

## **Our Plan for Childhood Spiritual Development Through Church and Family**

We at Cross Creek Church desire, as our vision statement indicates, for the children of our church to grow in truth, live in community, and serve in the kingdom by God's grace and for God's glory. We purpose, as a church, to teach children from the Bible, fostering a longing to know God deeply from a very early age, and also to equip parents to be their children's primary spiritual nurturers. In addition, we desire for Cross Creek Church to be a place where many different people invest in and point children to God by teaching them, praying with them, and sharing with them how God has worked in their own lives. This handbook is meant to flesh out how we believe this can happen by God's grace. Please prayerfully consider how God would have your family take advantage of the following opportunities to help your children grow spiritually.

### *Infant Baptism*

Some time after a new child is born into a believing family, parents are invited to take the step of having their infant baptized before the church. Or if a family is new to the church and their children have not yet neared the age for our "communicants" class,

the parents may also have these children baptized. This act not only symbolizes the child's entering into the visible church, but the parents' entering into a covenant relationship with God, stating their intention to raise the child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and recognizing God's promises to be gracious and faithful in their effort to raise the child in the Lord. This act in itself does not ensure the salvation of the child, but denotes the hope that God will draw the child to himself, and bring him or her to a place of professing saving faith when older. If the child does indeed seek a relationship with God as he or she grows older, we recommend that they go through communicants class around age ten, to ensure their understanding of the gospel and basic doctrines of the faith among other things (communicants class will be explained more fully in a later section).

When a family comes before the church to present their child for baptism, the church family also has the opportunity to affirm their desire to fully support and partner with parents as brothers and sisters in Christ in their endeavor to raise a godly child. Our hope is that church members will recognize the serious nature of such an agreement and sustain a constant effort toward its fulfillment.

## *Cross Creek Nursery*

At Cross Creek Church we aim to minister to children and to their parents through providing a nursery program where children are cared for in a comfortable, secure environment, and shown the love of Christ by dedicated and well qualified staff and volunteers. Our nursery rooms are available for parents to bring their infants for tender care during Sunday School and the Worship Service on Sunday mornings, and our hope is that this will bless children with positive feelings about coming to church, facilitate the active participation of parents in Sunday School and Worship, and foster friendships among our children through playing and sharing together.

The Nursery rooms also provide a place where children are introduced to the gospel message in an age-appropriate manner. At an age as early as infancy, we show children the love of Christ through the actions and words of our staff and volunteers, we expose them to the truths of scripture – often through scriptural lullaby music, and as they learn to interact with each other we teach them simple scriptural character traits. As children grow older and move into our two to three year old nursery rooms, we introduce a more structured learning time in which they learn to listen to Bible stories, repeat simple truths about God, sing songs of worship, and join in prayer together. All of these experiences along with the

building of relationships with church family, work together to point children to our heavenly Father.

### *Sunday School*

By the time children reach four years old, and have gained a basic knowledge of who God is through learning in the nursery as well as at home, they are ready to take their Bible learning a step further by attending Sunday School. At Cross Creek Church, children's Sunday School classes are where the most in-depth Bible study takes place for children. Children learn about who God is and how he is carrying out his plan for the world, as well as for them personally, by studying the Bible chronologically. Through a comprehensive look at both the Old and New Testaments, children come to see how God has worked in the lives of his children from creation until now.

Scripture memory and prayer are also a big part of what children experience in Sunday School at Cross Creek Church. Children begin to memorize scripture each week by reciting Bible verses together and discussing them as a class. Verses that children memorize at this young age will serve them for the rest of their lives, as the Holy Spirit is faithful to bring them to mind at opportune times. Children also have the chance join their classmates in coming before the Father's throne in prayer both with thanksgiving and requests. They learn to share prayer requests with each other and

carry each other's burdens to the Father. Children also learn to intercede on behalf of our church's missionaries as they are introduced to the various ministries and needs of God's children who are serving him around the world.

First and Second graders in Sunday School begin learning how to look up scripture verses in their own Bibles. As the children continue studying God's work in the people of the Bible, they learn to find and read passages to discover truth for themselves. Parents are encouraged to discuss Sunday School lessons with their children by asking about what they have learned and sometimes rereading passages with their children. Parents may utilize Parent Pages, which are sent home with children from time to time with information on what they have been taught, or they may discuss lesson topics with Sunday School teachers to become more familiar with what their children are learning.

Many parents have found it helpful to discuss what each family member has learned at church at a particular time each Sunday, such as on the drive home, or over lunch. Through following up with their children about what they have learned as well as sharing what they themselves have learned, parents not only communicate to children the significance of the things they do in Sunday School, but can help their children understand how to apply the things they are learning to their own personal experiences.

Third through Sixth graders in Sunday School move from studying the Bible chronologically to a more topical approach. They learn to discern what the Bible has to say about particular subjects by looking up many scripture references for themselves and applying many of the stories they have learned from the time they were very young to situations they face today. Children in this age group also learn basic doctrines of the Bible through studying the Westminster Shorter Catechisms, which is a statement of belief our church holds to, that summarizes what the Bible teaches. These catechisms are time tested methods of learning through question and answer form that date back to the sixteen hundreds.

### *The Worship Service*

Children of all ages are welcome in the worship service at Cross Creek Church. Corporate worship is a foundational practice taught in both the Old and New Testaments, and we believe it is a privilege as well as an act of obedience for children of God to participate in. With that said, we recognize that very young children often have difficulty engaging in the worship service and may at times hinder their parents' or others' ability to worship, and so our nursery is open and available for children up to age four throughout both Sunday School and the worship service. In addition, we offer a Children's Church program during the second half of the worship service for children age four through seven. Outside of these

separate learning opportunities for younger children, we have several suggestions for parents who desire to help their children engage in and grow through their time in the worship service.

During the first half of the worship service, parents can help children to sing along with worship music, bow their heads in prayer with the congregation, and listen or follow along in the worship bulletin as the congregation moves through the call to worship, call to confession, and assurance of pardon. Children who are too young to read may still learn to recognize these different stages of worship, particularly if parents take time at home to explain the purpose of the different elements of the service to their children, and point them out in their Sunday bulletin. Cross Creek Church seeks to come alongside parents in introducing their children to these things through a monthly children's moment in the service, that all children are encouraged to participate in.

While we strongly encourage families to work toward helping their children to follow along in prayer and worship during the first half of the worship service, we recognize that some children benefit from a more hands on approach to staying engaged. For these children, we suggest trying out the strategies listed in bullet point form in the following section depending on their age and ability.

## *The Sermon*

Cross Creek Church provides children's bulletins that are geared toward children age seven through twelve who remain in the second half of the worship service, to help them engage with the sermon portion of the service. These bulletins, which generally contain activities that correlate with the sermon passage or theme, are one way that parents may direct their children in this age range to engage with the sermon. Alternatively, children may be directed to engage with the sermon via one of the following activities depending on their age and ability:

- Have the child draw a picture of something that they hear the pastor or worship leaders say from the pulpit.
- Have the child draw a picture to represent each element of worship: call to worship, call to confession, and assurance of pardon (a picture of something the child can praise God for, a picture of something the child has done that makes God sad, and a picture of what Jesus did to pay for that sin).
- Have the child write down several things that they hear said from the pulpit.
- Have the child find the Bible passages written in the worship bulletin, and write out verses that stand out to them.
- Have the child take notes on the sermon by writing down things that the pastor says.



- Children can be taught at home how to make a simple outline, writing down main points that are made, and practice outlining the sermon on Sunday morning.
- Children may be directed to read through the sermon passage, and write in their own words and/or draw what they have read.

We encourage parents to follow up with their children after the service by reviewing with them the things that they read, heard, wrote, or drew. Parents can help children more fully understand the things that they heard, and help them see how to apply it. Parents may also share ways that they themselves plan to apply the things discussed in the sermon. By sharing with children the ways that God and His words have bearing on their own lives, adults can help children to see the gospel in action and grasp what it means to have a living and active faith.

By attending the sermon portion of the worship service, children will also have the opportunity to contribute tithes and offerings with the rest of the congregation. While most children do not yet earn money of their own on a regular basis, we encourage parents to teach children the importance of dedicating the “first fruits” of what we earn to God. While children are younger they learn about this through seeing their parents tithe on Sunday

mornings, but as they get older they can begin to do this themselves. Some children may receive an allowance, providing a perfect opportunity to begin tithing. Others may earn money on an occasional basis, when they may be taught how to give the first ten percent back to God. By beginning to practice this act of obedience on some level at an early age, children will cultivate the habit of giving back to God, and find repeated obedience in this area to be easier as they grow older!

### *Children's Church*

As stated earlier, Cross Creek Church provides a Children's Church program during the second half of the worship service, for children age four through seven. Children in this age range who would like to attend Children's Church are dismissed during the worship service just prior to the pastoral prayer and sermon. At Children's Church, a light snack is provided, and a Bible lesson is taught by qualified volunteers from our congregation.

Children's Church often involves hands on and interactive learning from the Bible, and it is a wonderful opportunity for adult believers in our church to get to know and pour into these little ones, sharing truths from God's word. Volunteers are encouraged to share with children different ways that God has been faithful in their own lives so that children may benefit by discovering how God teaches and leads his children today. Children also have an

opportunity to contribute toward the offering in a basket at the back of the Children's Church classroom.

### *Communicant's Class*

Communicants Class, which our church offers during the Sunday School hour on an as needed basis, is designed to prepare children who are (or will soon be) ten years old for the privileges and responsibilities of full church membership, and for making a public profession of their personal faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is called "communicants" because one result of this step of spiritual growth is to begin partaking in communion, however the larger picture is the fulfillment of prayers and baptismal promises parents have offered on their child's behalf coming to fulfillment in God's regenerating work in their lives.

In communicants class students study the basic doctrines of our faith through exploring the scriptures, completing homework each week, and hearing from several of our church leaders. They gain a greater understanding of who God is, the redemptive work of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of the Church, the sacraments, and church membership. Parents may find out more about communicants class by contacting one of our pastors.

## *Spiritual Growth at Home*

While we are deeply committed to fostering and promoting spiritual growth in children through the Sunday morning ministries mentioned above, we believe that is the responsibility of Christian parents to be their child's primary spiritual nurturers. Not only do parents have the awesome (yet humbling) privilege of living out the gospel message in front of their children every day, but they are commanded in scripture to train their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). As God spoke through Moses, parents should talk about God's words with their children all day long, and make every effort to keep it at the forefront of all thought and action. All of this can happen only by God's grace and in humble reliance on Him for wisdom and guidance.

We encourage parents to institute family devotions, or specific times in which the family reads from God's word and prays together, and also to teach their children how to have their own individual times of prayer and Bible reading. Parents should talk with children about the things God has done in their lives, and practice a life of prayer before their children. Through seeing their parents talk with their heavenly Father all throughout the day, children will gain a deeper sense of God's presence and active participation in their every day lives.

### *Building Relationships with Other Believers*

We believe that living in community with other believers plays an important role in Christian growth for both adults and children (Hebrews 10:24-25). Through helping children to form and build relationships with other believers, both with peers and with believers of different ages, children will be encouraged and built up in their relationship with God, and also have an opportunity to grow through encouraging and pointing others to God. This can obviously happen at church, however it will ideally happen mid-week as well through informal play dates and small group gatherings. At Cross Creek Church, we encourage families to get involved in a Life Group, in which both adults and children have the opportunity to spend time together outside of church. At the time of this writing, our church is also working toward developing additional mid-week small group opportunities for children.

### *Service Projects*

Another way that parents can help children enact the things that they learn in the Bible is through guiding them into service opportunities. Initially very young children may be taught how to serve their family members or friends, but as they get older and become more aware of needs in their community and beyond, parents must work to keep children from becoming callous to the needs around them and help them learn how to respond as God

would have His children to respond in love and service. Parents can remind children to pray first and foremost for needs that God lays on their hearts, and to ask God to show them how they can help. Then parents can help children find ways to use the gifts and abilities God has given them to be the hands and feet of Christ to the world around them.

Parents may help children foster a heart for the nations through talking with children about the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20), spending time in prayer for specific missionaries or ministries around the world, and finding creative ways for them to take part in missions efforts. Cross Creek Church promotes several opportunities for this at different points throughout the year. One such opportunity is Operation Christmas Child, through which children and parents together assemble Christmas gifts to be sent in shoe box's to children in needy countries, opening the opportunity for missionaries to share the gospel. Another way that some families choose to contribute together toward world missions is by sponsoring a child through a Christian organization such as Compassion International. Children can take part in sending letters or pictures that share the love of Christ with the sponsored child.

## *Church Events*

Throughout the year, Cross Creek Church seeks to provide specific opportunities for children to grow in different aspects of Christian life together. Each summer children participate in evangelistic outreach at Cross Creek Kids Camp, where they learn how to share the gospel message with those around them. In the spring children learn about how Christians are involved in fulfilling the great commission around the world, and about what their role in that could be at our church's annual missions conference. At Easter and Christmas time children are given opportunities to worship God through special musical performances at church, and in the summertime children can learn how to glorify God through visual art at our Visual Arts Workshops for Children. Our hope is that God will use these events to help children see how to actively apply the truths they learn in the scriptures every day.

## **Recommended Resources for Parents and Children**

### *Children's Bibles*

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones

The Big Picture Bible by David Helm

Pray and Play Bible by Group Publishing - a children's Bible, geared toward preschool age children that is different from others because for each story there are three pages of activities that will help parents teach the story and other important biblical concepts. These activity pages include songs, ideas for family prayer, family devotions and other great ideas to get families involved with the Bible.

ESV Children's Bible

### *Other Great Books to read with your Children*

Chronicles of Narnia Series by C.S. Lewis

One Year of Dinner Table Devotions by Nancy Guthrie

“Trailblazer” book series - by Dave and Neta Jackson - tell the stories of fictional children who interact with real missionaries. Children will love the exciting adventurous



stories of these children and enjoy learning about real heroes of the faith and how God used them along the way.

What Would Jesus Do by Mack Thomas - a chapter book for children that is a great one to read aloud to you children as it follows the story of a little boy and girl who are learning to ask the question, "What would Jesus Do?"

### *Helpful Books for Parents*

Creative Correction by Lisa Whelchel

Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours by Dr. Kevin  
Leman

A Chicken's Guide to Talking Turkey with Your Kids About Sex  
by Dr. Kevin Leman and Flores Bell

Shepherding a Child's Heart by Tedd Tripp

Grace Based Parenting by Tim Kimmel

Honey For A Child's Heart by Gladys Hunt

## *Websites for Parents*

[www.focusonthefamily.org](http://www.focusonthefamily.org) - Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. They provide help for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles.

[www.proverbs31.org](http://www.proverbs31.org) Proverbs 31 Ministries is a non-profit Christian ministry that seeks to lead women into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by reaching women in the midst of their busy lives. Among other things, great insight and encouragement on parenting is provided.

[www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com) Provides Internet accountability and filtering help and support.

[www.route1520.com/resources/internet-filters](http://www.route1520.com/resources/internet-filters) Provides a list of resources to help protect your family with regard to the internet.

## *Website for Kids*

[www.wonderzone.com](http://www.wonderzone.com) - A free online discipleship ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship. Children encounter the gospel message through adventures, games and a virtual world called "Wonderville". Each adventure contains an interactive devotional to help children learn more about God.