



Puppets [written 2004 & updated 2014]

Puppets

About 25 [now more like 35] years ago we watched in awe the puppet ministry of our local church. They seemed so organized, had a great presentation always with a “punch line” message, and were current on the culture, relating to the children in such a way that the kids were mesmerized. You could hear a pin drop when it was time for the puppets in the children’s church. These folks had satellite workers and teams that related to different age groups children’s churches. Unmistakably there was always a message when the attention of the audience was focused in and intent expectation on the next move the puppets would make.

Ongoing themes intensified the excitement. Everyone knew that one of the characters was inevitably going to “pull that one” again. Character was taught. Bible truths and principles prevailed each week.

Then the unthinkable happened. One Saturday night late in the evening our Children’s Church pastor knocked on our door. We turned on the porch light and there he stood with a distressed and forced grin on his face. The normal had transpired. Someone had gotten upset and left the church that day. Trouble was, it was the “puppet people”. Tomorrow morning 500+ boys and girls would fill a gymnasium and wait for their faithful puppets to be in place. We had never touched a puppet! But our children’s church pastor was sure we would do a great job. We had watched them weekly. We were children’s church workers, what else do you have to know? So in he came with 2 trunks full of puppets, worn out scripts, props, and a cassette player. There you go. Here was God’s call to the puppet ministry in one easy package, called immediate need.

Nothing has quite changed our image and our label among the children as has the puppets.

Ron personifies a character puppet named Henryetta. She is forever caught in time as the typical Christian chicken or is that chicken Christian? She typifies the carnal Christian and the flesh side of things. In the process of our puppet presentation somehow in the end, she always comes around to a better understanding of living the Christian life and is a better chicken for it. Both

children and adults ask for her by name whenever we do a special puppet presentation for banquets, Vacation Bible School, or adult church appearances.

We have a character puppet name “Clueless”. He is a beautiful orangutan. His character is so meek and so clueless. He is innocent in his understanding and thinking. The children adore him. His conversation is extremely corny. Everything has to be explained to him. His demeanor leads to some very serious conversations. Principles are taught through him. Recall is brought to new levels because of his presentations.

How do you go about a Puppet Ministry you ask? Glad you asked.

- ◆ Organization/Planning
- ◆ Portability
- ◆ Burden/Message
- ◆ Consistency/Dedication
- ◆ Did I mention it is a MINISTRY

Organization and Planning. Whatever the lesson/message or theme or series of lessons or promotions, since you are planning ahead long and short term, you can be prepared with the puppets. Planning determines when and how many extra helpers you may need for a project. Many times with only Ron and a puppet behind the stage and myself as the moderator outside the stage, we have successfully made our point. At other times we have used an entire puppet team of 6 or more to put on a presentation of 15 to 20 minutes. Planning ahead enables you to have props, music, sound effects, and such to enhance your presentation.

Portability. A portable puppet stage, sound system, and puppets that are quickly set up and quickly moveable are essential. Many times when making a puppet presentation we are in front of a church gathering, banquet setting, small assembly area, or in close or shared quarters. To quickly fold up our stage, bag our puppets, and move during the chorus of a song to make way for the main speaker or other presentations is a real asset to our ministry.

We keep a tri-fold stage that Ron made from three pieces of plywood. They are attached by lengthwise hinges. The stage folds in a 3 piece accordion style setup. It is setup by folding out. It is collapsed by folding in. The plywood is simply painted a bright color on one side and stays plain plywood on the inside where we often attached our puppet script outline or order of events.

Puppets are kept in suitcases or drawstring bags for quick concealment. [A puppet should remain a mystique to the kids. Handling the puppets or seeing them outside of performance diminishes their impact ability.]

We carry a small portable CD/tape cassette player. [\[in 2014 that is now a IPOD to connect to a portable sound system \]](#) While preferring to use the sound system

of the church or children's church, this is extremely helpful to have with us. More than once we have arrived at a setting to find that we have neither sound system that is useable nor a sound technician to set the CD when we need it. Therefore, we maintain control of schedule of the music and sound effects when necessary. Simply putting a microphone in front of the portable CD player has served on numerous occasions as a better alternative to nothing at all. A portable CD also serves well for a quick review of the music before the puppet presentation begins. After all, the puppets sing along with the CD music. When mouths and words must coordinate, well, lip synching is an art after all. Just ask any of our puppets. [\[In 2014 you have this wonderful option of a portable sound system & Ipod with pre-set playlists! \]](#)

Burden and Message. Puppets are work. Therefore, you must have a burden to teach and reach folks with them in order to use them successfully.

Puppets must have a message or they are just entertainment and less than a ministry.

The message may be salvation, the message may be a lesson on baptism, or the message may be quality Christian living. The puppets are another tool in conveying the message. If you stray from this principle, soon they will become an afterthought, a secondary tool, and soon just money spent that is tossed into a corner.

Consistency and Dedication. Weekly in the Children's Church the puppets appear either for a five minute episode or for a 15 minute presentation. Seldom do we ever use a printed script. If we write a script, it is mostly outline so that we may ad lib our own personalities into the presentation. Our object is to convey a message. Conveyance is only as good as knowing your audience and getting feedback from them. [\[Scripts are available on the website for seasons & for weekly use as well.\]](#)

Dedication to the cause of Christ and dedication to consistently preparing week and week are essential to a long term successful puppet ministry.

Did I mention it is a Ministry? Vital element, why else do it?

A typical puppet presentation in a weekly Children's Church setting follows.

Puppets
Sunday Morning 11AM CC

1. Opening Song on CD/tape [IPOD]
People puppets sing to *I'm Standing at the Crossroads*
Track 24, *Polecat's Poison, Patch the Pirate CD*
2. Henryetta the Hen comes up and has dialogue with Francine----
Henryetta has to decide whether to go to the Hen party. After questions about the party, we discover that the "in" crowd is going. In fact, Henryetta has to get her hair fixed and beak pierced....and on and on it goes.

We talk about her choices and her direction. She is truly at a crossroads in her behavior and choice. In the end she sees more clearly the correct thing is to:

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" Proverbs 3:6
3. Puppets sing CD/tape [IPOD]
People puppets sing to *There's no Higher Calling*,
Track 28, *Polecat's Poison, Patch the Pirate CD*

The average puppet presentation takes about 7 to 12 minutes. This is one segment of the Children's Church time dedicated to a theme message that will be remembered explicitly when the children get home.

The presentation targets different age groups at their level of comprehension and learning as well as the time limits of their focus.

We ALWAYS make the puppets a ministry.

It is almost always comical in nature as we observe the absurd antics of the character Henryetta Hen. Often other character puppets are used to convey our human natures as the puppet learns how to grow in the Christian life. We have a hairy monster muppet that is a continually griping and therefore is a church grouch. Sarah the snake is a sweet serpent with the voice of a southern bell of days gone by. She is the classic "straight shooter" when dealing with Henryetta. Sarah often sets Henryetta straight on her scripture and interpretations thereof.

Sound advice on puppets and the puppet ministry or dos and don'ts learned from 25+ years [35] of Puppet Ministry.

- ◆ Puppets are a ministry; convey a message.
- ◆ Go first class; not necessarily spend lots of money, just go first class.
- ◆ Use a good sound system; if they can't hear you, they won't hear you.
- ◆ Use **adult leaders**; do not rely on youth to **lead** puppet teams, they are youth.
- ◆ Presentations should be consistently weekly.
- ◆ Be prepared ahead of time.
- ◆ Use a recurring theme for no longer than 3 weeks running.
- ◆ Puppets should be large; use very few small hand puppets only on occasion.
- ◆ Whoever is on the outside of the puppet stage needs to interact well with the character puppet.
- ◆ Leave one adult worker at the front of the audience while the puppets are up; this maintains control just by the presence of an adult.
- ◆ The puppets are NOT for handling by anyone other than the puppeteers.
- ◆ The puppets DO NOT go out on loan to anyone in the church or otherwise for any reason without us going with them as their handlers and puppeteers. You destroy the individual character image that has been created for the puppets when others try to perform the part. Loaned puppets don't come home on time, either.
- ◆ Each and **every week** the puppets are bagged and go to our house. The puppets call this survival.
- ◆ Use quality music!!!! When the music sounds like the old chipmunks from the 1950s, they are not considered credible. When the music sounds like opera, only the opera savvy will respond well. When the music sounds like rap or hip-hop, then expect a rap or hip-hop reaction. Music sets the mood and the flavor of human reaction.
- ◆ Did I mention it is the Puppet MINISTRY?