

Children and Faith Formation

Contact us!

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Watts Street Baptist Church

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The Children's Education Ministry leads the congregation of Watts Street Baptist Church in joining hands with families to nurture children in the faith. At the dedication of the child, the parents and members of the faith family affirm our commitment to guide and support this child along the faith journey. Seeking also to weave the child into the fabric of the congregation, we carry out this commitment in a variety of ways:

Introduction of the Child and Prayer of Blessing

On the child's first Sunday at worship, sometimes at only a few days of age, the parents are invited to bring the child to the front of the sanctuary during Concerns and Celebrations where the child is introduced to the congregation. Other siblings accompany the family to the front. The pastor holds the infant, offering a prayer for infant and parents, and inviting the congregation to celebrate this amazing gift.

Dedication of the Child

After several months, the parents and siblings are invited to bring the child for a service of dedication, part of a Sunday morning worship service. The minister lifts the child, in a symbolic act of dedication to God. The congregation and the parents participate in a covenant of dedication, making vows to tend to the spiritual nurture of this child, and praying God's blessing on this life, and the life of the family.

Nursery Care

Nursery care is provided for infants and toddlers, during the Church School and worship hours, every Sunday throughout the year. The Nursery may be the most important room in the church building, for it is here that the caregivers have the first opportunity to share God's love with the very youngest.

Sunday School

Sunday School is provided throughout the year, for all children, two years of age and up. This is where the children learn the stories of the Bible and our faith is passed on to the next generation. Children learn about God's love for them through storytelling, games, crafts, activities and the help of caring adult teachers. The children's classes are currently using the *Shine* curriculum published by Brethren Press.

Worship Education and Participation

When children enter first grade, they are invited to join the family of faith in the worship service. We believe this is important because children learn a lot about worshipping by watching those around them. On the first Sunday of the new year in Christian Education, in early September, first graders are introduced to the congregation and presented with a Bible. A series on worship education is offered to the children, often during worship hour at various times throughout the fall. Parents receive informative brochures to assist them in talking with their children about worship and about the Bible.

Younger children spend the first few minutes of the worship hour with the congregation in the sanctuary. Then, usually after the first hymn, and before they go downstairs for Second Hour Ministry, they go to "Chapel Time", where they sing, hear a Bible story, and pray together. This is wonderful way to introduce young children to the worship experience.

In addition, the elementary children's choir program on Wednesday evenings, 6:10 – 7:15 (following supper), encourages the children's participation in music and worship. The children gain a wealth of information and insight about the Bible, faith, worship, and the Church.

Children are encouraged to take part in worship leadership in a variety of ways, including singing with the children's choirs, bringing in the light (3rd grade and up), reading scripture, participating in the procession during Advent and at other times, ringing the "alleluia" bells at Easter, and serving as greeters prior to worship.

Second Hour Ministry

During the worship hour, care is provided for infants through kindergarten. Rotating teams of parents and other volunteers assist with providing this care, along with a number of youth helpers. During Second Hour Ministry, children enjoy playing, drawing, singing, dancing, and pretending under the supervision of caring adults.

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School is a rich tradition at Watts Street. Held during the mornings one week each summer, this ministry provides the children, as well as the youth helpers and adult teachers, with opportunities for energetic Bible study and mission experiences.

Children and Stewardship

Families join with the Church School teachers in encouraging the children to become good stewards of the gifts God has provided.

Children and Mission

Children are also encouraged to develop as good stewards through their participation in community missions. Each month the Mission Committee designates a focus for the mission basket collection. Children and families are encouraged to bring non-perishable items for shelters and other community ministries. Sunday School classes also make cards and other gifts to help the church stay in touch with our homebound members.

Children and the Environment

Periodically, the Environmental Mission Group at Watts Street encourages an environmental awareness/education experience during the summer for children preschool through fifth grade. Besides being loads of fun, "Kids and Nature Connect" challenges children to take a look at the gift of God's creation and to discover ways in which we all are called to be stewards of creation.

Children and Music

Our children are offered a variety of experiences in church music. Children's choirs are scheduled on Wednesday evenings, at 6:20 following supper. Beginning with the three-year-olds, the children enjoy simple musical instruments and rhythms. The elementary

children's choirs lead in worship church periodically throughout the year.

Areas of focus include teamwork, theory/sight singing, rehearsal techniques, vocal production, and Christian training. Occasionally, the children work together to present a musical, or some may participate in an all-ages musical presentation.

Children and Fellowship

As we work together weaving our children into the congregation, we also recognize that we are, in a sense, growing the youth group. We want to encourage children to establish lasting relationships with other children and parents in the church.

We offer a number of opportunities for the children to gather informally:

Throughout the year, a variety of activities are offered, including picnics, retreats, swim parties, and play dates.

Adult Education Classes on Parenting Topics

At various times throughout the year, workshops or parenting book groups are offered during Church School or on Wednesday nights on topics of interest to parents of children.

All Ages Experiences

Two or three times each year, everyone is invited to gather in the fellowship hall for an all-ages Sunday School. Often, Vacation Bible School begins with such a gathering. Sometimes this opportunity is offered on Advent I, or on the Sunday between Christmas and New Years. These experiences help the children experience the gift of being a part of a dynamic family of faith.

One of the highlights of the year for many Watts Street members is the All Ages Beach Retreat, held each April at the NC Baptist Assembly at Ft. Caswell. From the very youngest through the senior members, we gather to know each other better, to grow in the faith, to laugh together, and to enjoy the gifts of that part of God's world. During the past several years, over 150 Watts Street people participate in this annual retreat.

Children and Advent/Christmas

Watts Street maintains several significant traditions for children and their families during Advent/Christmas.

On Advent I, the entire congregation is invited to gather in the afternoon for a light meal and for the Hanging of the Greens. While the adults and youth decorate the sanctuary, the children make decorations for the tree downstairs, and often for some of our homebound members. The evening concludes with a simple *Blessing of the Decorated Sanctuary*.

Taking on a variety of forms, the children's Christmas pageant tells the sacred story of the birth of Jesus, but always with a number of spontaneous twists and turns. What a gift to the congregation!

There are two services on Christmas for everyone, even the youngest baby is invited to both services. A late afternoon traditional Candlelight Service is held at 4:00 p.m. Others may choose to gather at 6:00 p.m. for the traditional Moravian Love Feast. We sing the familiar carols, partake of the Moravian buns and sweet coffee, and lift high the lighted candles as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

Children and Discipleship

Throughout their experiences at Watts Street, our children learn about being faithful disciples. Sometimes this learning takes place formally, in some of the ministries described above. Other rich learning takes place on the side. It takes place when adults stop to engage children in conversation, or when an adult friend invites a child to visit a homebound member. It takes place when children and their families are showered with love and care when in crisis. It takes place when the child observes the congregation in business meetings or sees how the congregation responds to community issues.

When children enter first grade, the church offers to each family a subscription to Pockets Magazine, a monthly journal for children containing stories and activities that support faith development.

A variety of off-site opportunities emphasize community building, missions, and other topics essential to a growing faith such as God, Jesus, prayer, the Church, and our call to mission. First through Fifth graders attend the CBFNC Children's Missions Day in the fall. Second through fifth graders participate in an overnight camp in the spring. Third through fifth graders are invited to a week-end retreat in the fall and *PassportKids!* in the summer.

When the children are sixth graders, and now known as "Youth," we invite them to participate in group or individual conversations as they consider making a profession of faith and being baptized. Before this time, they have been participants in the faith of their parents. Now it is time to begin to consider their response to the abundant life offered to them by God through Jesus Christ.

The Watts Street Covenant speaks directly to our responsibility to our children. The Covenant reads, in part:

Having been called by God and led by the Holy Spirit to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and having been baptized into the church gathered in this place and throughout the world, we enter into covenant with God and with one another. We promise:

...to teach the children among us by word and example that in obedience to God they will find life's highest purpose and richest meanings.