

Covenant Worship at Renewal Main Line

⁴ We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶ that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psalm 78:4–7).

We believe that one of the direct implications of our commitment to obey Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) to make and train disciples of all nations, which includes the people in our families, especially our children. As such, one of the blessed times of our church is when we witness a baptism and receive an infant into our covenant community. We believe that children, by virtue of believing parents are members of our church until they come to an age when they are able to publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Until then, their parents pledge, before God and the church as witnesses, to bring up the child in the knowledge of God and the gospel (Book of Church Order, 56-4). These responsibilities include:

- that they teach their child to read the Word of God and instruct him or her in the principles of the faith;
- that they pray with and for him/her, and
- that they set an example of piety and godliness to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The local congregation also pledges to take responsibility for helping the parents in the Christian nurture of their child. The most evident way this takes place is in the inclusion of our children in corporate worship, which we also call *covenant worship*.¹ And so, at Renewal, our children (Preschool through 5th grade) participate in the Sunday liturgy until the message, where they are then dismissed for their Sunday School lessons (except for Communion Sundays—see the fourth point below). While our youth (6th grade and above) remain with their parents for the remainder of the service. Some of our underlying convictions include:

- **Teaching children the importance of corporate worship** - According to Scripture, the parents have primary spiritual responsibility to raise their children² while the church comes alongside the parents to supplement and reinforce their discipleship. Therefore, the time spent as a family during Sunday service is an opportunity for parents to teach and model for their children that “the most important thing you can ever train your child to do, [is to] worship. Worship is the only thing we get to do forever.”³ We then worship together because worship binds us to one another as one body (1 Cor. 12:12). Our worship to God is not only an individual affair, but also a community affair, starting with the immediate family. Following this, the children also see themselves and their family as

¹ Corporate worship includes our *covenantal* children based on God's promises that they receive benefits as members of the church including the watchful care and discipline of the church, except for being admitted to the Lord's Table (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39).

² Exodus 12:26-28; Deuteronomy 6:2-7; 16:11-15; Joel 2:15-16.

³ Robbie Castleman, *Parenting in the Pew*, 2013.

part of the larger body of God's covenant community, which is made up of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Exposing children to the reverence of God-honoring worship** - Related to the first conviction, Sunday worship is at least one hour out of 168 hours of the week where children can witness what John Piper calls, "maximum intensity of moving reference." There is nothing that can substitute the experience of a child witnessing his or her parent(s) engaging in authentic, Spirit-filled praise who cherish worshipping the Lord. The cumulative effect of weekly services witnessing this communion with God is of the highest importance as children grow into their adult years. We encourage parents to desire to be the first and most immediate examples of this kind of reverent worship to their children, rather than a Sunday school teacher or pastor.
- **Having children receive weekly means of grace** - God has ordained what we call, *ordinary means* of grace that the church exhibits during weekly Sunday worship. These include the Word, sacraments, and prayer. Although we acknowledge the benefits of having separate portions of the liturgy tailored specifically to children; for example, a children's sermon, we trust in God's appointed means of grace that he distributes to the *whole* body. We affirm that God calls *all* his people to worship him, including children when Jesus says in Mark 10:14, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." And so, please do not feel embarrassed if your child makes noise during the service. If you feel it is too distracting for others, you are welcome to take your child to the lobby (where there is a speaker so you can still hear the service) and return if he or she is able.
- **Helping our children anticipate more mature faith** - We see in scripture, places where God included people in corporate worship, who were not yet able to fully understand all aspects of it (which is actually true for all of us as we're still growing in the faith as well!).⁴ By participating in those portions, little children learned they were part of something bigger than themselves, that they would grow into. For this reason, we want our children to experience the importance of the sacrament of communion by being present for it and by learning to anticipate their future participation. And so, on Communion Sundays, they stay with everyone else throughout the whole service.
- **Helping our youth develop more mature faith** - We recognize that it's challenging for our youth in 6th grade to transition from a sermon geared towards a child to learning from the sermon that the rest of the congregation receives. And so, 9 times out of the year, on the last Sunday of the month, our Youth Pastor takes any youth who would like, out of the service during the sermon portion, for a special class. He uses that time, both to teach basic skills on "how to learn from a sermon" and then preaches to them so that they can practice the new skill he just taught.

Practical Suggestions for Parents

1. **Take time to assess your hearts and your attitudes toward worshipping with your children.** Are you viewing this time solely out of obligation and duty or seeing this as a God-given opportunity to spiritually impact your children? Pray for this Spirit-filled desire.
2. **Treasure and look forward to Sunday worship.** Throughout the week, stress the importance of weekly Sunday worship and that this is a non-negotiable event so that your children will develop a spiritual habit of prioritizing worship on the Sabbath.
3. **Prepare appropriately before Sunday service.** Dedicate a portion of Saturday night to prepare clothes, offering, and anything else that can help you the next morning. During the car ride to worship, talk intentionally about the previous Sunday's lessons, listen to

⁴ See Deuteronomy 31:9-13 and Ephesians 6:1-3.

praise music, and initiate spiritual conversation among your family. Before service begins, have children go to the bathroom and drink water to avoid interruptions.

4. **Explain the liturgy elements as they occur.** To supplement this document, there is a separate document explaining all the parts of our Sunday liturgy. Spend a night going over the various parts with your child and during the liturgy, whisper and explain those parts of the service as they progress.
5. **Encourage participation throughout the liturgy.** Have children read along all or any words on the liturgy slides (e.g., Call to Worship, Confession). As your child learns the songs encourage them to sing along parts of the songs, as much as they are able to. During the announcements, point to the various events and have them follow along. If you have more than one child, ask other adults without children to sit near your family to help.
6. **Follow up after Sunday service.** Talk about the service on the way home. Discuss which praise songs they liked. Talk about their lessons or the sermon (for youth). Affirm where your child behaved well during the service. Be clear about the expectations you have for your children during the service and about consequences. Discuss these with your spouse and be consistent in follow-through.
7. **Recommended Resource.** Robbie Castleman has written a very practical, inspirational book for helping guide your child in worship called, *Parenting in the Pew* (published by InterVarsity Press). Her attitude toward bringing children into the larger worship setting is to say to God, "Daddy, I'd like you to meet my children." The warmth of that approach then informs all of her suggestions for how to help our children want to meet our heavenly father as well. We highly recommend this book if you're looking for solid ideas of how to help your child develop into a young worshiper.

Word of Encouragement

Parents, we know that this is not an easy task. All the more, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us engage in this calling to disciple our children. It is only God who can change hearts and grow a spiritual desire in your children. Our job as parents is simply to be faithful in ministering to our children and showing them Jesus. So when your child is disruptive during the service, be patient with him/her and do not be embarrassed. Everyone at our church is understanding and knows that this is a long-term process. At the same time, we trust and rest in God who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think for our children, according to the power at work within us (Eph. 3:20).

Youth Group Ministry at Renewal Main Line

A conversation between a pastor and his son:

We were on our way to church one Sunday, and my son said, "Dad, I think I know all the Bible stories now."

"Really?" I said. "All of them?"

"Just about," he replied. "And I know all the songs we sing in church too."

"That should make it easier for you to sing along," I said.

"I don't know why we keep going over the same stories and singing the same songs. Don't they think we've got it down by now?"

"I've been studying the Bible and singing songs for a long time, Timothy. And I get something new from God's Word every week."

By this time, we were getting out of the van and walking towards the worship center. That's when he said, "I don't think we need to go to church every week. Why don't we just wait until there's something new to learn?"

Meanwhile, I was wondering if the fact our son is in a Christian home, Christian school, and a good, Bible-teaching church has somehow overexposed him to the Scriptures...

So that night... I apologized for not being clear on the reason we gather with other believers. "It's not just about learning," I told him. "It's about worship. The learning is connected to our worship."

"Is that why we sing the same songs?" he asked.

"Yes. When it's easy for people to sing, they can concentrate on what they're singing instead of struggling to learn a new song. Do you know how you like it when all the instruments fade away and you can hear everyone in church singing the same song as loud as they can – all of our voices harmonizing? That's not about learning... it's about worship. All of us together, worshiping God for how awesome He is."

"We did David and Goliath today," he said. "I already knew all about it."

"And you already know the story of David and Goliath. But the point of hearing the story again and again is not so that you learn more facts about the story. It's that you are amazed again at God using a little guy like David to do something big for His people. That's the way God is. That's why we sing songs like, 'How Great Is Our God' in church, and 'Glorious and Mighty.' We are worshiping Him for what He has done."

"Me too. And next time we sing them, think about the story of David and Goliath, and how powerful God is."

"So it's not just about learning."

"Nope. The church isn't a class you go to, son. It's a people you belong to. It's about worship. I'm sorry, son, if I've made you think otherwise."

Youth Students Worshiping During All of Sunday Service

The following supplements Renewal's overall vision of Covenant Worship with our children and youth. Before you continue, please familiarize yourself with the earlier part of this document, "Covenant Worship at Renewal Main Line."

At Renewal, graduating 5th grade students begin a series of catechism lessons in the summer before their junior high school year. During that summer, our pastors and teachers will go through the theological foundations required for a correct understanding of the Christian faith as reflected in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁵ During the fall semester of their 6th grade year, they will sit throughout the whole duration of our Sunday service along with other junior high and high school students. When the parents and the student feel that he or she is ready to make a public profession of faith, they will inform the pastor who will then coordinate an interview with the student to affirm his or her knowledge and experience of the gospel. Afterwards, the student will be received into the body of believers at Renewal as a communicating member with all the benefits including admittance to the Lord's Table.

The major underlying convictions in having students participate with their parents are presented in the earlier portion of this document, "Covenant Worship at Renewal Main Line." The same biblical convictions apply for our youth—namely, that the parents are the primary spiritual authority in the lives of their youth who are responsible to disciple their children until they become adults. The church then, comes behind the parents to help facilitate this parent-child relationship.

However, there are some considerations that distinctly mark the youth apart from children who are in K-5th grade:

1. **Youth students are in period of transition into adulthood.** Students are in a *transitional* time of their spiritual lives where they are preparing to enter adulthood. The implication is that once they are able to make a credible profession of faith and are admitted as full members of the church, they will then be under the spiritual authority of the Session. Therefore, the decision to have the youth join all parts of the service is based on the conviction that they need to be exposed, be familiarized, and adjust to worshiping with other adults in the congregation. We see the whole of Sunday services as an opportunity for parents to prepare their youth for participation of services composed of adults.
 - a. One of the realities of incoming college students is that many of them have a low view of the importance of the local church. Rather than submitting to the spiritual authority of a local church provided through the administration of the Sacraments and church discipline, students are prone to look for campus ministries that are tailored for like-minded, college students—in other words, a "youth group-like" experience for college students. While we encourage and support these ministries, such as our very own college ministry (RCF), college students end up not ready to join a local church with its diverse members of all backgrounds and ages. This ends up producing two congregations in one church: a college congregation and the adult congregation without much relational interaction between the two.

⁵ A document that covers the major tenets of the Reformed Christian tradition in question and answer form. This document was composed for the catechesis (teaching) of new converts for the eventual membership into their local church.

- b. While we recognize that in the past, God faithfully revealed himself to many students primarily through their youth group ministries, that is not the *normative* means that God has prescribed in Scripture for the spiritual discipleship of children. At the same time, while there are testimonies of students who came to faith through their youth group ministries and without parents' spiritual involvement, there are many more testimonies of college students who have abandoned the faith because they could not find a community of college peers. Such students are those who have a difficult time incorporating themselves into a local church. Therefore, we do not want the exceptions to determine the role of youth ministry.
2. **The goal of Sunday is not learning, but worship.** The motivating factor for youth students' attendance in Sunday service is not solely driven by the accumulation of knowledge. Hence, their worship experience should not solely depend on whether they can understand all of the preacher's sermon but rather, on the *experience* of worship that they participate in *with their parents*. The experience of worshipping with their parents week-in and week-out is what will be most memorable for the youth as they transition into college ministries and churches. (Please refer to the introductory anecdote.)
- a. We understand and sympathize with the difficulty of younger youth students in being able to comprehend the sermon. Please remember that this is a time of training and that the art of listening to sermon takes practice. Especially in an age where information is delivered in soundbites and social-media, it is a necessary skill for our youth to learn how to follow the exposition of a sermon. And even though they may not grasp all of the sermons' points, we believe that they will, over time, be shaped by the preaching of the Word because of God's promises—like Isaiah 55:11 that states, "*So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"
 - b. There are examples of students with and without youth groups doing spiritually well in their college years. And there are examples of students who grew up in a youth group that have gone on to deny the faith. And so, the determining factor of a person's continued spiritual growth is not the presence of a separate youth group service on Sundays but rather (1) an understanding of Scripture and how to *apply Scripture* to life, and (2) the ability to worship with people from all ages and backgrounds. We believe having the youth participate in the whole of our Sunday services best prepares them to grow, by having the parents and their youth listen to the same message and have the opportunity to profit from it, together.

Youth Group Bible Studies

While we recommend that our youth worship with their parents throughout the whole of service, we recognize the importance of developing spiritual relationships with their peers. Hence, Renewal has Youth Group Bible Studies after service on Sundays among students 6th grade to 12th grade from 12:15 to 1:30 PM. Smaller discussion groups are broken up between junior high and high school students. These discussions and studies are led by youth group teachers along with our youth group pastor.

If you have any questions about either Children or Youth Ministries, please contact Pastor Nick Gwak (nickgwak@renewalmainline.org).