

## Vision for Discipleship Education: Children and Families

It is an interesting thing, arriving in a new church. There has been a lot of waiting and hoping, so far, and that is finally turning into meeting you and seeing what this place is all about. By now, I have met a few of you, and all summer I read about you and even heard about you from your neighboring congregational churches. But I still don't really know you. That is going to take time. I have heard many great things, and now that I am here, I am excited to transform some of my listening into doing. I want to keep listening, this time, to your voices as to what this place means to you and what you hope to see from me, but today's scripture reminds me that we must not just be a hearer of the word. I also want to be a doer.

It was pretty easy to listen and hear about you all on my own, but the thing about doing is, I can't do it by myself. In two weeks, the church school year kicks off for our children, and it will take every one of us to make it spectacular for the kids today, meaningful to them years down the road, and faithful to God. There is a wonderful social justice curriculum that is in place that will take the entire year to teach our kids about people who are different than they are and how to love everyone they encounter. However, the vision for this curriculum will not be realized without the help of all of the adults here.

My hope for working with our children this year begins is at home with parents and grandparents, anyone who is charged with raising a child. You are the ones who make the decision to come here week after week, and you are the ones who are able to incorporate Sunday morning into the rest of the week. You are the ultimate authority on your children, and I will be looking to you for information and ideas. You are the ones who share your children with this community, and you are critical to developing your daughter and son's belief in God and understanding of what a Christian community is and does.

However, parents are not the only ones responsible for nurturing the children we have here today. Everyone in this sanctuary is responsible. We are a faith community, a church family. We are called to care for every member of our community, from the oldest to the youngest, the strongest to the weakest. We are called to be active in the faith development of the kids in this church. There are a dozen ways in which you can do it. Some of the most recognizable is to volunteer in a Sunday school class or lend your talents to a special project, but there are other ways. Introducing yourself to kids, talking to them when they sit next to you in the pew, taking the time to get to know them as the unique individuals they are. This will take what the kids learn in the classroom into the rest of our church life—they will see that people who are a little taller than them, and a little older, still love and care about them, and treat them as if they belong. It is not enough to read about our children or watch them up front—God calls us to do more than listen. It can start with a smile or a hello and build up from there, but each one of us is called to work with our children. We are all called to be God's doers.

I am really excited to be a doer with you. I am excited to teach, pray, sing and play. My vision for the children is that they will see South Church as a place that is good to be, a

place where they will encounter new ideas and caring people. A place where they are free to be themselves and encouraged to grow into the people that God intends them to be. I am still getting to know you, and your kids, but so far, I have seen a lot of excitement and anticipation for the year to begin. I hope this continues and builds on the foundation you have already laid for our children; I hope it spreads throughout the year and into each of the people sitting here today. I hope I get to know each of you, and in turn, you all get to know each of our kids. My vision is for our children is not one that can I do alone, this year we all need to be active and live out this vision together.