

Church-shaped means creating a path towards everyone gathering together as the body of Christ

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10, ESV

This is the great Day that God's people yearn for. This is the great Day for which we share the gospel and urge all to accept. And this is the Day which we have a little dress rehearsal of each Lord's Day we gather together to worship God and love one another. Once a week, we are all together-- our own, little version of every nation, tribe, people and languages praising God. So very different, in so many ways, yet unified by our Head and beloved Savior, Christ. This a dress rehearsal that we want to our children to watch and take part in. There is a special reflection of Christ that can be seen in these gatherings of God's people. We don't want our children to miss it.

But in this day when custom, same-age learning is so highly esteemed, sometimes the importance of including children in the church's weekly gathering together is down-played, if not left out almost completely. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned customization can create a diversion from exposure to the whole church body gatherings that starts with children's church, continues with youth church, then ends with college ministry. It may not be until they are adults that they have much opportunity to seeing the beauty of gathering together with others different from us and learn how to be a part of that, themselves. They miss the chance to gradually become familiar, and hopefully come to love these gatherings.

Church-shaped Children's Ministry also sees the great benefit of customized, same-age teaching times. It may include--even often include-- nursery child care as well as classes for younger kids, not only during a separate Sunday School hour, but even during all or part of the worship services. BUT, the eye is always on the goal: everyone gathering together to worship God and hear the preaching of the Word. It sets a path that gradually leads all to this point, and offers parents resources to help their kids along the way.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

- Most congregations include a high percentage of families who are parenting their kids in the pew.
- Children vary a lot in their ability to sit still, listen and understand. Different approaches will be needed to help these different children gather well with the congregation.
- Families can have very different, strongly held opinions on how and when to include their children in the worship services. These strong opinions can sometimes cause friction with others who do not hold to their opinion. This can cause divisiveness.
- Different elements of the worship service are more quickly understood and accessible to younger children.
- Children can be noisy and wiggly, making it difficult not only for parents to focus on the worship service, but those around them, too.
- Volunteers who serve in child-care and Bible classes that take part during the worship services miss the opportunity to gather together with the congregation.
- Many times children's church and youth church strives to provide a very different, "more exciting" experience than the whole congregation worship service. They do not prepare the children well to take part in the church life that will be offered to them their adult life.
- Many times children/youth "church" enlists kids who are not necessarily believers as part the "worship team" or to take other up-front roles that are meant only for mature, Christian leaders. This is not a healthy or a good model of what it means to gather as a church.

What Churches Can Do:

- Provide resources and even hold a panel on parenting in the pew. Make sure to include not just “successful parents” of “well-behaved” children, if you do the panel. Those even-tempered children are the not nearly as common as we might like to think. It will be the parents with the wiggly, inattentive, strong-willed kids who are attempting this that will be most encouraging to those who attend. Victorious overcomer parents are a thing of beauty, but the ones who remain in the war zone despite all odds are the ones who may have the best advice.
- Create an atmosphere that allows for “different strokes for different folks”. Help your parents appreciate each other and encourage each other, even when they are choosing a different approach for preparing their children to gather together.
- Provide worship service aids for use during the services. Children Desiring God has some great, little, spiral-bound books that can be used with any worship service. They can be used at home to hold a “service” review discussion on truths learned.
- Provide a “cry” room with audio/video feed for parents with children who are noisy while “in-training.” This allows for the training to continue without the worry of distracting others.
- Choose curriculum or adapt your curriculum to include “ramp-up” to worship service elements in the children’s classes. This can be easily done by including hymns or other worship songs into the schedule and taking time to explain the meaning of the words. You also can introduce them to the leaders who they will see up front leading the congregation by inviting them to come to the class and talking with the kids. Familiarity with the leaders can really help kids be more interested in what is going on. We (Capitol Hill Baptist Church) have added a “VIPPP” (Very Important Prayer Person) activity into our classes for elementary school aged children. They learn about what different leaders in the church do (learn words like deacon, elder, pastor, etc), what they do, how to pray for them. But they also learn fun things like what each person likes to do in their free time and what’s their favorite animal.
- Pastors set healthy volunteering limits to make sure all child-care volunteers get to gather together with the congregation on a regular basis.
- Pastors with the helpful input of Children’s Ministry leaders and others, look at how they can set age limits on any child-care/Bible classes that takes place during any worship service. They will want to weigh length of service (especially preaching time) as well as understandability of the service elements as they consider what (if any) child-care/classes to offer children during all/part of the service. The idea is to create an up-ramp that eventually includes the children for the entire congregational gathering. They will also want to think about what parents might most benefit from child care offered during the worship service. Frequently, this may look like care for babies (child-care, no teaching) during the whole service, as well as classes for preschoolers and/or younger elementary school children during the sermon portion of the service. Teachers and parents also look for signs of readiness for children to stay in the whole service. Parents may choose to have their children stay in for the sermon some weeks, but go out for their sermon-time class others.
- Pastors address the children in the application portions of their sermons, reminding children that this message is for them, too.
- At home, family worship time can include songs sung at church. They also can take home a service bulletin and use it in their worship time.
- If you do have a special worship time for children/youth, make sure it echoes the gathering together of the church. Include prayers and songs that they will also sing with the whole congregation. Make sure godly, mature leaders, not the children, lead the worship times.
- Help support and/or welcome Campus Outreach within your church. It is college outreach organization that is church-based. Not only do they work on campus with college students, but they encourage them to become an active member of a local church. This sets these students up well to be members of a local church after they graduate.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

Do you see how Children's Ministry takes on a significant role in your church? It's impact on the congregation can be felt far outside of the Sunday School classroom walls. That's why we say that your ministry IS children's ministry. Because in one way, shape or form, everyone in your church... really is affected.

And that's why, Children's Ministry, which can seem like such a sideline ministry, needs pastoral leadership. And if you give it the leadership it needs, it can bear much good fruit in your church now and in the future.

The rest of this book is dedicated to looking at what Capitol Hill Baptist Church, under the leadership of our elders, has done to try to create a church-shaped Children's Ministry. Every church is shaped differently, so that means what you might do at your church will probably look different than what we have done here. But we hope that there will be enough elements that will be helpful to you as you seek out your own shape.

We will look at the three main ways our church support parents in their role as primary spiritual caregivers of their children: by providing them with safe child-care at church; by providing them resources to use at home with their children; and, by teaching their children biblical truth at church. But we will start by introducing you to our church and the four fundamentals that stand behind all that we do in Children's Ministry here at CHBC.

**A Little about Us
and
Our Path to
Gathering Together**

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Life in Washington, DC

Capitol Hill Baptist Church is located in Washington, DC, just a few blocks behind the Capitol. It is a vibrant city, that takes much of its life from the people who come here to take part in our nation's government, as well as many stationed here in military positions. It has an unusually high number of young adults in their 20's. DC is a very transient city, with both politicians and their staff coming and going, as well as military postings that usually last no more than three years. It is also a city of many internationals, coming either for college or for work.

Housing prices are very high. Public schools are not the best (though they are getting better), and the price of private school would astound you. While our church has an unusual number of families who somehow find a way to live close to the church in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, many families wind up moving out to the suburbs for the better, public school and somewhat cheaper housing prices by the time their children reach school age.

Capitol Hill Baptist Church: Where We Live Affects Who We Are

The personality of the city is reflected in our church. We have a high percentage of young, unmarried/newly-married members. Chances are they will move out of the area within three years. We turn over a third of our 900+ membership every few years. Those that do stay, are enthusiastic about their families. Many of them three or more children. We average about 100 babies born each year. These babies have about 100 preschool siblings, 100 elementary school siblings, and about 50 siblings in middle school and high school. Campus Outreach is based out of our church. Largely through them, around 100 college students attend/become members during their time in college.

We may be heavy in young singles, married, with or without children, but we are "light" in older adults of the empty-nest and older variety. This number is growing as our congregation ages, but we still only have about members, ages forty and older.

Our Leadership

We are an elder-led (not elder-ruled) congregational church. We have 30 elders, as well as 30 deacons who care for the congregation. We have one senior pastor, five associate pastors, two assistant pastors, plus a number of pastoral assistants. We have a full-time, paid Children's Ministry Administrator, a part-time Curriculum Developer/Teacher Trainer, as well as four deacons who support these paid workers and help the member volunteerteachers on Sundays. I (Constance Dever) spend much of my days developing curriculum, but am unpaid.

Our Membership

You must be a member to join in most of the activities of the church. This is not trying to be exclusive, but it is because we are serious about the covenant we make together. We commit our lives to each other. We live under the loving care of our pastors. We try to actively live out the promises to disciple each other and to encourage each other in whatever callings God has given us, including the raising of our children.

Our Services and Other Programs

We gather together as one body, each Sunday morning for about an hour of music, prayers and Bible reading, followed by an hour long, expository sermon. We meet together again on Sunday evenings for more worship, an extended time of prayer and sharing, and a shorter message (15 minutes) from the opposite testament of the Bible from the morning service, but on a related passage/theme. These

evening services are attended by a majority of our membership and provide a wonderful way to bind our lives together and encourage us in the faith in a more intimate fashion than the morning services.

We also have Core Seminar (Sunday School classes) for adults before the Sunday morning worship service; as well as a Wednesday night inductive Bible study. Many members are also involved in small groups (only men or women) or community groups (men and women). The elders have chosen for the church schedule to remain light from other programs. They want the members to have time to care for their families and build relationships with others, especially non-Christians. Members also meet up less formally to enjoy, disciple and encourage one another.

Capitol Hill Baptist Church: Children's Ministry

Elders Set Goals

Our Children's Ministry reflect the elders' goals to provide:

- the most child-care help for those parents who will be least likely to hear because of their children's ages/abilities.
- teaching that will support, but not usurp the parents' biblical training of their children.
- what will be taught in those classes (Bible, Theology, Discipleship, etc) and what curriculum will be used to teach it.
- separate teaching for younger children who might be less likely to understand the sermon.
- programs that by their content, and by the age-limitations to whom they are offered, will create an up-ramp to gathering together with the whole congregation.

Reflects the Needs and Opportunities of Our Own Community

They also reflect the realities of our community. For instance, we hold a one-day, Saturday VBS instead of the traditional full-week version because that's what works best for outreach here on Capitol Hill. And, we do not offer child-care of any kind during our Wednesday evening service because most families typically stay at home on Wednesday nights, either because of school schedules or because they live so far away.

Respect for Differences

Many of our families homeschool, though an increasing number have their children in public (usually Charter) schools or Christian (especially hybrid) schools. At church, we have many parents who include their children in classes/child-care and many who do not. We encourage parents to not set up strongholds of opinions about either of these issues, acting like their school or worship-participation choice is the only right way. We agree on the essentials of the gospel. We allow for Christian freedom everywhere else.

Quick to Share Gospel, Slow to Baptize Children

We are quick to share the gospel (in every sermon and every Bible class), but slow to baptize children. The elders have found that it is best for children to be encouraged to grow and become known more broadly within the church as a Christian because pleasing adults can easily mimic conversion in children. This is NOT because the elders think that children cannot become Christians. Many became Christians as children, themselves. It is out of care for the children's souls and for the purity of the church that they have made this decision.

Anyone who is baptized becomes a full member of the church. They go through membership classes like everyone else. Because this can be a hot topic with parents, the elders give out their thought-paper on this decision for them to read and understand before they join the church. Better to be up-front about this, then to get what may feel like an unwelcome surprise later. (See the elders' paper on baptism in Appendix B.)

Safe Child Care

We make safe child care a top priority. Only members can be child-care workers/teachers. They must be members at least six months before they can serve with the children. This is for the volunteers' good, giving them time to get settled into the church body. It is also for the good of the children. We want to know our teachers before they spend time in child care with the children. Every child-care candidate is required to fill out a child-care application form, to attend a child-care workshop and to under-go a background screening. In the nursery/classroom, everyone keeps to the child protection policy, include important elements such no teacher will be alone with the children at any time. The child protection policy was created under the supervision of the elders.

Resources at Home

We know that they are the primary spiritual care-givers of their children. We realize that parents have far more time at home with their children than we will ever have with them at church. But there's a lot we can do to support them as they teach at home. We try to support parents by teaching them well in their own classes and by the preaching of God's Word. We offer them book lists and hold book fairs of great books to use with their children. We pray for them by use of our members' directory. We provide take home sheets and online resources that go with the curriculum we teach in the children's classes.

Teaching Them Well at Church

The Children's Ministry team takes the elders' teaching recommendations and puts them into practice. They seek out good curriculum and good teachers to bring these biblical truths to life in ways that are understandable, enjoyable and memorable. One elder in particular oversees Children's Ministry and helps them as they carry out the elders' recommendations. He also is there to help with difficult situations that arise with parents and children. He cares for the Children's Ministry team and ensures they are being spiritually well-fed, themselves. He keeps the other elders abreast of what is going on in Children's Ministry and seeks their advice on any matters as needed.

Supporting Teachers

Teachers teach in over-sized teams which include more teachers than are needed to teach at a time. This allows us to put more experienced and less experienced teachers together. It also allows for someone to serve as a teacher, but not be "chained" every single Sunday to teach. This provides for vacation time, illness and an opportunity to attend classes/worship services. It goes a long way to prevent burn-out. We also provide teachers with opportunities to be mentored, to be observed, to observe someone else teaching their class, and workshops to improve their teaching skills. Hall monitors and deacons are on hand every Sunday to help teachers with any last minute needs that arise or with escorting children to the bathroom.

Caring Well for Our Volunteers

About a third of our church is involved in child care of babies or in teaching children. Since the elders want to make sure teachers are well-fed, they have set limits on how frequently teachers can teach. This is especially true for any teaching for children (as well as child care for babies) that takes place during the worship services. What happens if we have a consistent problem with filling teaching/child care slots with volunteers, given the elders' limits? First, the issue is brought to the attention of the congregation. Then, if the pattern persists, and enough new volunteers cannot be found, the elders choose to shut down particular classes. These will stay unavailable until a time when we have enough volunteers to fill those slots in a sustainable way. The elders give child care/teaching provided during worship services as the top priority to fill. Child-care during the services may make a big difference in helping some parents learn from God's Word, and therefore, giving them better spiritual food to feed their whole family. They are willing to make up for a consistent short-fall in volunteers by closing other child-care offerings. A few years ago, they shut down Sunday School classes for a year when our volunteer numbers were too low as a way to ensure enough teachers/child care workers during the worship service times. When the volunteer numbers came back up to a sustainable level, Sunday School was added back, grade by grade.

The Path to Gathering Together

Why the Elders Care to Create a Path

The elders hope that all children, 4th grade and up will be a part of all the worship services. For children under that age, they have provided options for children to gradually be a part of the worship services. This “ramp-up” approach helps children become familiar with gathering together with the congregation, but is mindful that developmentally the whole service (especially the hour long sermons) might be too much for some.

Many Roads Lead to the Same Place

While the elders have set age limits that are the guiderails along what they think is a good path to gathering together, there are almost as many variations as there are parents in terms of how to get there.

Here’s some of the variations the parents of these younger children use:

Sunday Morning:

- Include their children in all available child-care/Bible classes. These families will be fully using the “guide-rails” set by the elders for ramping up to gathering together with the congregation.
- Sunday School classes, then join for full worship service.
- Sunday School, then join for the entire, 45 minutes of singing, prayers, Bible readings, then go to their class during the sermon.
- Sunday School, then join for the first 15 minutes of preparation music (just singing), then go to their class.
- Parents will pick up a children’s worship bulletin that we provide, or bring along their own version of one, to help the children engage in the service.

Sunday Evening:

- Include their children in child-care/Bible classes through the whole service.
- Join for the first 15 minutes of singing, then go to child care/class.
- Stay in for the whole service.

Preparing to Gather Together through Elements of Classroom Time

There are a number of ways we prepare our younger children in their classroom time to gather together with the whole congregation:

- Introduce hymns and songs that will be used in our worship services. Not only do we teach the music, but we also explain the meaning of the lyrics.
- Pray prayers using the ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) model to introduce the children about the types of prayers that will be used in the worship service.
- Use Bible story sermons, which are much shorter than the expositional preaching they will hear in the main worship service, yet still echoes the teaching model.
- Take time to go through the worship service bulletin, either before or after a service, and help them understand the aspects of the service.

Preparing to Gather Together by What Families Do at Home

- Our church has a sermon card that lets the congregation know what passage will be preached on. Some families read the passage together ahead of time, preparing their hearts for the pastor’s sermon on Sunday.
- Many take home and use the worship bulletins (especially the songs) to sing together at home.

The elders have chosen to stagger class offerings to create the up-ramp for gathering together:

Sunday School Hour:

- **ages 0-2** childcare (no teaching)
- **ages 2-3:** Hide 'n' Seek Kids (Praise Factory 1 "Theology" Bible truths)
- **ages 4-preschool 5:** Deep Down Detectives (Praise Factory 2 "Theology" Bible truths)
- **K5-4th grade (5-10 year olds):** Treasuring Christ (Old Testament/New Testament Overview)
- **5th-6th grade (11-12 year olds):** Seeking Wisdom (Inductive Bible Study)
- **7th-12th grade (13-18 year olds):** Youth Core Seminars (Variety of topics for growing as a Christian.)

"Ramp-up" Notes for Sunday School:

- Child care/Bible teaching does not interfere with worship service, so it is offered for all ages.
- In Praise Factory classes, the children learn songs and prayers that will help them better gather together with the whole church. The stories used are more like story sermons, helping them prepare for more in-depth preaching in the worship service.

Sunday Morning: One, Main Preaching Worship Service:

- **ages 0-2** childcare (no teaching)
- **ages 2** childcare (no teaching)
- **ages 3:** Hide 'n' Seek Kids, pt. 2 (Praise Factory 1 "theology" Bible truths)
- **ages 4-preschool 5:** Deep Down Detectives, pt. 2 (Praise Factory 2 "theology" Bible truths)
- **K5-3rd grade (5-9 year olds):** participate in worship service and dismissed before sermon for a separate teaching time. Praise Factory Investigators (Praise Factory 3 "theology" Bible truths)
- **ages 4th grade and up (10+ year olds):** in the service the entire time

"Ramp-up" Notes for Sunday Morning Worship Service:

- Two year olds have just play time because one teaching time is a good limit for them.
- Three year olds, four and five years olds continue with Praise Factory curriculum that we have stretched over the Sunday School/Worship Hour and stuck play times in between so both Sunday School kids and those who only come to church will get teaching.
- Worship bulletins provided to help the K5-7th graders learn more during this service.
- Younger elementary school comes in for the the first part of the worship service (first 35 minutes) to gather together with congregation.
- In Praise Factory classes, the children learn songs and prayers that will help them better gather together with the whole church. The stories used are more like story sermons, helping them prepare for more in-depth preaching in the worship service.

Sunday Evening Church-wide Prayer/Share Meeting:

- **ages 0-preschool 5:** child care/Bible classes for the ENTIRE SERVICE
- **ages K5-8:** participate in singing time of the worship service and are dismissed for a separate teaching time. Great Commission Club (Missions)
- **ages 4th grade and up (10+ year olds):** in the service the entire time

NOTE:

- Younger elementary school comes in for the the first part of the worship service (first 15 minutes) to gather together with congregation.
- Because this service has a shorter preaching time; and, the sharing/praying content is more easily assessible to younger children, we lower the age limit on Bible classes by another year down to 3rd grade.

See this information in a diagram on the next page

