week planning two Sunday morning KP&L services and preparing for a monthly evening service run by the kids.

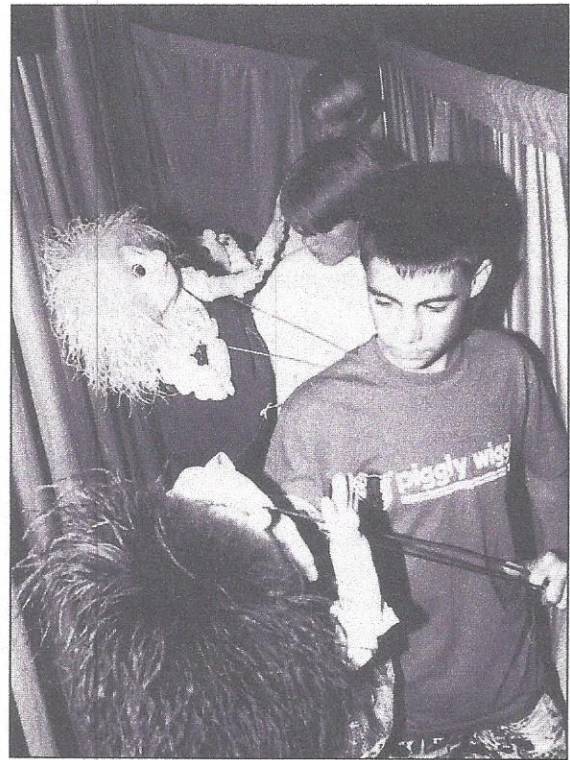
On a typical Sunday morning, the children meet upstairs while the adults meet in the sanctuary. But on the second Sunday evening of each month, the "big church" belongs to the kids. They *are* the service. The children's choir sings, the puppets dance, drama students perform. And the adults receive the ministry.

Amazingly, Lindelien's program doesn't have a budget—although everywhere you look, the children's rooms are teaming with high-tech sound and recording equipment, compact-disc players, spotlights and other support paraphernalia.

"Kids require excellence," Lindelien says. "In this day of high-tech, television and complicated toys, the kids know when you are serious about them. There's no room for hokey worship."

Besides, if you are going to promote a particular ministry, Lindelien believes, you must have the necessary equipment to make it work. Otherwise, you lose the kids.

"If it sounds



By getting children involved, Lindelien teaches the importance of ministering to others.

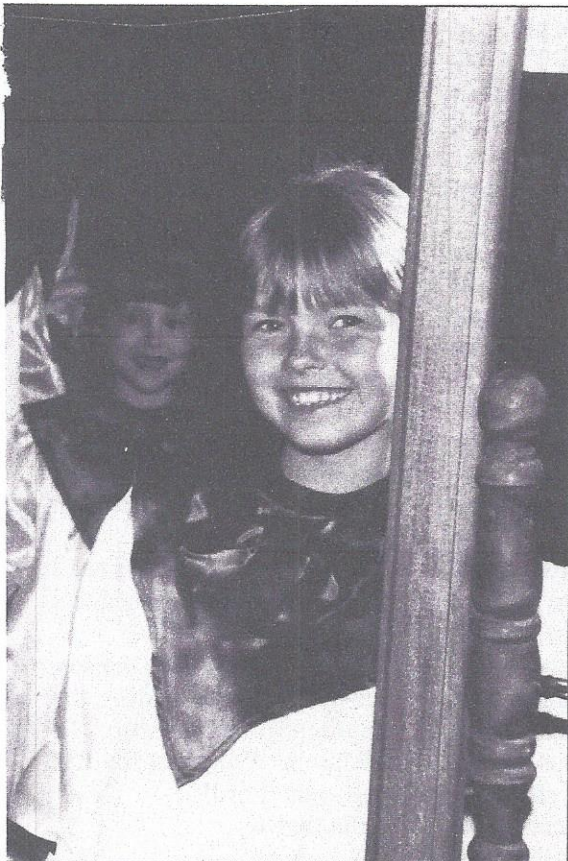
bad, they won't listen," he says.

But sound systems and spotlights cost money—lots of it. Cedar Lake's annual budget of \$650,000 only provides Lindelien's \$30,000 salary. Lindelien gets the rest of the money he needs through sales of T-shirts ("God Uses Kids"), music tapes (written, recorded and produced with a professional flair by Lindelien's team of kids and their parents), and offerings taken during the monthly Sunday evening children's service.

Last year, the kids raised more than \$30,000 to support their activities and programs—and not a penny came from the church budget.

Lindelien's rule of thumb: Present the need, and the Lord will supply. Parents are eager for their kids to receive quality ministry, he notes. The money always comes in.

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Each child knows and understands God's love—both for the child and for others.

"We needed someone who was a true minister to kids—not someone who was looking to climb the ministry ladder."

Parent Participation

Parents are a key to the success of the children's ministry at Cedar Lake. Moms and dads are told not to plan on simply dropping their kids off at the Sunday school door so others can take over responsibility for them.

"You are the teachers of your children," Lindelien exhorts the parents. "Everything you do, everything you say, is a lesson to them. No one else can take your job. No one else can teach your kids to respect God and love others. Who else can teach them the lessons of commitment to God? Don't expect others to do your job."

It is a lesson Lindelien began teaching from his first days at Cedar Lake. When he came on staff, the church leadership gave him complete authority to revamp what was then a nearly non-existent children's ministry.

One of his first moves was to fire the entire nursery staff.

"We had a paid nursery staff

"You are the teacher of your children... No one else can take your job."

when I first arrived," Lindelien explains. "The kids were being taken care of physically, but spiritually they were neglected. After I let the nursery workers go, I went to the parents and said, 'If you want a nursery, you will have to provide it.' They did.

"Now even the youngest kids have one of the best programs for learning how to love the Lord. They are not just being watched, they are being blessed—by their own parents."

Lindelien admits that at first the parents were skeptical about becoming involved in children's ministry. Many expressed concerns about missing their own adult worship services. But as they began to see the positive influence they were having on the children, ministry to someone began to take priority over ministry from someone.

As the nursery kids grew up and moved into the 2- to 5-year-old classes, parents began asking to graduate with them. Since that time there has never been a lack of teachers.

"When Jesus was on the earth, kids were not liked," Lindelien says. "They were despised—always in the way. They were dirty. They didn't smell good. They were treated like slaves. But Jesus loved the children, especially the small ones. He called them to Him

while others were pushing them aside. They sat and played in His lap. Jesus wants us to establish the lap ministry again. From there, the children will learn about God's love."

Parents are not the only ones ministering to the children at Cedar Lake. Many of the kids who graduate from Lindelien's Sunday school age group ask to remain with him and help with the younger kids.

"One of our greatest concerns has been to make sure our kids don't leave Carl's classes and drift into a do-nothing attitude," says senior pastor Broadus.

So far that hasn't happened.

"We allow the older kids to stay and help," Broadus says. "We will not inhibit their desire to minister by forcing them to attend older Sunday school classes. The key is to involve families in ministry and allow children to work with their parents. We want to train these kids now so that by the time they are adults they will be experienced veterans."

Lindelien admits that the hardest part of starting a new children's ministry is not seeing immediate fruit.

"It's like planting an apple tree," he says. "It takes a couple of years to see the apples. But when something positive does appear—and it will—be sure to tell the church about it. Show them the fruits."

He turns, and a whole treeful of shiny, smiling faces gathers round him.

"Remember, during the service you will be leading the congregation in worship," he tells them. "Sing out loudly! Sing to the Lord!"

And they do. ■

Bruce Buckingham is a spokesman for NASA at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.



Lindelien started his ministry with a \$35 custom-made puppet. Now he has over 300.