

# Missions education

First Church of Lead Hill uses Royal Ambassador, Girls in Action programs as outreach



Children from First Church of Lead Hill attend Girls in Action (left) and Royal Ambassador (right) classes. Multiple age-graded classes draw a total of about 80 children.

**Charlie Warren**  
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FIRST CHURCH OF LEAD HILL, a rural church in northwest Arkansas just a few miles from the Missouri border, has reenergized itself through Royal Ambassador (RA) and Girls in Action (GA) programs and Reaching Generation Now.

When Rodney Fry, pastor, was called to the church three years ago, there were no more than a dozen children from kindergarten through 12th grade in the church. Sunday morning attendance was about 50. Now it averages 160-180.

"We have added a lot of young families," Fry explained. "We've reached out in the three years. We did not have an RA program or GA program. We had a very small youth group at that time."

He encouraged the church to start RAs and GAs, and they responded.

"I had been told RAs and GAs would not work, that they were dead programs," he said. "We started RAs and GAs, and they just flourished overnight. They have continued to grow."

Charity Garner, Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC) missions support team member, and Bob Fielding, then ABSC missions support team member who has since moved to the missions ministries team, visited Lead Hill to help them start RA and GA programs.

"They did a workshop with potential leaders," Fry said. "Most of those leaders stepped up and are still leaders today."

"The children have not just studied about missions, but they are doing missions, even at that young age," Fry said. "We are praying that God will call out of our church a missionary because of these programs."

The key to success seems to be that the RA and GA leaders simply love children into the kingdom.

The church spread the word throughout the community that all children were not only welcomed, but the church would send buses and vans to pick them up each Wednesday night.

Come, they did.

Many Wednesdays, they have up to 40 RAs and 40 GAs attend.

Many come from unchurched families.

"Most of our baptisms have come out of our RA and GA programs," Fry explained.

He said as RA and GA leaders teach missions, a child will ask question about salvation. Each group has a leader and an assistant. The assistant will take the child aside and lead him or her to Christ.

"When we first started, they would bring the kids to me and let me lead them to Christ," Fry recalled. "Then I said, 'You need to learn how to lead them to Christ.' So we taught the adults how to lead them to Christ. Now they lead them to Christ and bring them to me and we just rejoice. It is exciting to watch our adults grow just as much as our children."

After children come to know Christ, leaders pray for and visit the families.

"Within months of picking up children in the bus, their families start to roll in," Fry said, attributing much of the church's growth to the RA and GA programs.



"I've had phone calls from RAs who have said, 'I learned this in RA class Wednesday, and I want you to tell my Momma and Daddy about that,'" Fry said. "I get the parents on the phone, and they invite me to their home, and they end up accepting Christ right there in their living rooms. It's just an awesome feeling. If we didn't have this program, I don't think those doors would be open for us."

Jim and Angie Sprinkle are key leaders in the programs.

"It has been an awesome blessing to watch what the Lord is doing in their lives by a simple seed that was planted through us and through God," Sprinkle said. "Then to see the doors that are opened to the parents is awesome."

"One fellow would just send his children to church," he said. "The next thing I knew, the Lord had worked on him so much that he was baptized and has become a member."

In a recent prayer time during RAs, a young lad said, "Pray that my dad will come to church more often."

Angie noted they sometimes invite parents to join them in fun activities or a mission project.

The Sprinkles have participated from the beginning, and he is now RA director.

"Ever since it started it's been nothing but a blessing to my life and in the lives of the children we teach," Sprinkle said. "I've really enjoyed working with the boys, teaching them things they aren't necessarily getting taught at home. ... It's been a real pleasure. I've grown with the children."

Other workers agreed.

"It has strengthened me more spiritually than I realized at the beginning," said Chad Ludwig. "What I've gotten out of it is the feeling of serving God and just being there for the boys, being able to teach them what it means to be a Christian. I definitely started digging into my Bible a lot deeper."

Cynthia Vance added, "Being with the boys, and watching them learn, and teaching them things they probably have never heard before is very uplifting. They don't ever really say thank you, but what they give us back is a thank you."

"For me, it's watching the boys when we teach them about Christ and when we do projects with them," said Mike Farrar. "They really enjoy it. It's a lot of fun."

Amanda Rogers stated, "Just being with the kids is a blessing - seeing how the Lord is working in their lives."

Angie Sprinkle told of one GA who is already a missionary at home.

"She comes on Wednesdays, then she goes home and gets her Bible out," Angie said, noting the girl teaches her parents and grandparents.

"Someone asked the grandmother if she goes to church. She said, 'Yes, at my house. My

granddaughter comes and preaches to me every Wednesday.' It is amazing to see her shine her little light like that," Angie said. "They had quit going to church. This may bring them back into the church."

RA and GA mission projects are endless.

They have built benches for the local soccer club, recycled cans and newspapers to raise funds for local disaster relief, painted pavilions at the Baptist Assembly at Siloam Springs, participated in local hunger projects and a food pantry, held a rock-a-thon to raise money for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and participated in a walk-a-thon for world hunger. They are planning a project to visit the Arkansas Baptist Boys Ranch.

Church women have taught GAs canning and handicrafts. Church men taught older boys to change oil, and then the boys offered free oil changes to the community one day.

In "Project Warmth," the children collected coats - 250 one year and 500 another. They give the coats to area thrift stores to give to people in need.

"I didn't realize when we started that project that I would someday be on the giving end," Sprinkle said. "One Christmas people were going to get Christmas baskets and food from Share and Care (a local ministry). I was standing in line with a buddy of mine that needed some help, and I saw a bunch of people out there with no coats on. I thought, 'Wow, is this not a perfect opportunity?' So I went inside and got the coats we had collected and handed them out among the folks and talked with them about Jesus."

RAs, GAs and youth participated in the North American Mission Board's GPS (God's Plan for Sharing) emphasis.

Older adults, some too frail to go to doors themselves, used their personal vehicles to drive the children and youth throughout the rural area, placing GPS door hangers on the doors of about 500 homes.

Door hangers included a gospel tract and a brochure inviting them to the church. The next Sunday, six new families visited the church.

"That was a very blessed day," Sprinkle said. "It has opened a lot of doors ... for the children to invite children and really become ambassadors for Christ."

Because of RAs and GAs being mission-minded, they have challenged the church's women and men to begin WMU and Brotherhood groups, Fry said. The church also launched a Mission Friends program.

"It has really encompassed the whole church," Fry said. "We have become a more mission-minded church because of the focus on RAs and GAs."

A youth ministry program is drawing dozens of area youth, who have done their own mission projects.

"We are going to Nebraska as a church this summer," Fry said. "The youth will teach vacation Bible school, do prayer walking and block parties. ... I've never seen them more excited than about going to Nebraska."

"I am just thankful God has called me here to be a part of His work because God is definitely at work," Fry concluded.