

THE HISTORY OF KIDS' LIFE BIBLE CLUBS

Kids' Life Bible Clubs (formerly Christian Service Club, Inc.) was started in 1962, growing out of a desire to reach inner city children beyond the two weeks of summer Vacation Bible School at Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church. It was initially named Community Bible Clubs at the suggestion of the Assistant Superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools, Dr. Pylman, who supported the idea of having the clubs in the schools.

The first fall clubs began in three schools: Sheldon, Henry, and Sigsbee. On the day before the start of each club, Henry Nieboer, chairman of the board of directors of Christian Service Club, went to each classroom of each school and announced that there would be a Bible Club starting the next day and handed out registration forms.

The first club was at Sheldon School. Two teachers, Mrs. Kooi and Miss Felton, were prepared with materials and a filmstrip of the Bible story. Mr. Nieboer and Mr. Bill Narvis were also there to see how things went. No one knew

how many kids to expect. The group was stunned to have whole classes led by their teachers arrive for Bible Club-about 200 children! They had to quickly divide the children up and take them to three more rooms. The Henry School was the next day, but this time they arranged to use the gymnasium to accommodate another large group of children. Sigsbee was a repetition of the numbers at Henry. Three more clubs were added that school year at Madison, Vanderberg, and Franklin schools and attendance doubled.



The VBS at Sherman Street CRC which became the 1st Bible Club.

Just like today, in 1962 many people were amazed that the Bible could be taught in public school buildings. At the suggestion of Dr. Pylman, Assistant Superintendent of GR schools, the clubs were initially called Community Bible Clubs. Rather than identifying the clubs with a particular denomination, he felt the name would broaden the appeal of the clubs and make it more acceptable.

The office of Christian Service Club, sponsor of the Bible Club program, was moved to a new, larger location on Sheldon Ave. where they installed their first phone and had room for volunteers to come and help with office work. Marty Hamstra, a seminarian, was hired as part-time office and program manager. The program began to grow and clubs were opened in more schools.

Rev. James Keifer and his wife Velma came to the attention of the CSC board. They had served with Child Evangelism Fellowship for 12 years where they taught children's Bible classes. Mrs. Kiefer introduced them to the use of flannel graph and they were very impressed with this personal "high class" method of teaching Bible stories.



A demonstration of how the flannelgraph is used.

It generated interest through movement of the story scenes and characters. The board hired her to teach the Bible Club teachers how to use the flannel graph, and it proved, as our teachers know today, to be very appealing to the children.

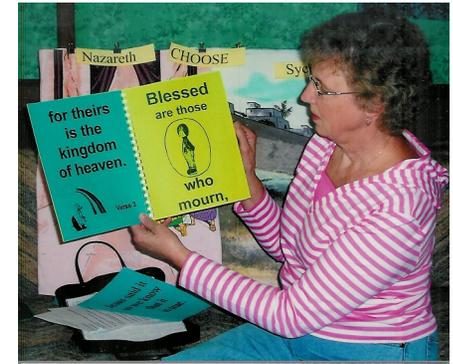


Bible Club teachers still use flannel graph today!

The success of the first year of Community Bible Clubs in the schools and the engaging nature of the flannel graph method prompted some men on the board to wonder if CSC could extend its outreach into the community by producing a television program using the flannel graph to tell Bible stories. Henry Nieboer approached a new station in town, WZZM, with the idea and they expressed interest in such a program. At the end of the second year of Community Bible Clubs, the first 15 minute program featuring Velma Keifer teaching Bible stories with the flannel graph was on Sunday mornings at 11:00. This program, called *Stories of the King*, continued for a full year.

The number of schools with Bible Clubs continued to grow and the Keifers managed both the

clubs and the TV program. Ray Felton, a song leader, joined Harold Hartger on the organ and a special craft project was added. The time was extended to 1/2 hour. Many children who watched the program sent letters to the station expressing their love for the Lord and how much they enjoyed Miss Velma and Mr. Ray. The program was reaching 10,000 homes at the time and CSC was thrilled with the results. However, mounting expenses involved with producing a television show forced the board to transfer responsibility for the TV program to another group, the Christian Laymen's League. This move allowed CSC to concentrate on the Bible clubs in the public schools, which is our legacy and privilege to carry on today. Christian Service Club changed its name to Kids' Life Bible Clubs in the early 2000s.



Bible Club continues after 60 years!



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