

Oklahoma Evangelist Launches Bible Clubs in Tulsa Public Schools

Bob Heath says his Kids for Christ ministry has seen thousands of children come to Christ; many have led others to salvation

An Oklahoma evangelist is training young missionaries in one of the nation's most unlikely places: public schools.

Bob Heath, founder and director of Kids for Christ USA said his organization has seen more than 6,000 children accept Christ since it began launching Bible clubs in Tulsa public elementary and middle schools in January 2001. In turn, he said, the children have used the tools they learned during the weekly meetings to lead 2,500 of their friends and family members to salvation.

"I ... simply wanted to empower people—children and their parents and leaders—to start Bible clubs in their schools," Heath told Charisma.

Based in Broken Arrow, in suburban Tulsa, Kids for Christ (KFC) began informally about seven years ago when a parents group invited Heath to be the guest speaker at a Bible club at a Tulsa elementary school. Then children's minister at Calvary Church of the Nazarene, Heath had gained recognition locally for his evangelistic festivals for children.

He said the students were crammed on the floor of the small meeting room. "I taught them that Jesus was like chocolate; the more you get the more it takes to satisfy you," Heath said. "It blew me away when 20 of those kids responded to an

invitation to give their lives to Christ.”

That experience stayed with him for the next several years. Yet despite “constant nagging” by one of the moms to organize similar Bible clubs around Tulsa, he kept the idea on the back burner. Then in 2001, while participating in Dad’s Day with his son’s kindergarten class, Heath noticed one of the men giving out gospel tracts. At first Heath thought the man was a loose cannon, but then he “had one of those ‘open your mouth and let God fill it’ moments,” he said.

When the man asked Heath if he was a Christian, he said: “‘Yes. In fact, I am a minister. As a matter of fact, if I started a Bible club here would you help me?’”

Heath said he then realized God had set him up. Heath later launched KFC at the elementary school his sons attended.

According to the Family Research Council, the 1984 Equal Access Act (EAA) requires schools to grant religious student groups the same rights and privileges as nonreligious student groups. Though some Christian organizations have been challenged for hosting Bible clubs in public schools, Heath said he hasn’t received any significant opposition. He said he spoke with a representative of the American Center for Law and Justice in the developmental stages of KFC to make sure he was on solid legal ground.

Now children’s director for fourth- through sixth-graders at Believers Church of Tulsa, Heath describes the weekly KFC meetings as “Nickelodeon-style, high-energy, virtue-driven, simple gospel.” They kick off with praise songs, a game and a Bible story with a very practical application. After more

worship and prayer, the children are invited to accept Christ.

Instead of praying the traditional “sinner’s prayer,” the youngsters meet Christ through the “Ticket to Heaven Prayer,” which Heath said gives the children an easy way to lead others to Christ. The prayer comprises eight simple phrases: “I thank You, Jesus. You died for me. Rose again for me. Forgive all my sins. Come into my heart. Make me the champion You want me to be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Genevieve Delaune, parent-sponsor of a KFC club at Andersen Elementary in Broken Arrow, said her three children struggle getting up every day except Wednesdays. “All I have to do is say: ‘OK, kids. It’s KFC day,’ and they jump out of bed,” she said.

In its 2004 year-end survey, KFC reported that of the 238 children who responded, 56 percent had led someone to Christ using the Ticket to Heaven prayer. During KFC’s 2004 “Operation Treat-or-Treat” outreach event, students from three Tulsa schools chose to hand out Ticket to Heaven tracts to the adults who answered the doors on Halloween. As a result, 22 adults accepted Christ.

With 25 clubs in the Tulsa area, KFC receives requests from groups nationwide who are interested in beginning Bible clubs in their local schools. Though Heath has said his goal is to “have a thriving Bible club in every school in the nation,” he believes Jesus is already in most public schools. “If there is one child in a school that has given his or her life to Jesus,” Heath said, “then Jesus is in that school.”

Carol McClain Bassett