

**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 have 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 volunteer teachers 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, expositional 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**

