

**Part II**

**Characteristics**

**of**

**Church-Shaped**

**Children's Ministry**



# chapter 5

## A Tour of

### Church-Shaped Children's Ministry

When you get ready to take a road trip to unexplored territory, what do you do besides pack? You pull out a map (or at least an app.); and you look at the trip overview of the roads and cities to get a sense of what to expect. Church-shaped children's ministry may feel like uncharted lands to some, so we're going to start out with an overview of the journey ahead.

Here's the destinations ahead of you:

**Stop #1:** A simple summary of church-shaped children's ministry

**Stop #2:** Church-shaped Children's Ministry: Mindful of the Gatherings

A look at how to shape your children's ministry so that it always keeps the worship gatherings the main thing.

**Stop #3:** Church-shaped Children's Ministry: Encouraging One Another, Without Burning Out Anyone  
This section will take a look at each of the five, key groups of people and the two, key ways that a church-shaped children's ministry works to build up families, while continuing to care for the needs of those who serve them.

Strap yourself in and let's hit the road!



# **STOP 1**

# **Overview**



## chapter 6

# Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Overview

### Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Is Mindful of the Gatherings

- It points to the gathering of God's people, in heaven at the end of time and on earth, every Sunday.
- It is organized so that everything else that happens in children's ministry is a support to this basic model that the pastors lead their local church in providing to help families.
- It wants this support to be helpful in leading everyone to taking part in the gatherings: parents, children, member volunteers and children's ministry leaders.
- Is an outflow of the church's covenant to aid each other in growing in maturity in Christ and in living out in godliness the good works God has planned for their lives.

### Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Is Lead by the Pastors/Elders

- Who feed parents and children from the pulpit.
- Who decide what programs the church offers parents and children.
- Who make sure children's ministry echos the teaching priorities of the church.
- Who make sure children's ministry reflects the resources of the church (financial, facilities, spiritually-healthy serve limits for volunteers).
- Who keep the people involved in children's ministry (families, children, volunteers, staff) under their guidance and care.
- Who make children's ministry a path towards all gathering to worship together.

### Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Supports Parents

- It acknowledges that parents are called by God to be the primary, spiritual caregivers of their children.
- It 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.

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Desires to Train Children

- 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 Is Rooted the Worship Gathering

- It recognizes the basic biblical model of children's ministry to for families to be equipped through preaching, strengthened by worship, and encouraged by fellow members at church to carry on training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord at home.
- It sees itself as an aid to help children to gather together meaningfully with God's people and Lord willing, as God's people.

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Often Includes Other Programs

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

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Enlists Fellow Church Members

- 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.

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Leaders Carry Out the Pastors' Vision

- They work under the leadership of the pastors and are cared for through their leadership.
- They bring the pastoral vision to life through curriculum, volunteers, and generally encouraging families.

**That all might gather together,  
for the good of the whole church, and to the glory of God.**



**STOP 2**

**Church-Shaped  
Children's Ministry  
and the  
Gatherings**



## chapter 7

# Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Is Mindful of the Gatherings

If you know about Nine Marks ministries, you know that it encourages “building healthy churches”. (And if you don't know about it, you should go take a look at [9marks.org](http://9marks.org). It will make a lot more sense of what I'm going to tell you.) Church-shaped children's ministry, as well as all the other Praise Factory resources is Nine Mark's little sister. First of all, because it also has grown up in the Capitol Hill Baptist Church family and it has been my labor of love alongside my husband, Mark Dever, as he has pastored this church. But most of all, because it is the scribe of how we have seen those Nine Marks have made a huge difference in children's ministry at CHBC and many other churches around the world. They really have helped our pastors keep children's ministry “Church-shaped,” that is, to keep the gathering of God's people the main thing behind everything we do in children's ministry.

Hebrews 10:22-25 goes along way in describing church-shaped children's ministry:

“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

This tour stop will take a look at how everything in Church-shaped Children's Ministry points not only to the Great Gatering at the end of time, but to the gatherings here on earth that prepare God's people for that Day. Let's take a look.



# chapter 8

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry

### Points to the Gatherings

#### **1. Points to the Great Gathering of God with all of His people.**

What happens on that “Day” that verse 25 mentions? Two main things. Those who rejected God’s offer of salvation through Jesus will go to their final punishment for sins. They did not draw near to God and now they will never get that opportunity. Their hearts were not cleansed from their guilty conscience. They did not trust in Christ. They were not buried with His death, nor raised to life with Him (vs. 22). They have no hope. Only judgement. Oh, so very sad!

But for those who did repent of their sins and trust in Christ as their only Savior, this will be the Day of the Great Gathering of all of God’s people with God forever. A day to enjoy the Feast of the Lamb with the Lamb: “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” --Revelation 19:6-8

This is the great Day that God’s people yearn for and that all of history points to. This is where the Church at last really looks like a bride, without blemish. This is where she really acts like a bride, full of love for her groom. It is also the Day when those who refused to repent and believe in Jesus as their Savior will go to their final punishment. No one is left unaffected by this Day.

First and foremost, Church-Shaped Children’s Ministry points to this gathering. That’s why we want to prepare everyone for it.

This means clearly teaching them the gospel; and, by clearly explaining what it means to be a disciple --one who turns away from their old way of life and turns and trust and obedience to Christ. AND, by teaching them to commit themselves to a local gathering of the church for guidance under godly pastors, instruction in God’s Word, the worship of God, and the care and encourage of one another. the good news of salvation to children that they, too, might be a part of that Great Gathering of God’s people.

#### **2. Points to the earthly gathering of local churches each week.**

And that’s why church-shaped children’s ministry also points to those regular, earthly gatherings of God’s people in the local church each week. If the Great Gathering of God’s people with God is the grand finale, the gathering of God’s people in the local church is the weekly dress rehearsal. We are to gather regularly—not give up meeting together. We are to spur one another one to love and good deeds—through the preaching of God’s Word, through our corporate worship and through us loving and encouraging one another (vs.25).

Families are to be a part of these gatherings. Children watch and learn as they are part of the gatherings. They hear God’s Word. They watch God’s people worship Him. They witness God’s people loving each other and enjoy that love, themselves. And Lord willing, faith will come by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. (Romans 10:17, ESV) and they will join with God’s people, and as God’s people, in worship and witness, too.

## CHURCH-SHAPED CHILDREN'S MINISTRY POINTS TO THE GATHERINGS

These gatherings are crucial for parents, too. Parents are equipped through the preaching of God's Word, they are strengthened through the worship of God, and they are helped by each other, encouraged by wisdom, sharing, praying, serving, teaching and admonishing to live godly lives. Lives that can be a powerful witness to their children. Through the church, parents are equipped for all of life and godliness—including for their job as primary spiritual caregivers (disciplers) of their children, both in the pew and at home.

Church-shaped Children's Ministry is also means being mindful of those who care for the children to be ready for that Day, too. It seeks to care for the one (families), without neglecting the other (member volunteers) through the regular gathering of God's people at church (vs.25). Being too busy serving the children and missing these gatherings is another way of neglecting to gather together (Hebrews 10:25)

### **3. Even points to the family gatherings of godly parents with their children at home.**

The minutes families spend each week in the church pale in comparison to the days they spend together each week at home. If the grand finale is the heavenly, Great Gathering of all God's people, and the weekly gatherings of the local church is the dress rehearsal, then home life is the daily "play practice" gatherings as godly parents carry on "training up their children in the nurture and admonition in the Lord" through their life's witness, through their daily worship of the Lord, and the instruction from God's Word they give them. (Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:19; Ephesians 6:1-4)

Where do familie, particularly parents, get their "lines" to speak out into their lives and their children's lives Monday through Saturday? Through their own time in pray and in God's Word at home during the week, no doubt. But, even more so, on Sundays, when they gather together with God's people.

**This leads us to the very core of children's ministry: providing for families THROUGH the weekly, worship gathering, itself.**

## chapter 9

# Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Provides Through the Worship Gathering at Church

The most basic, biblical model of children's ministry is to provide for families through the gathering of the local church of believers. This comes through worshipping God together, through sitting under the preaching of God's Word, and by receiving encouragement and aid from fellow members who work to present each other mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28). We are to spur one another on towards love and good works (Hebrews 10:25), including the good work of helping each other raise the children under our care.

The worship gathering is not just about equipping parents for the training of their children. It is to be a place where children see God's people worship, hear God's Word preached, and watch God's people display God in how they love one another. And Lord willing, as they see, hear and watch, the Lord will work in their hearts, bringing them to repent and believe in Him, themselves.

But how can we strategically and make the most of the worship gathering to help parents and children? Here are some ideas and resources.



### Ways to Provide through the Gathering



#### **The Service**

- Provide a simple worship bulletin and pencils/crayons for kids. This can be an especially customized worship bulletin for each particular service; or, check out Truth78's spiral bound service "templates" that can be used with any service. Great for use in the service. Great for parents to use with their children at home to review what they learn.
- Provide blank paper and pencils/crayons for the kids and ask them to draw a picture of something from the service and give it to the pastor at the end of the service. One pastor told me he takes these pictures and posts them on his office door. The kids love this.
- Give away books/make book suggestions that would be helpful to parents or their children to use at home.
- Adding a catechism question (one of your own making or from a simple, kids catechism) to the service or at least in the bulletin that fits in with the theme of the service.
- Include children and their families in the worship service prayers.
- A few pastors/worship service leaders I spoke to told me they especially welcome the youngest children (usually 4/5 year olds) to the service during the opening welcome time. They would ask these children to raise their hands to show him where they were seated. Apparently, this has been a huge encouragement to these children and has helped them to want to pay attention in the service.

### **The Songs**

- Provide mp3 links (such as on your church's website) to hymns and other songs you sing in your gatherings for families to listen to and learn at home.
- Include the words and music to the songs in printed bulletins for them to take home and use in family worship times.
- Be intentional with your service music. Choose songs in advance and let the congregation know what you will be singing. This is especially good for introducing new songs. At CHBC, new songs are introduced, then sung three weeks in a row in our preparation music time on Sunday mornings. This is singing that takes place during the 15 minutes leading up to the official start of the service. It's a great way to learn new songs.
- The church also informs the congregation about new songs being introduced in the weekly e-newsletter that goes out on Wednesdays. It includes links to the new songs for them to listen to and learn from.
- Introducing songs in the service by providing a simple explanation of some of the "big, Bible words" in the lyrics. You can do this verbally as you introduce the song or even include in the bulletin.

### **The Fellowship**

- Include a section in the back of your membership directory of families including names of children. Encourage your members to pray for the families as they pray through the directory (Our church has been training to regularly pray through the directory and this has been a great way to learn the names of children and to ask God's blessings upon them.)
- Encourage the congregation to ask intentional questions and share vulnerably so they can truly give each other godly encouragement and advice that builds up. Take time to pray for each other as you share. Parenting can be so hard. Advice from others, especially those who have children older than yours can be so helpful. Grace from our prayer-answering God can be even more helpful!
- Encourage husbands, wives, couples, etc getting together to talk and pray about family matters—everything from discipline to discipleship.
- Encourage families to adopt singles or couples without children into their lives. Families can provide a natural training ground for these future parents. And, these singles/couples can be yet another reflection of Christ to the children, as well as help for the parents.



### **The Space**

- If possible, provide a special room outside of the worship hall with audio (and video feed) for people even with sick kids or noisy kids.
- Provide audio feed of the service into any room for nursing mothers.
- If you only have one space, such as if you are a church plant in a hotel ballroom, bring a portable partition to allow nursing moms to be present, yet have some privacy at the back of the meeting space.

### **The Sermon**

- Teach parents about their calling as primary disciplers of their children.
- Print a sermon card (or make available on your website) up-coming sermons and Scripture passages. Families can read these passages in the week leading up to your sermon. Some families even try to come up with a 3-point outline or at least key words that will be emphasized in the sermon. After the sermon, they discuss how close they were.
- Use a simple, outline format that will help even young children follow along; and, can be used by families at home, if they have a “sermon review” time during lunch.
- Think about the basic pitch of your sermon (one pastor friend told me he always pitched his sermon to a bright 16 year old.)
- Choose illustrations that even they can understand.
- Choose a few, key concepts, such as gospel, disciple, grace, faith, repent to regularly explain in very simple terms when preaching.
- Regularly include ways members can encourage parents and children through conversation and acts of service.
- Give the children a question to ask their parents when they go home (such as “Ask your parents about a time they struggled with fear and God helped them.”)
- Post sermons online for parents to listen to another time if noisy children kept them from absorbing the content during the service. Or, to even be able to use portions with their children to lead discussions at home (with older children/youth).

### **Some Helpful Resources**

- Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children in the Joy of Worship Robbie Castleman
- Truth:78 Resources, such as “My Church Notebook” and “Children and the Worship Service” by David and Sally Michael

**CHURCH-SHAPED CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROVIDES THROUGH THE WORSHIP GATHERING AT CHURCH**  
Because Scripture points to the centrality of these gatherings, children's ministry needs to, too.

It starts here, with this basic, biblical model:

**In light of the Day to come,  
The Church gathers, led by pastors:**

- **Word:** To instruct and equip God's people for life and godliness, including parenting
- **Worship:** Strengthened and growing as they worship God and meditate on His character.
- **Witness:** Seeking to actively build one another in the faith, seeking to present everyone mature in Christ, by prayer and acts of love, by encouragement and reproof; by teaching and example; seeing that you are in the faith and continuing in the faith. By God's grace, being an increasing witness to all of Christ, including the children in their midst. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

**In light of each week to come:  
Families continue the training at home, led by parents:**

- **Word:** Equipped at church, they continue to instruct their children in God's Word at home.
- **Worship:** Strengthened at church, they continue to worship the Lord at home, before their children and with their children, if they come to faith, themselves.
- **Witness:** Continuing the reflection of Christ at home in how they discipline and love their children. and before them, live their lives in love to God.

Lord willing, the Holy Spirit uses the gatherings at church as well as the training at home in the hearts of the children. He works in their hearts, helping them to repent, believe, and become Jesus' disciples and fellow church members themselves one day. Short. Sweet. Basic.

**This is basic, biblical, church-shaped children's ministry.**

**In a very real sense,  
if you are faithful in this basic, biblical model mentioned above,  
you are being faithful in children's ministry.**

 Beyond Basic 

But usually Children's Ministry winds up including a lot more than this basic, biblical model. Many churches provide child care, Sunday School and many other programs for children. They also often provide extra teaching times for adults. These can be great services that help parents and children grow in their knowledge of God.

But this is also when things get complicated, many times unhealthily complicated. Time at church, which should be pointing to the gathering of God's people, winds up losing its direction. The main thing no longer seems to be the main thing.

**The next sections are dedicated to thinking about  
how you might add more  
while still keeping the gathering the main thing.**



# chapter 10

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Provides for the Worship Gathering at Church

When thinking about going beyond the basic, biblical model, start with providing FOR the gathering. That is, what parents/children would especially benefit from extra help so they can be better equipped through the worship service themselves?

Often, providing for the worship gathering includes programs like these:

### **1. Safe child care (no teaching) for infants and toddlers during the worship service**

These little people are obviously limited in their ability to understand what's going on in the service, but not limited in their ability to disrupt the service. Providing something as basic as childcare so that parents can focus on the service may sound just like babysitting on Tuesday night, and in some ways, it may look like it. But encourage your volunteers that it is not! They are supporting the preaching of the Word and the building up of the congregation through their service. It's like turning up the volume of the hearing aid of someone with a hearing deficit. They are playing an important role in equipping parents to teach their children at home. That's a big deal with even eternal consequences.

**Note:** Don't provide child care for anyone but your own children unless you have a child-protection policy in place.

#### **Helpful Resources:**

On Guard Deepak Reju

Safe Kids: Policies and Procedures for Keeping Kids Safe in Church

### **2. Providing teaching during all/part of the worship service for younger children that phases out as they get older**

If church-shaped children's ministry emphasizes the importance of the worship gatherings for families, why would it ever include programs during part or, even more radical, all of a service? Isn't this a contradiction? It certainly could be. Some churches provide programs that start with newborns and continue all the way up through high school and even college! This "stovepipe" shape that never brings children into the full gathering is a terrible idea, no doubt coming from the well-intentioned "give them what they like and they will keep coming back" mentality. But this approach assumes the smell of "custom-made kidliness" in these homogenous "services" is better than the not-as-familiar, aroma of Christ and the gospel that waifs out of the whole-church worship services. Church-shaped Children's Ministry is definitely NOT advocating this kind of approach.

But it doesn't necessarily mean you never any children classes during all or part of the service. It does mean that you gradually add them in as they mature. For example, if you have really long sermons (like we do here at CHBC) you might provide, something for preschoolers during the whole service and even something for younger elementary school age children for the sermon portion of the service. We have chosen to offer two such classes. Preschoolers have their own meaty class during the entire service that parents may choose to put their children in. Our younger elementary school are included in the first 45 minutes of singing, prayers and Bible reading, but can be excused during the sermon portion of the service to their own teaching time.

## CHURCH-SHAPED CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROVIDES FOR THE WORSHIP GATHERING AT CHURCH

This is where we use Praise Factory curriculum for both the preschoolers and young elementary age kids. The curriculum includes elements like what the children experience in the worship service, including prayers, Bible reading, and a story sermon with listening questions that help prepare them for purposeful listening, like they will do in the worship service.

Even though these children are missing all or part of the service for a few years, what we have chosen to do helps them prepare for the gathering for many more years to come. And, we are always encouraging the parents to pull their kids out and bring them I mean to keep their kids in for the sermon and see how they do. As they see a continued pattern of readiness, they may have the kids go out let's frequently. And even though we offer Praise Factory for those older kids through third grade, we very frequently have parents who are pulling their kids out to sit with them all the time to the sermon earlier than that. The curriculum also provides a meaty take-home bulletin That includes the him they're learning the scripture their learning the story they're learning and ACTS prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) that they're learning so that parents can continue to prepare their kids to gather together with the gathering even in their home devotion times.

And, for as many parents who do include their children in any of the "ramp-up to worship" classes we provide during the worship service, there are many who choose to keep their children with them. The elders have served the whole congregation well by encouraging an attitude of respect for these differences of opinion. Many churches have not faired so well, having been rattling with parents who firmly feel that their view on these matters is the only "biblical" view. Many well-meaning family-integrated families have sadly been implicated here. Pastors, preach to your congregation the importance of unity in gospel essentials, but Christian freedom in how families, in good conscience, use the members of the church family to help equip the members of their own family.

# chapter 11

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Provides for the Gathering at Home

In addition to equipping parents and training children through the worship service, churches may have a library, book stall, or provide a book list of helpful books for parents to use with their children. Often, take-home sheets are provided with Sunday School curriculum. In my experience, I've found that two issues frequently keep good books out of the needy hands of families. One: parents who are very busy, and don't get around to getting books. And two: most of the best books are only available online, making it even harder for busy parents to find time to search for books, make sure they are good fit for their children, and actually use them. For this reason, we actually do all three of the above things, plus a few more:

### **1. Annual Bookfair**

We host a once-a-year book fair in November (in time for the holidays) on a Saturday/Sunday at church. We have done this as a "Look Only" book fair as well as a "Buy What's There" Book Fair. We include a comprehensive list of all the books on hand as well as articles to help parents think through catechisms, Bible story books, Bibles and other related topics. This annual list goes up on our website for families to continue to access throughout the year.

This has been a big hit for parents getting their hands on resources and finding what's just right for their family and children. Perhaps of as much value has been the conversations we have with the parents. It's a real "pastoral" event in that we learn so much more about the individual challenges and struggles particular families are facing. Information that helps us serve them better in other ways.

**Note:** Visit the Capitol Hill Baptist Church website and you can view or download the hefty 40+page booklist we have compiled. We try to update this list once a year.

### **2. Pulpit Give-aways**

Our pastors give away books every week from the pulpit, including books for parents or children. This gives them a chance to tell the congregation about books they particularly like and why. This helps not only the lucky parent who gets the free hand-out, but everyone else who hears about it. We've had members still asking months later about one or other book a pastor recommended and gave away; as well as stories of how the one parent who received the free book went on to share the resource with others.

### **3. Curriculum with Take Homes and Online Access**

We use curriculum with beefy take-home sheets and online access to full curriculum for use with parents. While some parents may not choose to use these, we find that some do.

### **4. Quarterly Newsletters and Bi-monthly Members' Meetings**

We always try to include reviews of a few books in the newsletters and at members' meetings that would be useful to parents with their families.





# chapter 12

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Prepares for the Worship Gathering at Church

Many churches provide classes for children and adults, in addition to the preaching of God's Word in the worship service. The great thing about having a separate Sunday School hour is that it does not interfere with teachers or families taking part in the worship service. They also can provide focused, age-appropriate instruction in Bible truths that helps both child and parent to get more out of the worship service.

Let's take a look at some variations of this two-hundred-year classic, first for children, then for adults.

### Sunday School Hour: Preparing Children

The good and bad news is that there is a ton of curriculum options for Sunday School. It takes discernment to weed through the bad theology found in some of these options. A willingness to make adjustments to fit your teachers and children, even from the best the market has to offer. But put in the effort and you leave a rich legacy. Here are four types of "curriculum" frequently used.

#### **1. Simple catechism and/or Bible memory time**

There are some GREAT catechism and Bible verse materials that even set the questions and answers to music. I particularly like New City Catechism and the Truth 78 Fighter verses. Both are set to music. The New City Catechism even includes a devotional guide you can use in class or recommend to parents to use at home with their children. There are multiple levels of difficulty available for both of these resources. In addition, now there are Fighter Verse coloring books that can be used. One warning: be careful to not discourage kids who do not memorize easily. Sometimes those stinking star charts on display are so hard for kids like this! Make the point the meaning of the verses or catechism answer, not the perfection of the words. I know many children who cringed to go to classes because they felt like losers at Bible memory. Memory is partially a skill. Understanding is the goal that God will use to change hearts. Keep your eyes on that prize.

#### **2. "Go from the Worship Bulletin" classes**

Teachers can use the actual worship service framework to help children think about what they will learn in the service. This can include singing the songs, reading and thinking about the Bible verses, and leading in prayer. Many times, services will focus on a particular attribute of God and all of the prayers and songs flow out of that one theme. This can provide a focus for your prayer and meditation, too. If you throw in a few Bible verses games that have kids moving as they learn, they may enjoy the time even more. (See the [praisefactory.org](http://praisefactory.org) website for dozens of games like this for preschoolers and for elementary school age kids.)

#### **3. Full curriculum-based classes**

There are a number of great curriculum on the market that help kids understand Bible truths and a structure of redemptive history on a framework of theology. It might be adding in elements to that class time that will prepare them for what they will encounter when they're in the service, such as prayers and learning hymns that they might sing in church or other songs they might sing in church. Might include memorizing and learning the meaning of Bible verses. Praise Factory is certainly one of these curriculums.

**4. Take a Second Look**

Some churches have a morning and an evening service. Sometimes a Wednesday service, too. You can also use one of these additional services to review what they learned in church, similarly to what was described in number 1 listed above, only as a response to what they learned.

## Sunday School Hour: Preparing and Equipping Parents

The Sunday School hour is a great time to equip parents and teachers (and everyone else, too). These classes most certainly may include classes that directly equip them for parenting in the pew or at home. But really, any classes that helps parents to know God and His truth better can help them train their children better, whether it be an inductive Bible study or a class in theology, world religions or evangelism. Life with children will take parents to every arena of thought. CHBC offers its Core Seminar “Sunday School” courses for free online. These can be used to train parents or even for parents to use with their children, in a simpler fashion, at home.

Last, but not least, membership classes are a great refresher for parents as their children show signs of conversion and possible interest in baptism. These classes can help parents teach children what it means to be a follower of Christ and a member of a local church.

## Classes During the Worship Service: Still Preparing for the Gathering

Other times, churches provide teaching during all or part of the worship service, too.

We mentioned under “Providing For the Gathering” about good reasons for why you might also offer classes during part or even all of the worship service for younger children. When not treated as a stove-pipe, but as a ramp to gathering together based on developmental ability, these, too, can prepare children for gathering together. This is especially true when you include worship service-like elements in the curriculum.

Praise Factory curriculum does this. Learn more about this family of three, free curriculums at [praisefactory.org](http://praisefactory.org). But it is not hard to add these elements into most any good curriculum, if they are not already included in it as written. You can even look around the Praise Factory website and curriculum to get some ideas of what you could do to enhance the curriculum you use to better prepare children to gather with the rest of the church.

## Doctrine that Matches the Gathering

Whatever the extra teaching you choose, and whoever you intend to teach, it is important that the pastors to be part of planning what happens in these classes. They are the overseers of the church. God has entrusted them with teaching sound doctrine. They need to make sure that the teaching helps prepare children for what they're going to experience in the service; and, that the content of the materials used in those classes matches the soundness of doctrine they preach from the pulpit. It means carefully choosing and training teachers who know and can convey these truths to the children. And, it means making sure that curriculum and teachers understand the special developmental challenges in sharing the gospel with children. Sharing the gospel with kids is not exactly the same as sharing with adults. Children feel the weight of pleasing adults and peers that can lead to them wanting to profess faith in Christ even if they truly are not converted. They may not fully understand or feel the weight of conversion and discipleship until they are teenagers. This is not to say that many children are not indeed converted at a tender age. It just means that we need to proceed with care and understanding; with encouragement and patient waiting, before we recognize them as ready for the baptismal pool and the handshake of membership. Let the tender shoots mature and bear timely fruit. Teachers may not know this about children. Make sure to teach them this for the sake of the children and the church.

# chapter 13

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Protects Volunteers for the Worship Gathering at Church

Children's ministry is notorious for either being a hiding place for those who don't want to go to the church service or for being a burn out place for those who want to make sure there's always enough volunteers to staff the children's ministry programs. Both of these people need to be protected from themselves by the pastors.

### Pastors Lead the Way

- They make sure that the number of programs you provide matches the sustainable number of volunteers available, so that no one is being asked to serve too frequently for their own spiritual good.
- They set healthy limits on how frequently someone volunteers.
- They set up teaching priorities for whatever these programs are, so that if there becomes a regular pattern of insufficient volunteers, they know to limit or even cut out a program of a lower teaching priority, to be able to continue sustaining the programs of higher teaching priority.

### Different Churches, Different Priorities

Different churches will have a different set of teaching priorities. For us, our elders have decided that the number one group who needs the most support are parents with infants and toddlers during the worship services. That's taking care of those with children least able to understand what's going on in the service and whose parents are those usually least able to hear because of the noisy, little darlings. Programs for older children are a lower teaching priority because these children are more able to understand and their parents will be more likely to hear even with their children present.

When space allows, church also may decide to provide a special room for parents with small, noisy people in tow to watch the service in a space where their children can be noisy without distracting everyone else. For them, they may rather spend their volunteers on teaching children's classes... The kind of classes that help prepare the children for the gathering.

That's why church-shaped children's ministry will always be particular to your particular church. Your elders will assess how to best support your families.

There have been times at CHBC when, even though we had a high percentage of members volunteering, we still have had to completely cut out a program. (This was especially true right after we sent out a large church plant.) We just didn't have a regularly sustainable number of volunteers for the same number of programs. So, the elders looked at the teaching priorities and got rid of Sunday school until we could make up we could get back up to a regular sustainable number of volunteers for that program. They did this to protect having enough volunteers for child care during the worship services. As numbers improved, Sunday School came back class by class, not the whole thing at once. After a year, we were able to bring back all of the classes.



# chapter 14

## Church-Shaped Children's Ministry Patiently Waits to Fully Participate in the Worship Gathering at Church

We hope that all children will in some way participate along with their parents in the worship service. We hope they will hear the gospel, understand what it means to be a disciple, and as they grow in maturity, become known, not just to their parents but to the church in general, as followers of Christ. We firmly believe that even very young children can understand the gospel and put their trust in Jesus.



### How Children Are Different



But, we also firmly believe that children typically mature in a slow cooker kind of way. They are not adults in small clothes. They are adults in the making. And that “making” has well-recognized phases to it.

#### **The Classic, Trivium of Child Development**

1. First, a great memory and ability to recall things before they can understand. Hearts that are eager to please and desirous to understand. (2-10 years old)
2. Next, it gives their minds that interact with their memories and their hearts and begin to make connections, taking truth and making it theirs. (11-13 year olds)
3. Then, their wills to full fruition able to make costly decisions for their lives and bear the way of it. (14-18 year olds)

As you can see, most children do not get to that third stage of the will until they are well into their teenage years. Some need even more time than that. A few, less. That's why in church-shaped children's ministry, the pastors encourage patient waiting with children who seem to have put their faith in Christ. These pastors choose not to baptize children upon their first vocalization of faith in Christ, but to continue to encourage them in the gospel, in discipleship, and to grow in maturity until they have reached the clear stage of the will. They want to see these children feel the tug of the world, choose Christ, and decide to live in a way that is obviously Christ-centered. And importantly, they want this choice to be obviously not just to their parents, but the church. In this way, baptism is not tied so much to possibly conversion date with young children, but to clear signs of disciple behavior. “Make disciples” Jesus commanded in Matthew 28. This approach wants to see that they are indeed “made” before baptizing, and welcoming these souls to take the Lords Supper, become church members, and most sobering of all, be subject, if necessary tonot just parental disciple, but church discipline., if necessary.

It may seem hard to ask children to wait, but their willingness to wait and patiently persevere in the faith for maybe even years to be baptized. But, it is a first good step in showing their willingness to trust the wisdom of their elders, even when they don't completely understand or are happy about it. This will be the first of many times when they will have to do this when they become church members. Willingness to wait patiently and persevere in growing is a great indication of conversion. And, it's a wonderful way of helping the church's witness stay purer; and, for a child's assurance of faith show itself to be based in reality.

## CHURCH-SHAPED CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PATIENTLY WAITS TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE GATHERING

This understanding of children's developmental phases is important for parents and teachers to understand. Learning how to hold out the gospel and invite them to repent and believe, accepting their prayers of faith, but taking a position of encouragement and waiting does not come easily to these dear care-givers who long

to be assured the children are indeed saved. Pastors serve their families well by teaching upon this. Our elders even include teaching upon this in the membership classes. Some parents are so adamant about their children being baptized as soon as they show first flickers of faith. Being upfront on their position of "patient waiting" helps parents to choose another church if they cannot agree with our approach. (This statement is included at the back of this book.)

## Helpful Resources

Elders Position on the Baptism of Children (included in Appendix A)  
Understanding Baptism by Bobbie Jamieson

**STOP 3**

**Church-Shaped  
Children's Ministry:  
A Whole Church  
Affair**





## chapter 15

# Church-Shaped Children's Ministry: Encouraging One Another

We've thought about how Church-shaped children's ministry always strives to keep the worship gathering of the church the main thing; how that gathering is preparation for the Great Gathering of all of God's people; and, how parents are equipped through it to have what they need to go home and continue to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

But, as we've noted previously this is not simply an exchange of information or experience between pastors, parents and kids, with no one else involved, as those who agree with the family-integrated church philosophy might argue. (See article on this philosophy in Appendix B.) God chose to call His people, the body of Christ. That is not just because Christ bought us and is our Head. Scripture is clear: it is also because we are members who work together to carry out all of God's good plans. We can expect to have different gifts and different needs. We can expect to use those gifts to help care for each others' needs. In Romans, Paul says: "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. --Romans 12:4-8

And in his letter to the Ephesians says this: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." --Ephesians 4:15-16

This is God's beautiful plan: to use us to be a picture of Him as we love one another.

No where in Scripture is training up children excluded from the "needy list." And actually, we see verses to the contrary. The very fact that Paul writes to churches for parents to raise their children in God's ways (Ephesians 6) shows a desire for the whole church needs to hear this, because they will undoubtedly be helping each other in this task, as passages like Titus 2 points to.

We are not to be family-integrated, unless you are talking about the family which is the body of Christ. We are to be family-equipping, when we speak of our biological families and the church. We help one another to all reach maturity in Christ: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." --Colossians 1:28

This is church-shaped children's ministry.

But what do the different "members" of the local church work together to equip parents and train up children? There are five, different groups of people and the two most common places where this equipping take place in the church. The next page shows an overview of these.

**Church-shaped Children's Ministry**

**starts with:**

- **pastors**
- who lead their churches**

**in serving those under their care:**

- **parents**
- **children**

**with who/what they have:**

- **church services**
- **programs**
- **member volunteers**
- **children's ministry leaders**

**in a way that is sustainably and spiritually-responsibly  
that all might gather,  
for the good of the whole church  
and to the glory  
of God.**

Now we are going to look at church-shaped ministry, segment by segment: the part each plays in church-shaped children's ministry, special care to bear in mind with each, and ideas on how to better encourage one another.



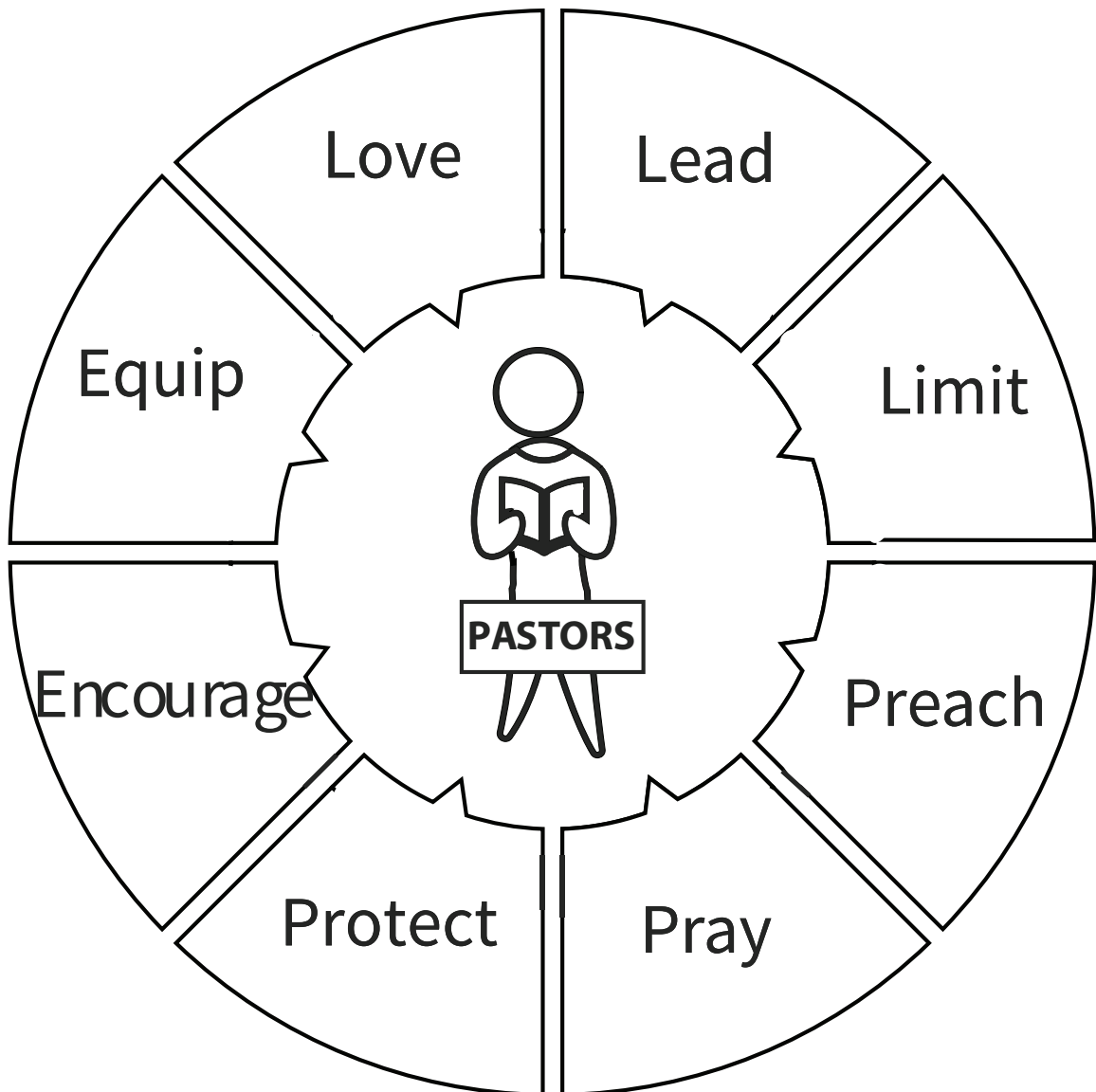
# chapter 16

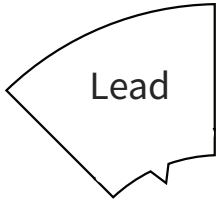
## Pastors Take the Lead in Shaping Children's Ministry for the Good of the Whole Congregation



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 love, lead, limit; preach, pray, protect; equip and encourage the congregation as they work together to raise the children in their midst in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Pastors, your ministry IS children's ministry!

### ☞ What Pastors Can Do ☞





**by Example:**

- They lead by example in how they raise their children. Not as model of perfection, but as faithful and godly fathers, depending upon the Lord to help them parent their children well. This is a qualification for being a pastor, elder or deacon.

**by Vision-Casting**

- They provide the vision for what to teach adults and children in any teaching outside of the pulpit. They set these in order of priority and make them available as the number of volunteers becomes sustainable.
- They handle the most difficult conversations with parents or teachers that arise in the children's programs.

**by Humble, Wisdom-based Decision- Making**

- They take advice and ask questions. 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!

**by Looking at the Big Picture**

- They consider how to help everyone to gather together for worship. They want to support parents so they can grow and be equipped to train their children. They think about how to use the church service and carefully choose classes to provide a ramp up for the children to that gathering. But they do so, always keeping a watchful eye out for those who service in children's ministry, that they might not overserve.

**by Regular Check-ups**

- They are known as the church's leaders of children's ministry and take responsibility for it in knowing what is going on and giving regular guidance.

**by Being Involved**

- They handle the most difficult conversations with parents or teachers that arise in the children's programs.

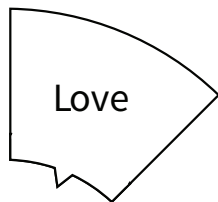
**by Pastoring Families**

- They provide pastoral oversight of families, programs and children's ministry volunteers.

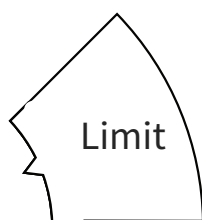
**by a Liason**

- They 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.

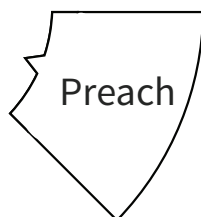
## PASTORS TAKE THE LEAD IN SHAPING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FOR THE GOOD OF ALL



- They love and care for the flock under their care, from the youngest to the oldest.
- They discuss, guide and pray with parents having difficulties with their children.
- They think about how to care well for the children who come to church without parents.
- They take time to speak to children from the pulpit and in person.
- They can show love to their own children.



- Establish volunteer serving limits to ensure that all volunteers are also being well fed themselves.
- Decide on a healthy, sustainable number of classes/programs to offer, balancing needs with available budget and volunteers.

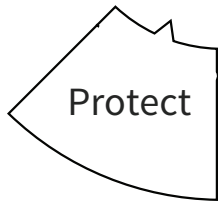


- Feed parents and children from the regular preaching of God's Word.
- Urge the congregation to serve each other in children's ministry in your applications when is appropriate.
- Are a part of making decisions about curriculum soundness and teacher qualifications for any classes offered to adults or children that they do not personally teach. The curriculum and the teachers are an extension of their authority to preach into the hands (and mouths) of others. They want to be careful that this preaching is sound.

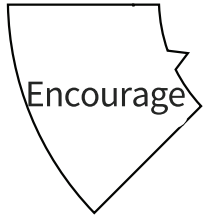


- Take time to regularly pray through the membership, including families.
- Pray with parents facing challenges.
- Realize that many of the church's future members and leaders are in their midst now as children. Pray for the future church today.

## PASTORS TAKE THE LEAD IN SHAPING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

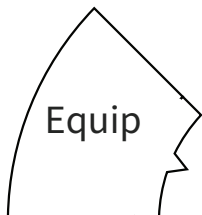


- Make sure that an effective child protection policy to keep children and volunteers safe BEFORE any child care takes place. Abuse scars children and destroys a church's ministry.
- Set wise guidelines for the baptism of children and their partaking of the Lord's Supper, protecting children from false assurance of salvation and the church from unconverted members.



- Encourage parents in their calling to raise their children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord.
- Encourage the congregation to pursue honest conversation concerning their parenting struggles, building one another up with wise words and helpful service.
- Encourage children who profess Christ at an early age to keep on growing in discipleship and patiently wait for the best time to be baptized and join the church.

- Appoint a like-minded administrator/team who to implement the pastors' vision.
- Lead the church in recognizing deacons of children's ministry who support the administrator and the teachers/nursery workers as they serve.
- Equip parents, children and their teachers through the regular preaching of God's Word.



- Equip parents through adult classes, raising their biblical knowledge or their parenting knowledge that they can use to train up their children.
- Equip parents and teachers with an understanding of conversion in children. Help them to know how to share the gospel with children and encourage them in discipleship, while being aware that children are best served by waiting until youth/young adulthood for signs of Christian maturity that is recognizable by the whole church and stands the test of temptation and persecution.
- Make book recommendations for parents to read or read to their children.
- If you give away books during the service (like we do weekly), make some of them kids' books and give them to the kids directly. Tell the child who receives it that you would love for them to draw a picture or come tell you what they thought about it later.



## chapter 17

# Parents Are the Primary, Spiritual Caregivers 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 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. They train up their children through the gatherings of the church as well as at home.

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. (See Appendix B for my response to the family-integrated church ideology which begs to differ.)

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 to offering Bible classes and youth group for the children, themselves.

### 🌀 Why Parents Make Your Ministry Children's Ministry 🌀

- 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

### **1. Fill Your Parents at Church**

- Fill your parents with solid preaching that they grow from themselves as well as pass on to their kids.
- Provide parenting workshop/classes or mentoring relationships to encourage parents, especially new parents.

### **2. Remind Your Parents**

- Remind parents from the pulpit of their calling as the primary, spiritual care-givers of their children.

### **3. Provide Resources**

- 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.
- Have a bookstall or a library of resources parents know they can count on.
- Have a bookfair to display good resources parents might not know about.

### **4. Encourage One Another**

- Encourage members to honestly share, pray, and seek advise from the pastors and from each other for their parenting needs and struggles.
- Hold panel discussions on various topics related to parenting and children.
- Encourage members to appreciate different styles in parenting and schooling that may differ in approach, but lead to the same biblically-based goals.

### **5. Provide Help with the Kids**

- 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.

### **6. Help Them Understand How Kids Are Different**

Equip parents with appropriate language and developmental knowledge for conversion and children. Help them understand how children are different in needing a longer period of time to mature and show the fruit of true conversion. Help them learn how to point their children to Christ and encourage their growth in discipleship, even as they wait for baptism, the Lord's Supper and church membership.





## chapter 18

# 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.

The members of a local church gather together each week to worship God and love one another. They seek this gathering to be a picture of the beautiful love of Christ for His Church that glorifies God. They hope this picture will remain in children's hearts and minds as a winsome testimony to the gospel. They also help teach these children God's Word, leaving a legacy of truth in their minds. And that, Lord willing, the Holy Spirit can ripen in their hearts, bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ and prepare them one day to be well-equipped to commit themselves as followers of Christ and lovers of His Church, as well.

Childhood is a rich time to equip children with gospel truths that can prepare them for life, godliness, and for gathering together as church members, themselves, one day.

### 🌀 Why Children Make Your Ministry 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 🌀

#### 1. Include Them in the Worship Gatherings

- Include the children in your worship gatherings. They need to hear God's Word through preaching. They need to see the body of Christ worshipping and reflecting its Head. If you do have classes for younger children, make sure to phase these out and gradually include the children in the service. Do not "stove pipe" them from one separate service to another, never bringing them into the service.
- Pastors, be mindful of the children in your services, either indirectly, by providing a simple sermon outline or easy to understand illustrations; or, even directly, by addressing them at some point in your sermon with a question or an application.

## CHILDREN: TOMORROW'S CHURCH IN YOUR MIDST TODAY

- Provide blank paper or a simple outline or another form of worship service aid for the children to use. Truth 78 has some particularly useful resources.
- If your pastors give away books during the service, make some of them kids books and give them to the kids directly. Have the pastors tell the child who receives it that he would love for them to draw a picture or come tell him what they thought about it later.

### **2. Pray for Them and Their Families**

- 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.

### **3. Care for Them While Their Parents Learn in Their Own Classes or in the Worship Service**

- There is great value in having the children in the worship service. This is the goal of church-shaped children's ministry. But there is also something to be said for giving parents a chance to learn and worship undistracted. This is especially true when the children are very young and unable to pay attention themselves.
- Providing safe childcare for infants and toddlers can be a great way to strengthen parents as well as equip them with truth to teach their children at home. It may feel like babysitting, but this is really serving the preaching of the Word.
- If your church provides care for preschoolers (and maybe even young, elementary school age children) during part or all of the worship service, you can double the value by teaching these older children Bible truths during this time.

### **4. Be a Witness**

- 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 other members.

### **5. Help Disciple Them and Prepare Them for the Worship Gathering**

- Share the gospel with children that the lost might be saved. Make disciples of those who trust in Christ.
- 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 church in their classes by helping them make a connection between what they are learning in class and what they will take part in the service.
- Mentor non-Christian kids who attend your church without their parents. Wrap both them and their parents into your families as a display of the goodness and love of God.

## **6. Be Mindful of Their Developmental Differences**

- Treat children as the work in progress that they are. The church knows this and cares for them with patience, love, perseverance, and prayer. The Lord may use what the children learn and watch while they are young, or one day, many years to come.
- Make disciples, not baptismal statistics. "Pleasing" can mimic true conversion in the short run. Look for sustained fruit before you baptize. Out of care for a child's soul and for the church's pure witness, pastors encourage patiently waiting for young faith to bear mature fruit, so as not to confuse childish eagerness with true conversion.

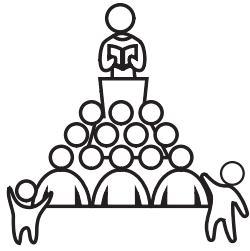
## **7. Treat Them with Kindness and Gentleness**

- 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.
- Don't exasperate children who aren't "Bible memory stars." Make understanding truth, not getting it word perfect, the point.

## **8. Get to Know Them and Enjoy Them**

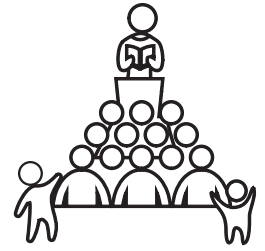
- Do not underestimate the value of taking time to talk to children. This is true for every member of the church, but especially pastors. Kids open like flowers when you show you are interested in their lives. They love to know you care. Even the most basic conversations can build a foundation of receptivity that the Lord may use later on to commend the gospel to this very same child.





# chapter 19

## The Church: Equipping Families Through the Worship Gathering



“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.

### ☞ Why the Worship Gathering Is Children’s Ministry ☞

#### **The Bible Tells Me So**

- The worship gathering is the “main thing” of any local church. Parents being equipped and children being trained up through the worship gathering is the basic, biblical model of children’s ministry. Anything else that a church provides as children’s ministry should flow to and from the worship gathering.

#### **Everybody’s Doing It**

- Most congregations include a high percentage of families who are parenting their kids in the pew.

#### **Why It’s Hard to Decide What to Do**

- Different elements of the worship service are more quickly understood and accessible to younger children.
- 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.

## **A Lot of Opinions**

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.

## **Missing in Action**

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.

## **Substitute Services**

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**

### **Be Family-Friendly**

- 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.
- Provide audio feed of the service into the nursing mothers' room, if you have one. Or, provide an area in the back of the hall for nursing moms to nurse in a less prominent location, but still able to be a part of the service. (Some church plants in temporary sites, such as hotel ballrooms or school auditoriums, have even put up a portable partition in the back of the area with seats for nursing moms behind it.)
- 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.
- Pastors address the children in the application portions of their sermons, reminding children that this message is for them, too.

### **Trading Ideas**

- 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 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 and provide the most encouragement for struggling parents.

### **Respect for Differents**

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.

### **Start at Home**

- 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.

### **Cooperative Classroom**

- 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.
- Introduce the children to the leaders who they will see up front leading the congregation by inviting them to come to the class and talk 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. This helps the children connect with these leaders as people, not just as figure heads.

### **Loving Limits**

- 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.

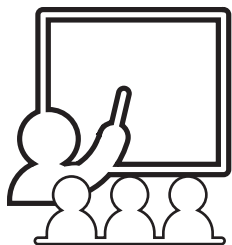
### **Take Care with Special Services**

- 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. If at all possible, gradually phase these special services out if they are seen as substitutes to the gathering of the whole church.

## THE CHURCH: EQUIPPING THROUGH THE WORSHIP GATHERING

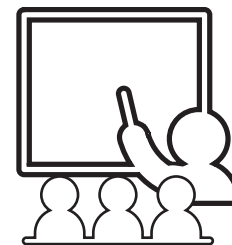
- Help support and/or welcome Campus Outreach within your church. It is college outreach organization that is church-based. Not only do they work on campus with college students, but they encourage them to become an active member of a local church. This sets these students up well to be members of a local church after they graduate.





## chapter 20

### Programs: Supporting the Preaching in Sustainable Ways



Programs partner with the preaching, so that all members might be fed, parents equipped, and children might be better trained up for life, godliness and gathering with God's people. They do not replace the worship service, but aid it, in a variety of ways.

#### ☞ Benefits of Programs in Children's Ministry ☞

##### **Help Feed Parents So They Can Feed Their Children**

- These support programs can make a huge difference to parents, allowing them to hear God's Word and understand how to live it out, for the good of their own souls and the good of their children's. Even the most basic, safe childcare can multiply the power of God's Word in the lives of families, simply by making it possible for parents to learn undistractedly themselves.

##### **Teaching at Church Transfers to Home**

- These programs can also be a great aid in teaching parents (and future parents) how to talk to their children about God. For children from non-Christian or new Christian homes, these programs may provide the teaching they do not get at home. Children of believers can also learn truths that support what their parents teach at home.

##### **Winsome Witness**

- They provide a regular opportunity for members to be a witness for the gospel in their time teaching children in the classroom. Their love for God, His Word, His people, and for them (the kids), can be a powerful display of God's love, power and goodness to the children.

##### **Ramp-up to the Worship Gathering**

- They can provide a ramp-up to the worship service by teaching children truths that help them better understand what they see and hear in the service.

#### ☞ Some "Bewares" of Programs in Children's Ministry ☞

##### **Cost of Up-keep**

- 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. It is important to make sure these volunteers are well-cared for spiritually, themselves. And, it's important to count the cost of recruiting and maintaining a sustainable volunteer schedule before you add any new program. Go slowly!

##### **Shiny Package, Good Theology?**

- 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! (See Appendices C & D for helpful resources.)

### **Family Time Crunch**

- Sometimes, children's ministry programs become so numerous as to crowd out important family time.

## What Churches Can Do

### **Pastors Lead the Way**

- Pastors choose programs as part of the teaching of God's Word in the church under their care. They 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. Care for the WHOLE church--families and volunteers-- is of prime concern to the pastors, and directly affects what programs are offered when.
- 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.
- 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.

### **Keep the Gathering the Main Thing**

- Always keep the worship gathering in view. Choose programs that will prepare the children for these gatherings. Time the programs so that they do not conflict with the gatherings, unless they directly support it (such as child care for infants and toddlers.) Programs like these will always be phased out so that children are gathering with God's people as much as possible, as soon as possible. The gathering is always the goal.

### **Support, Don't Usurp**

- Programs support, not replace, the parents' own spiritual training of their children.

### **Small Is Beautiful**

- Start small. Offer less. Only add more, slowly.
- 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.
- 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.

### **Re-visit, Re-evaluate**

- 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.

## PROGRAMS: SUPPORTING THE PREACHING IN SUSTAINABLE WAYS

- 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.
- As the church expands, the pastors 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.





## section 21

# Member Volunteers: Supporting Parents in Sustainable Ways



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.

## Membership Matters in Children's Ministry

### Ministry to Parents as Well as Kids

- Fellow members join together with parents in providing the children with a testimony of God's grace through their lives.
- Members support and encourage parents by mentoring each other, and by helping to care, teach and mentor their children through the local church.

### Major Teaching Responsibility

- 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.

### Typical Troubles

- Over-volunteering and under-training are usually the two, biggest reasons why volunteers do not come back.
- Typically, more members miss the worship services and adult classes because of children's ministry obligations than any other ministry of the church.
- Children's ministry programs can be vulnerable places for child abuse to occur in the local church, especially when there is no child protection policy in place.

## What Churches Can Do

### **Include with Care**

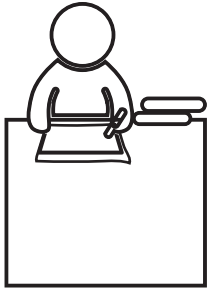
- Carefully screen and train members for working with the children. Make sure volunteers comply with the church's child protection policy for their own good, the good of the children, and the good of the church.

### **Love within Limits**

- Have members serve in children's classes within limits set by elders, to meet the needs of children's ministry, but not at the expense of members' own spiritual nurturing.

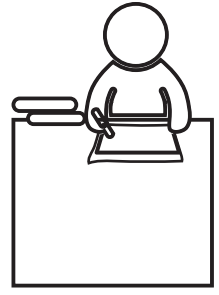
### **Help Your Teachers**

- Provide pastor-approved curriculum that is biblically solid, developmentally-appropriate, and teacher-friendly.
- 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..
- 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.



## chapter 22

# Children's Ministry Leaders: Carrying Out the Pastors' Vision



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.

### 🌀 The Load-Bearers in Children's Ministry 🌀

- 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.
- Sometimes are mis-lead by the pastors who do not carefully consider what the church is able to do. They pass down new programs to these leaders like “un-funded mandates” who are supposed to carry out their vision without volunteers available to fulfill them.
- They are often the “on-call, bad cop” who enforces difficult but necessary policies for everyone's good.
- They 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.
- A Children's Ministry Administrator who lasts more than a few years is a very rare bird, indeed.

### 🌀 What Churches Can Do 🌀

#### **The Buck Doesn't Stop Here: Regular, Pastoral Oversight**

- 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.

#### **A Little R & R**

- 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.

## Helping Hands

- 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.

## 🌀 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 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.

So far, we've talked a lot of theology, church history and theory. Now it's time to look at some practical examples. First, I'll describe what Church-shaped children's ministry looks like at our church, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, under the leadership of our elders. Then, we will look at examples from other churches.

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.