

## Youth/Children Initiative - A Movement Toward Hospitality

In considering priorities of Seventh Street Christian Church, focusing our efforts on creating a welcoming space for children, youth and their families is critical. Statistically, families with children will encounter our space through an initial worship experience. From the moment a new family enters the building, they will be wondering what is available for their child(ren). Ensuring that their worship experience is family friendly and engaging for children of all ages is important. Jayme Babczak and I have worked on a comprehensive plan that will begin to meet the needs of children and families during the worship hour at Seventh Street Christian Church.

### The Worship Hour:

1. Children (Ages 3-7) can begin worship in the sanctuary with their families or be dropped off in childcare between 10:30am and 11am and brought to worship with staff. Children under the age of 3 can stay with parents for worship or be dropped off in childcare for the duration of worship. Children over the age of 7 can stay with family members for the duration of worship. Designated areas will be available for young families and supplied with flexible seating options and activities for children of all ages.
2. An effort will be made to incorporate a child-friendly worship experience at the beginning of worship. This could include more child-led components of worship, repetitive and simple hymn selections, a children's bulletin, etc.
3. Prior to the sermon, children will be invited to Wondering through Worship, which we propose will happen in the chapel. This location is close to the sanctuary in case parents need to be contacted and also serves as an easy pick up location after worship. The chapel is also a designated place of worship. Using a "chapel" as opposed to a nursery classroom welcomes children of all ages into places of worship.
4. Wondering through Worship will focus on a parallel lesson to connect with regular worship. Children will have the opportunity to actively listen to the story and engage in an activity that allows them to offer something back in worship. Scripture lessons will be used from Storybook Bibles to engage younger hearts and minds with language that is more developmentally appropriate. Also, children will contribute to a group activity (artistic representation of scripture, related science experiment, game or musical activity, etc.) that can be presented as an offering of the time and talents of children at Seventh Street. A place in the church (bulletin board or display in parlor) will be designated for sharing the offerings of Wondering through Worship.
5. Children will reenter worship during the doxology / presentation of the offering – with the opportunity to sit on mats (or with family members) up in the front of the sanctuary where they can see what is happening.
6. Children will be invited to see and participate in communion.
7. Upon the closing hymn, children will be invited to follow the pastor out of the sanctuary and sit with their family or head back in the Narthex/Chapel to be picked up.

## Creating a comfortable and hospitable worship space for all persons at Seventh Street

One of the attributes of Seventh Street Christian Church is the beautiful sanctuary. The vaulted ceilings, stained glass windows and chancel area are awe-inspiring. However, the proximity of the pews to the front chancel area makes it challenging for anyone who has a wheel chair, walker, stroller, or child(ren) to maneuver. We propose removing pews to create space for both children, families with children and persons who need more physical space to maneuver.

### Removal of the front pew footboard:

Removing this will accomplish two things:

- 1) create space for children to gather, see and participate in worship comfortably
- 2) create more space that HARPS can utilize for their rehearsals and performances



### Removal of 1-2 pews in middle of sanctuary (right or left side):

Removal of pews will allow us to create seating for families and/or those who need more moveable space to get situated. (Currently, members and visitors that use walkers or wheelchairs must sit behind brick pillars because they are the most accessible seating options) Creating space that allows for easier access is safer for guests and provides a sense of dignity for those who have physical limitations.

Floor mats, flexible seating options, and a few activity bags will be added to this area so children and parents can move comfortably and stay occupied, as needed.



Example of family area: Church of the Holy Comforter in Richmond, VA

### **Removal of left and right back pew to add chairs:**

It has come to our attention that the narrow, sturdy pews are not comfortable for many individuals in our congregation. This, coupled with a lack of space to maneuver wheel chairs or walkers, sends the message of inhospitality. Replacing the back two pews with oversized red chairs creates additional space for different bodied individuals of all ages.



These recommendations create space that is hospitable and inviting for all persons.

### **Proposed Timeline:**

Space transformation completion by February 4.

We propose we initially incorporate children in worship on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of the month for February and March. (Intinction Sundays)

January 28 – Annual meeting – Wondering through Worship is presented/shared

February 4 – Be our first trial and would include intentional education with the congregation as we move through the service.