

Parents Are the Primary, Spiritual Care-givers of Their Children

Church-shaped Children's Ministry recognizes parents as the primary, spiritual caregivers of their children. The Bible is filled with passages encouraging parents to raise up their children in the nurture and admonition in the Lord (Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 4:9, 11:19; Isaiah 38:19; Joel 1:3; Psalm 78:4). Men being considered for roles as elder, deacon and pastor must first be good leaders of their families and children in the home (1 Timothy 3:4). God clearly takes the call to teach our children His ways very seriously, for the children's sake and for the sake of His Church.

Spiritually caring for children is no easy task. God equips parents for it through His Word, read at home and taught at church. They parent by the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the help and encouragement of the pastors and fellow members of their local church.

But just because parents are the primary spiritual caregivers, does not mean they have to spiritually care for their children alone. As members of a local church of covenanting believers, Church-shaped Children's Ministry seeks to encourage parents in this daunting task in ways that support, without usurping their special calling. Every family is different. This support is respectful of differences in approach parents may have for taking care of their children's spiritual needs. It is also sensitive to the different needs of different families. Some parents are younger Christians or single parents. These may need the most support of all.

Supporting parents can take on various forms: from honest sharing, advice-giving and prayer among members; to recommending resources for parents to use as they train their children in gospel-truths at home; to providing safe child-care while parents attend classes or workshops; to preaching to them from the pulpit; as well as offering Bible classes and youth group for the children, themselves.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry, as the local church raises up and equips those who will be primary, spiritual care-givers of children.

- Most of those who attend your church are, or will be, parents at one point in their lives. Parenting will be one of their greatest, God-given callings... and challenges.
- Parents help their children take part in the church services. They help them understand the prayers, music, ordinances, and the reading and preaching of God's Word. Frequently, a parent's attention is divided between training their child and focusing on the worship service. This requires much patience.
- Parents vary in their own Bible and parenting knowledge. Some are better equipped than others to spiritually nurture their children. Everyone needs help and encouragement!

What Churches Can Do:

- Fill your parents with solid teaching that they can pass on to their kids.
- Remind parents from the pulpit of their calling as the primary, spiritual care-givers of their children. Provide parenting workshop/classes or mentoring relationships to encourage parents, especially new parents.
- Encourage members to honestly share, pray, and seek advice from the pastors and from each other their parenting needs and struggles.
- Recommend resources that can help children engage in the worship services (bulletins, notebooks, etc). Provide Sunday School take-home sheets for parents to reinforce these truths at home. Provide a booklist of great books parents can use to teach their children about God.
- Provide child care for babies and toddlers during adult teaching times, so parents can listen well themselves.

- Offer Bible classes for children. These can provide helpful support to parents' teaching, as well as allow the children to see the work of God's grace in the lives of their teachers.

NOTE:

Some have been attracted by the Family-Integrated Church ideology. They take parents' job of primary spiritual care-giver for their children and make them the SOLE spiritual care-givers of their children. Local churches are made up of brothers and sisters who work equip each other for the spread of the gospel--to children as well as to everyone else. They commit to encourage one another in whatever God calls them to do. Raising children is one of these very important callings that fellow members can help each other fulfill in a God-honoring way. For more thoughts on this topic please see the article on family-integrated church ideology in Appendix A in the back of this book.