

Church-Shaped Children's Ministry

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

Sometimes your Children's Ministry might seem like the "desperate girlfriend" of your church. Always wanting more attention. More oversight. More volunteers. More money. Whine, whine, whine.

And all for what? To take care of a bunch of sniffly-nosed, wiggly kids, who would much rather be out on a playground than sitting in a classroom learning about Jesus. Yes, it provides a service that helps keep families happy and coming back; but man, what a pain!

Yet, maybe this desperate girlfriend is little smarter than she looks. You might be surprised to learn that Children's Ministry impacts your entire church in a far more significant way that you might first imagine. I'd go as far to say that your ministry IS children's ministry. Here's four observations why.

Why Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry: Four Observations

1. Children comprise the highest numbers non-Christians in attendance at most churches. The 4-14 window is the most common age of conversion. It is also unfortunately the time when kids are very prone to accept Christ as their Savior just to please the adults they love and respect, rather than out of true conviction. They may lead to false conversions--terrible for both the children and the church.

How will you reach these with the gospel while they are young?

Yet on the other hand, How will you look for true conversion before you baptize, for the sake of the children and the sake of the purity of the church? You don't want to wind up with baptismal statistics without the believing life to back it up. You don't want to encourage people to think they are Christians, but their lives clearly show that they are not.

2. Everyone who attends your church is or once was a child. Your current leaders and members WERE all children in the past. Your future leaders and members ARE all children now. Childhood is time of curiosity, open-heartedness, and lasting memories.

How can you fortify these future members/leaders now, helping them be a stronger part of the future church?

3. Most people who attend your church are or will be parents or grandparents. They are called to be the primary care-givers of their kids, including their spiritual nurturing. This will be one of their life's biggest, most time-consuming, challenging callings. No matter how many programs you have at church to teach their kids, the amount of time their kids spend with their parents, observing them and learning from them, dwarfs in comparison to anything the church can offer within its doors.

How can you equip this majority of your congregation for their major role in spiritually raising their children? How can you help their own life be a better witness to the truth of the gospel at work in the heart of sinners?

How can you help equip them for this job? How can you pour truth into their lives? How can you help them learn how to take that truth and feed it to their children?

4. In most churches, more members, miss more adult teaching times and services, because of taking care of their own kids, or volunteering to take care of other's kids, than any other ministry of the church. More members typically volunteer in children's ministry than any other ministry of the church. Most volunteers are not trained pastors or teachers. Yet there are usually more souls being taught by them in children's ministry than any other venue of the church, outside of the preaching from the pulpit.

How can you balance providing child-care and Bible classes for children that help support parents at church, with protecting the spiritual well-being of your members who volunteer to care and teach? How can you make sure that they do not over-serve and miss too much of the teaching that they, themselves, need on a regular basis?

Pastors are responsible before God for the soundness of all the teaching that takes place in the church. How can you make sure that the teaching these volunteer teachers provide, (and take in themselves, as they teach), is sound?

Common Scenarios that Have a Big Impact on the Church

Still not convinced of the impact of Children's Ministry on the church, present and future?

Consider these all too common scenarios and how they impact the core of the church's concerns:

- Non-Christians come to church with their children. Non-Christian children come to church without parents. --**Conversion, Sound Doctrine, the Gospel, Expository Preaching**
- Parents are new converts and have no idea how to parent as children. --**Discipleship, Sound Doctrine, Expository Preaching**
- Teachers downstairs in the green, cinder-block wall classrooms teaching creative, but moralistic lessons while upstairs the parents are receiving sound, life-changing, expository preaching from the pulpit. --**Sound Doctrine, Expository Preaching**
- Poor teaching as a child that lingers into adulthood, affecting their view of God, the gospel, the Bible, and the Church. --**Sound Doctrine**
- Teachers who go online Saturday night to find an easy lesson to teach to the kids at Sunday School, not aware of the unsound doctrine it includes. --**Sound Doctrine**
- Church plants that over-stretch their few volunteers to try to have the full "wishlist" of children's programs that will attract future members --**Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- Churches with a growing membership that use any resulting increase in Children's Ministry volunteers to keep on expanding the programs they offer, without first using the increase in volunteers to relieve over-worked volunteers in their current programs. -- **Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- Parents who put pressure on pastors to immediately baptize their child who just prayed the sinner's prayer. -- **Conversion, the Gospel**

- Fluctuations in numbers of children or demographics that change what support would be most helpful to parents and children. --**Conversion, Discipleship**
- Number-hungry statisticians who pressure confessions, while creating false conversions. --**Meaningful Membership, Conversion**
- Members who come to church to serve in child-care but rarely attend the worship service. --**Meaningful Membership, Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- Members who leave the church, burnt out from over-serving. -- **Meaningful Membership, Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- No one is willing to take on the position of Children's Ministry Administrator (CMA) because it is too burdensome and thankless. It requires too many hours of work. They rarely get to enjoy a worship service or can be spared to take vacation time. They feel the pressure to fill volunteer shortages, themselves. They are left to field all program criticisms and put out all fires from disgruntled parents. --**Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- Fiefdoms of power arising from lack of shepherding. Someone other than the pastors assumes too much authority over a program for too long. They become offended when asked to change something they are doing. -- **Church Leadership**
- Families who have no family worship time because they/their kids are so busy in church programs many nights of the week --**Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**
- Difficulties between parents that show up as troubled behavior in their children. --**Shepherding Well the Whole Flock**
- Fluctuations in volunteer numbers that lead to over-working of volunteers to keep the same programs running as usual. -- **Shepherding the Whole Flock Well**

Evangelism, sound doctrine, conversion. Meaningful membership, discipleship, shepherding the whole flock well...these are all core issues of critical importance. Do you see how Children's Ministry takes on a significant role in all of these? Children's Ministry is not just a service on the side. It affects every single person in your church, one way or the other.

Your ministry IS children's ministry!

Children's Ministry, Past and Present

Let's take a look back at the progression of children's ministry through recent history up to today. There's nothing like looking back to look for wisdom for going forward.

Children's Ministry, as we think of it, started in the 1758 by Robert Raikes as an outreach to non-Christian children in the slums of Gloucester, England. These first "Sunday School" classes were held on Sunday because this was the only day off for these children who worked in factories the other six days of the week. Children from Christian families were not targeted for these classes, assuming their parents would educate their children in these biblical truths at home and grow under the preaching of the Word at church.

At Raikes' Sunday School, boys and girls were not only taught a catechism of Bible truth and taken to church but were also taught how to read (and write). This would be the only formal instruction many of these children would ever receive. Though controversial among Sabbatarians who saw these schools as work, rather than an act of mercy and an aid to worship, the classes were nonetheless hugely successful and spread throughout the rest of Great Britain. By 1831 it is estimated that over a million children attended Sunday School weekly—a staggering 25% of the population.

Public Education Brings Changes in Church Outreach

In 1870, public education for all children was legislated in Great Britain. From this time, Sunday Schools gradually came to focus only on Bible teaching, as well as increasingly included the children from church member families, more like what we find in churches today.

The four goals were to provide with children with:

- a testimony of life with God in the lives of their teachers
- to share the gospel that the lost might be saved
- to make disciples of all who trust in Christ
- to leave a legacy of Bible truths and knowledge of Scripture in the minds
- to prepare them to gather together well with the members of a local church

Children's Ministry Today

The goals of those 1870's Sunday Schools remain largely the same today, though some, like the importance of gathering together with the whole church body, may have retreated to the background or at least not not be as clearly articulated. Churches still invite children from non-Christian to take part in their programs. They still hold out the gospel to all, that they might be saved and grow as Christ's disciples. They still hope to leave a legacy of Bible truths in their minds and heart.

But now, in most churches, Children's Ministry often spends far more time on programs and resources for Christian parents and children (perhaps this is because they are spending less time on outreach to children). And most notable of all, most churches have expanded to many more programs than the original Sunday School Bible classes and church attendance. Now, they frequently include safe nursery-care for babies, so parents can go to their own Sunday School classes. They may be recommending resources for parents to use at home with their children; and, they may have added a host of other, now-classic, peripheral programs (such as youth group, children's choir, AWANAs, After school Good News Clubs, Mother's Day Out, Sunday night missions programs, Bible camps, Vacation Bible School, and even Children or Youth Church that caters to a particular, homogenous age group.)

All of This Growth Has Led to Mixed Results

These intentions, and even some of the fruit, of these increased programs of today's typical Children's Ministry has been good. But sometimes the burgeoning list of programs has led to serious fallout for parents, children and the volunteers who people these activities. The motto of "If you make the children happy, then the parents will stay" might bring more families to church, but it can unintentionally lead to malnutrition. Parents can begin to lose their sense of calling as primary, spiritual caregivers, or at least struggle to find time to fulfill it. Children may become so used to being catered for in a custom-fit, homogenous-group style that they lose their taste for the more important influences of family time and/or gathering together to worship with the whole church body. Overused volunteers may struggle with burn-out and suffer from neglect of their own spiritual nourishment at church.

More at Any Cost?

"More is not just better, but necessary" is the even uglier step-sister motto that frequently accompanies the "If you make the children happy, the families will stay" motto. This line of reasoning exacerbates the problems mentioned above, in every size church.

Small, churches and church plants frequently face the frustrations of not enough man-power to keep open the children's programs that visiting families are seeking. Or, even if they do manage to have all the "wishlist" programs in place, they often tend to rely too heavily on too few volunteers. These tireless, big-hearted servants often sacrifice their own spiritual needs, week after week, to make sure the children's programs stay running.

Medium and large churches face their own version of these same problems. As the number of children and volunteers expands, the tendency is for churches to expand their program offerings, instead of first seeking healthier volunteer service limits with the programs they have. This plethora of programs can perpetuate the volunteer crisis. Yes, there are more able volunteers, but now so many more are needed to maintain the large number of programs.

Churches with more pocket money than volunteers find a solution by hiring care-givers who aren't members of their church. Others are tempted to enlist people who aren't really qualified to teach, choose a curriculum because it's an easy fit, even though it lacks biblical soundness; or, "fudge" on safe caregiver-to-child ratios to fit in more children.

And, if parents are not urged to be discerning, their children's schedules may so fill up with programs that the very families you hoped to serve with all these activities, can't find time to just be a family.

Pastors may be so overwhelmed with other aspects of ministry that they leave oversight of these matters in the hands of others who should be helpers, rather than shepherds over this segment of their church's growth.

Enter Church-Shaped Children's Ministry

Church-shaped Children's Ministry is a humble, finite approach to caring well for the families in the church. It acknowledges parents in their role as primary spiritual care-givers of their children and encourages them in ways that are in keeping with the spiritual well-being of all of its membership. It looks to its pastor-leaders to set priorities for the spiritual support of parents and children; and, to carefully assess what resources (volunteers, finances, facility space, hours, etc.) the church has to offer towards those priorities. They prayerfully consider the best fit for the good of the whole church, and to the glory of God. Then, they lead the members in carrying it out.

Let's explore what Church-Shaped Children's Ministry looks like.

Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Overview

Church-shaped Children's Ministry desires:

- to provide children with a faithful testimony of life with God in the lives of their parents, teachers and other members.
- to share the gospel with children that the lost might be saved.
- to make disciples of all children who trust in Christ.
- to leave a legacy of Bible truths and knowledge of Scripture in the minds of the children.
- to prepare children to gather together well with the members of a local church.

Church-shaped Children's Ministry:

- acknowledges that parents are called by God to be the primary, spiritual caregivers of their children.
- also understands that parents are not Christians, alone, but are members of the local church, who encourage and build one another up, including encouraging and helping each other to spiritually nurture their children well.

That's why Church-shaped Children's Ministry enlists the members of a local church:

- to help equip each other in caring well for their children, at home and at church.
- to prepare them to be, Lord willing, future members of the church.

And includes programs that:

- support, not replace, parents.
- don't get in the way with family time.
- help prepare the children to gather together well with the congregation.
- are sustainable, in terms of finances and volunteers required.

Church-shaped Children's Ministry is led by the church leaders, so that:

- it feeds parents and children from the pulpit.
- it decides what programs the church offers parents and children.
- it echoes the teaching priorities of the church.
- it reflects the resources of the church (financial, facilities, spiritually-healthy serve limits for volunteers).
- it keeps the people involved in children's ministry (families, children, volunteers, staff) under their guidance and care.

For the good of the whole church, and to the glory of the Head of the Church.

Let's take a more in-depth look at what Church-shaped Children's Ministry looks like for pastors, parents, children, programs, member volunteers and Children's Ministry leaders.

Pastors Take the Lead in Shaping Children's Ministry for the Good of the Whole Congregation

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

Church-shaped Children's Ministry starts with the pastors. How pastors lead their church in ministering to children has a far more significant impact on both their present and future members than they might first imagine. Pastors are accountable before God for sound teaching in their local church, even for sound teaching in Children's Ministry.

Pastors teach and encourage parents in their role as primary, spiritual care-givers of their children. They pray for families, and equip them through the preaching of God's Word. They think about how to care well for the children who come to church without parents.

They provide pastoral oversight of families, programs and Children's Ministry volunteers. They are known as the church's leaders of Children's Ministry, and take responsibility for it. They lead by providing teaching priorities; approving program and curriculum choices; and, setting healthy limits on volunteering. They encourage, advise, and support the Children's Ministry team through regular meetings. They protect children and volunteers through a child protection policy.

How Pastors Can Lead

- Feed parents and children from the regular preaching of God's Word.
- Teach and encourage parents in their calling to raise their children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord.
- Set wise guidelines for the baptism of children and their partaking of the Lord's Supper.
- Realize that many of the church's future members and leaders are in their midst now as children. Setting teaching priorities to train today's children well can help prepare a stronger church of the future.
- Decide on a healthy, sustainable number of classes/programs to offer, balancing needs with available budget and volunteers.
- Establish volunteer serving limits to ensure that all volunteers are also being well-fed themselves.
- Create an effective child protection policy to keep children and volunteers safe. Abuse scars children and destroys a church's ministry.
- Appoint a like-minded administrator/team who to implement the pastors' vision.
- Choose one elder/pastor as liaison, overseer and encourager of Children's Ministry and its leadership. He receives regular updates on families, volunteers, programs, curriculum changes, and arising issues. He takes charge of difficult situations and bears the burden of enforcing unpopular but needful actions. He reports back to the other pastors, so they can pray, advise, and care well for those involved, too.

Note: Pastoral leadership does not mean that no guidance will be needed to make good decisions. The best leaders are humble learners. Pastors will need the wise insights of the Children's Ministry team, parents, teachers, and others to make the best decisions for the whole church. With many advisers, come the best decisions!

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.

Children: Tomorrow's Church in Your Midst Today

Realizing that childhood is an especially responsive time of learning, and even conversion and spiritual growth, Church-shaped Children's Ministry seeks to make the most of these years. In conversations, in classes, in resources, in worship services, church members seek to clearly proclaim the gospel to the children, as well as live out the gospel before them. As they gather together each week to worship God and love one another, the church members seek to paint a picture of the beautiful love of Christ for His Church that not only glorifies God, but that also will remain in these young minds as a winsome testimony. They work to create a legacy of truth in their minds, that the Holy Spirit can ripen in their hearts, and prepare them one day to be well-equipped to commit themselves as followers of Christ and lovers of His Church, as well.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry!

- Everyone who attends your church was or is a child. Your current members and leaders WERE children. Your future members and leaders ARE children now.
- The highest concentration of non-Christians attending your church is usually the children in your children's programs.
- The "4-14" age window is the most common age of conversion. It is also when kids are most prone to "make decisions" to please their parents or teachers, without being truly converted.

What Churches Can Do:

- Provide children with a faithful testimony of life with God as they see God's work of grace in the lives of their parents, teachers and others.
- Share the gospel with children that the lost might be saved. Make disciples of those who trust in Christ.
- Make disciples, not baptismal statistics. "Pleasing" can mimic true conversion in the short run. Look for sustained fruit before you baptize. If in doubt, wait, for the sake of the child's true conversion and the purer witness of the Church.
- Pray for families. Include a section in your membership directory listing parents and the names/ages of children. This helps the congregation to easily and regularly pray for them.
- Offer Bible classes for children. These can reinforce what Christian parents teach at home, as well as introduce God's truths to children from non-Christian homes. These can leave a legacy of Bible truth in young hearts that echoes throughout their lives.
- Prepare children to gather together with the members of your local
- Mentor non-Christian kids who attend your church, frequently without their parents. Wrap both them and their parents into your families as a display of the goodness and love of God.
- Children are impressionable. They remember how they are treated. They notice how others live, and emulate (or try not to) them. Create a winsome memory of Christ and His church by treating children with love, respect and kindness.

Programs that Support and Are Sustainable

are set by the pastors. These programs support, not replace, the parents' own spiritual training of their children. Church programs may ebb and flow, depending upon the vision of the pastors; families' needs; and, program sustainability, in terms of church volunteers and other resources required. Care for the WHOLE church--families and volunteers-- is of prime concern to the pastors, and directly affects what programs are offered when.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

- Children's Ministry is sometimes used as the "magic key" that will attract families to church and keep them coming back.
- Sometimes, Children's Ministry programs become so numerous as to crowd out important family time.
- Children's Ministry programs frequently enlist more volunteers than any other ministry in the church.
- Once a Children's Ministry program is offered, the expectation is high to keep it going, sometimes, even at the expense of what is spiritually best for your volunteer teachers.
- Sadly, the most kid-friendly, exciting published curriculums are not always the most biblically sound. The "wow" factor of these curriculums can be very attractive, but can lead to unbiblical, simply moralistic, teaching. Read the curriculum carefully before purchasing!

What Churches Can Do:

- Pastors set teaching priorities and approve curriculum choices for Children's Ministry programs. They decide which programs the church will implement, taking into consideration need, family time, available budget, and number of volunteers needed. Healthy spiritual growth for and healthy sustainability for the whole church, not a program's attractiveness or its potential to swell attendance, drives their decisions.
- Pastors determine when to add, close or modify programs. They teach members to expect some ebb and flow in programs in order to care well for the spiritual needs of all--volunteers and families alike.
- Children's ministry leaders, teachers, parents and others can help the pastors understand their biggest needs in being better equipped to spiritually care for the children. Pastors can regularly seek the wisdom of these people in order to make the best decisions for the whole church.
- Start small. Offer less. Only add more, slowly. When you feel you cannot offer a particular program at church, recommend resources that parents can use to teach these same truths to their children at home.
- In some very small churches, the programs supporting parents might look as bare bones as regularly praying for parents; encouraging them and their children from the pulpit during the worship service; recommending good resources to use with their children in the pew and at home; and, facilitating honest conversations among fellow members.
- As the church expands, the leaders re-visit what might be beneficial to the growing congregation and what is now possible with the increased resources on hand. It very well could expand to a bookstall of resources for family devotions, child care for babies and Sunday School classes for parents and children on all or most Sundays.

From there, it might grow to include many other programs. But always, whatever is done, the pastors take into consideration healthy limits for the spiritual well-being of all.

- Sometimes the volunteer pool or the budget shrinks. Or, there are so many kids, that the church can no longer provide the same number of programs or for the same group of children. The church shape has changed again, and the leaders respond to these changes, trying to continue to care well for everyone. This might mean only offering classes for K-6th grade, when previously you offered classes for K-12th grade. It might mean putting a cap on the number of children you have in a classroom, rather than over-taxing volunteers beyond what is good for them.

Member Volunteers Who Serve Within Healthy Limit

Member volunteers support and encourage parents by helping to care, teach and mentor their children through the local church. They provide the children with a testimony of God's grace through their lives. They serve within limits set by elders, to meet the needs of Children's Ministry, but not at the expense of their own spiritual nurturing. They may serve in "over-sized" teams that don't require every teacher to teach every session in order to share the teaching load, avoid burn-out, and provide natural substitute teachers for classes. They are a great way to train less-inexperienced teachers by pairing them with more experienced lead teachers.

Church-shaped Children's Ministry strives to care for the spiritual well-being of all church members, not just the families. What programs you offer should be directly influenced by **who you are** and **what resources you have**. You need to live within this "budget" for the spiritual health of all your members. Building size, number of willing and qualified teachers, age and number of children; available finances; maturity of the Christian parents (ability to teach their children truths, themselves), number of services, and many other factors should be taken into consideration.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

- There are often more teachers, teaching more souls, in Children's Ministry than in any venue in your church, outside of the pulpit.
- Most Sunday School teachers are not trained teachers or preachers. Curriculum doesn't just teach children. It often is teaching your teachers, too.
- Typically, more members miss the worship services and adult classes because of Children's Ministry obligations than any other ministry of the church.
- Over-volunteering and under-training are usually the two, biggest reasons why volunteers do not come back.
- Children's Ministry programs can be vulnerable places for child abuse to occur in the local church.

What Churches Can Do:

- Provide pastor-approved curriculum that is biblically solid, developmentally-appropriate, and teacher-friendly.
- Provide teachers with mentors who can teach them how to manage a classroom, as well as engage children in ways that are understandable, memorable and enjoyable.
- Enlist "over-sized" teaching teams for each program (not everyone teaches every week). This helps avoid teacher burn-out; builds in vacation time and good, substitute teacher choices; and, it allows for teachers to regularly attend adult classes and worship services.
- Enforce a child protection policy to keep volunteers and children safe. Know your teachers before they teach. Pair more-experienced, better-known teachers, with newer, lesser-known teachers. Require a waiting period before brand-new members can work directly with kids.
- Set up healthy volunteering limits to make sure all volunteers are being spiritually well-fed themselves.

Children's Ministry Leaders: Preventing Burnout

Children's Ministry leaders work under the leadership of the pastors. They bring the pastoral vision to life through the curriculum they implement, the volunteers they help train and enlist, and by generally encouraging families. They provide regular updates to keep the pastors informed, so they can care well for families and volunteers.

Your Ministry IS Children's Ministry

- Children's Ministry leaders are often the "stop gap" for last minute substitutes and other classroom issues. If there's a need, they are called to meet it.
- They can become so busy filling urgent needs, that their own spiritual needs are neglected.
- They carry most of the huge burden of enlisting, training and managing teachers; finding (or creating) good curriculum; and, caring well for the needs of many, different families.
- They have to be willing to be the "on-call, bad cop" who enforces difficult but necessary policies for everyone's good.

What Churches Can Do:

- Have a designated pastor who oversees and encourages the whole Children's Ministry team. He schedules regular meetings with the team to keep informed and to know how he and the other pastors can best care for the leaders, teachers, and families involved. He initiates any needed pastoral conversations with Children Ministry workers, teachers, or parents. He shares the job of enforcing difficult policies. He reviews and approves any curriculum choices. He reports back to the other pastors for their prayers, input, and further oversight.
- Recognize Children's Ministry deacons who work alongside the Children's Ministry Administrator/team (CMA) to welcome families, support teachers, and otherwise keep Children's Ministry programs running smoothly on Sundays or other program days. They are a great help to families, teachers, and the CMA.
- Designate Children's Ministry team leaders to take over much of the CMA's burden of finding substitutes and other last-minute program issues.
- Shepherd your CMA and deacons well by ensuring they regularly attend worship services. CMA's need regular vacation breaks, too. Well-trained assistants and program team leaders can help your programs run smoothly, even in their absence.

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 “VIPP” (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.