

Family Friendliness Task Force Summary

July, 2009

This document is a brief summary of the work of the Family Friendliness task force from spring of 2008 to our final meeting in March 2009. We met many times during that time period and completed two surveys. Complete summaries and results of our surveys are in attached files. A brief description of these files is included in this document.

First, for historical context, the church worship and Christian education (CE) schedule and changes over the past 10 years are briefly summarized: Up until the fall of 2004, the church held two services, one at 9AM and a second at 10:45AM. CE for all children (Preschool, elementary, and youth) occurred during the 9AM worship hour. Other than an occasional Sunday every 6-8 weeks, elementary children were not ever present in worship. A combined preschool and elementary CE program was offered during the 10:45 service, primarily for choir families and late risers. For many reasons that go beyond the scope of this summary, the services were combined and eventually one service was offered at 10AM with CE for all age groups offered at 9AM. A “special sermon time” for elementary children in 1st-3rd grade, led by one of the pastors, was offered during the “sermon and pastoral prayer” portion of the worship service 1st-3rd grade children returned to the sanctuary at the Passing of the Peace. Preschool CE was offered at 10AM with preschoolers beginning the hour in worship with their families, and leaving for their classes after a special time of blessing. For preschoolers, the 9AM hour was primarily a child care option for parents participating in adult CE or teaching in Elementary CE.

The Family Task Force convened in spring 2008 because of a broad sense of family unhappiness with the church schedule, teaching demands and a perceived unresponsiveness of church leadership to family needs. The task force created an extensive survey covering topics of Meaning of Church, Worship, Christian Education and Family Programming, Church Communication, Organizational Structure and Leadership, Church Schedule, and Time Commitment to Christian Education. Seventy three surveys were collected, representing families from all three CE age groups (youth, elementary, and preschool). The survey results were analyzed and a summary document was distributed to the wider church audience (*Survey Analysis Final*) and an extensive document was compiled for church leadership (*Survey Results Comments and Questions*). The results were also distributed to a number of boards for consideration. The task force did recommend a schedule adjustment to address family concerns.

In the fall of 2009, at the suggestion of the Family Friendliness Task Force along with Council awareness, CE for elementary children was moved to the 10AM hour, coinciding with worship and preschool CE. Thus, everyone began worship together and then the children, elementary along with preschoolers, were dismissed from worship to their classes after a special blessing and prayer. A Family Faith Enrichment hour met at 9AM to offer elementary children a place to go if their parent(s) participated in Adult CE and/or the family arrived at 9AM for Youth group.

Approximately six months later, the task force took another survey, much smaller in scope on Survey Monkey to touch base with families about the current change (*FF survey results March 2009*). Fifty-three surveys were completed, again representing youth, elementary and preschool families. Overall, the majority of families indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the new schedule and CE format (73 percent). Other results from the survey indicated a need for continued conversation about what a truly intergenerational worship service might look like for all members of our church family.

Lastly, the task force discussed how the church can make institutional changes to continue to support families. These possible changes in board, staff, and leadership structure are outlined in the document, *Possible Next Steps to Create a Church-wide structure to Support Families*. In July and August, some Family Friendliness Task Force members and many other lay and staff church leadership are meeting to discuss how Christian Formation function, at the staff and board level. The retreat in August will address how the board structures support of families, seek a definition of family friendliness, along with addressing issues remaining from the work of the Family Friendly Task Force.

The Family Friendliness Task Force surveys collected information that goes far beyond church schedule. Although our effort resulted in a specific schedule change, we hope that the church will consider all the information we collected and will acknowledge that a simple schedule change is insufficient to address family needs expressed in the surveys. Indeed many task force members feel that our original work, to envision a family friendly church, was overtaken by the need to address the Sunday morning schedule. Thus, there are still a number of concerns outstanding and we list the more pressing here:

- ❖ **Intergeneration Worship:** One dream of the original schedule change of 2004 was to collect all generations in one place at one time to be together, not to send them all off into different rooms. During the time when we did have a schedule that allowed for this (from fall, 2004 through summer, 2008), some parents

deeply appreciated being able to worship together as a family, and being able to attend adult CE programs while children were involved in their own age appropriate CE. In addition, occasional 9 a.m. intergenerational education events (Epiphany party, Lenten pancake breakfast, Pentecost church birthday party, etc) were also appreciated. While it was necessary to change the schedule to meet the expressed needs of many families, some have been disappointed with the loss of that time. In addition, we have not lived into that dream of an intergenerational worship, nor have we convinced all the generations involved that this is a worthy dream.

- ❖ **Family disconnect with Church leadership and the decision-making process:** Parents with limited time and thus limited ways to volunteer and connect with church leadership or church boards feel a sense of confusion about how the church makes decisions that directly affect their families.

- ❖ **Creating place and time for family Sabbath:** Many families have limited time to participate in church programming and feel 2-3 hours Sunday morning is too big a demand on their time. Yet for some, spiritual needs might be better met if a family can become a part of the wider church community and participate in a wide variety of church programs, whether that is on Sunday morning or during times that fit better for a family's schedule. We need to offer programming that offers a respite, a "Sabbath" to busy families.

- ❖ **Accountability for family needs:** Oversight for family needs and concerns needs to be built into our board and leadership model so that the church does not lose touch with families.

- ❖ **CE Time Commitment:** The demands on parents to teach in preschool and elementary CE has seemed excessive to many parents, and may continue for others. Although most families prefer elementary CE during the worship hour, in the past it has been observed that enthusiasm for teaching wanes if worship time is sacrificed. This issue must be under careful watch as we proceed. The preschool program has made gains in reducing the time commitment of parents in the classrooms during worship; we celebrate and thank the many volunteers who have come from outside the preschool parent community.

Although there are still significant issues to be addressed, we are encouraged by the progress made so far and excited about the upcoming August retreat and how the church can continue to grow and become more family friendly. In hope and prayer for that future, we offer this work so that it can be considered and preserved for the future.

The Family Friendly Task Force

Beth Gatewood, Chair, Carol Coleman, Susan Dutro, Lisa Coleman, Candi McCoy, Susan Ovens, & Catherine Foote

Files included for consideration and safe keeping:

Church Survey SMD 080603: Spreadsheet of the data collected from the original survey (Excel).

Church Survey by group SMD 080611: Spreadsheet of the same data split into the different groups, youth, elementary, and preschool (Excel).

Survey Analysis Final: A summary of the results from the first survey compiled for the wider church audience (Word).

Survey Results Comments Questions: Complete results and comments from the first survey compiled for church leadership only (Word).

FFSurvey Results March 2009: Summary of the results from the survey collected via Survey Monkey (Word).

Possible Next Steps to Create a Church-wide structure to Support Families: Description of the taskforce's recommendations and suggestions for institutional changes the church could make to ensure oversight and consideration of families needs (Word).

Possible Next Steps to Create a Church-Wide Structure to Support Families

The Family Task Force has created the following list of possible institutional changes to support the families of the church.

1. Assess, Reorganize or Refocus how Christian Formation Boards function
 - Possibility 1: Keep boards in their current configuration but task boards with assessing and meeting the needs of families
 - a. Charge Preschool, Elementary, and Youth Boards are charged to regularly assess and respond to the family experience
 - b. Preschool, Elementary and Youth Boards will have representatives that will represent the needs of families and advocate for those, furthermore these representatives will meet regularly together.
 - c. Two representatives on Music and Worship Board to represent the needs of families and to advocate for those
 - d. A structure to allow for representatives of each board—Preschool, Elementary, Youth, and Music and Worship to meet at least twice a year to focus on family specific issues along with staff representatives
 - e. Have representation at Council. Create a model to allow this to successfully to occur.

Possibility 2: Create a single Christian Formation Board

This board could serve as an umbrella board to better integrate the work of all Christian Formation Boards, plan and create a shared view of what a child's and families' experience within our church is, and allow for increased communication and accountability. This board, among other tasks would be to assess and meet the needs of families. This board would have single representation at Council.

2. Define what a Family Friendly Church would look like

The original work of the Family Task Force was to envision what a family-friendly church would look like. This work was supplanted by the immediate need to re-asses how the Sunday Schedule was affecting families.
3. Executive Representative

In the past, and possibly currently, there has been a position at Executive Board that served an advocacy role for families.
4. Staff Roles

Seek clarity of goals of paid CE staff for the advocacy, communication and assessment of family health and satisfaction and general family concerns.