

Partnership Reflections

From our Partnership Dessert on Sunday, March 13, 2011 ~ 6-8pm, Fellowship Hall

In Attendance: 24 parents, 7 elders, 5 youth workers and 3 pastors.

Purpose/Goal:

- **Ownership:** To take ownership of our God-given calling to disciple our kids.
- **Partnership:** To agree to work together as pastors, elders, youth workers, and especially Christian parents, to help our kids become fully devoted followers of Christ through His Church.

Meditation:

[Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#)

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Covenant Baptism Vows

Minister: Do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct these children in the Christian faith and to lead them by your example into the life of Christian discipleship?

Parents: We do, God helping us.

Minister: Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?

People: We do, God helping us.

Student Ministry Participation Trends ~ Winter 2011

The chart below captures the current participation trends of students (grades 7-12) from **MEMBER FAMILIES** at Pleasant Street Church:

	<u>Regular Attenders</u>	<u>Semi-Active</u>	<u>Inactive</u>
Worship	70%	27%	2%
Sunday School	30%	14%	57%
niteLife/ReaLife	41%	14%	45%

These percentages are not very different from recent historical norms. Worship participation has been consistently good over the past 5 ½ years. Sunday School and other youth programs have consistently been attended by less than 50% of the student population from member families.

A look back, and a look forward:

The total number of students from active member families has plummeted since 2005. This is a reflection of our church's aging demographics. When I arrived in June of 2005, we had roughly 100 students in grades 7-12 from active member families. Today, that number is 44. For several years now,

we've been graduating large classes of seniors (10-15 students) and replacing them with small classes of 7th graders (3-6 students). If we continue in our current trend, the number of students in grades 7-12 from member families will be about 20 by 2015. Through it all, our **total** number of students who regularly attend niteLife & ReaLife (both members and visitors) has grown – as we've become more and more effective at reaching kids outside the church.

Year	Total # of Students from Member Families	Avg Att @ niteLife + ReaLife
2005	100	45
2007	80	55
2011	44	55
2015 (projected)	20	?

DISCUSSION FORMAT: Small & Large Group Discussions based on these questions:

- 1) What do you think is contributing to these high levels of non-participation in our church's Student Ministry?
- 2) What would a Student Ministry at Pleasant Street look like that was faithful to Jesus and effective at reaching and discipling students?
- 3) How can the church provide meaningful ways for parents and their kids to worship, fellowship, grow and serve together?
- 4) Earlier tonight we reflected on God's Word in Deuteronomy 6. What are some ways you struggle to live that out in your own home? What are some ways you are effectively living that out within your family?
- 5) How can the church effectively equip parents to disciple their kids?

REFLECTIONS:

- **Parents need to be reminded of their calling.** Many parents expressed feelings of “guilt” and “failure” when it comes to the spiritual nurture of their children. The opportunity to reflect on Deuteronomy 6, and renew our baptism vows, was a poignant and sobering reminder for many parents of their calling to be the primary spiritual leaders of their kids.
- **Good things happen when Pastors, Elders, Youth Workers and Parents sit down and talk.** The process of wrestling with and discussing these questions was a healthy one. These corporate sins of apathy and failed spiritual leadership have gone unaddressed for too long. Exposing our excuses as excuses and agreeing together that the spiritual formation of our kids is OUR JOB (meaning the job of parents and the Body of Christ) is time well spent. These conversations need to happen more often.
- **When it comes to the spiritual formation of our kids, we will, by and large, get what we are.** One of the ongoing themes of the meeting was the idea that our kids spiritual passion tends to mimic the spiritual passion of their parents. Apathy begets apathy. Low commitment begets low commitment. Fear of “outsiders” begets fear of “outsiders.” Religious consumerism begets religious consumerism. On the other hand, our very best attitudes, practices, disciplines and commitments are often mirrored in our kids' lives as well. As adults, and especially as parents, we need to work on becoming the kind of mature, Christian adults that we hope our kids will turn into!
- **Parents need to be kept accountable by their elders.** Parents agreed that they ought to be held accountable to their covenant vows—and that means having some hard conversations about their commitment to the Spiritual Formation of their children—both at home, and through the church. When students are not participating in the life of the church, elders should lovingly and graciously

confront the parents and begin a constructive dialogue with them about why their kids are not participating.

- **As spiritual leaders, we need to model perseverance.** A fair amount of dialogue centered on the fact that a growing percentage of our Student Ministry population is coming from the community. This shifting population is making some kids, and some adults, uncomfortable, and in some cases, leading to their total disengagement from the Student Ministry. The culture of our Student Ministry (and, to a lesser extent, our church) is changing—and change impacts different people in different ways. Spiritual leaders (which includes parents) need to persevere through the growing pains of change, and continue to remind the church that Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” New social dynamics at niteLife and ReaLife may be awkward for a time, but we all must work together to remind our kids that new friendships take time, and that they will be worth it in the long run. Simultaneously, as adults, we need to vigorously pursue relationships with people outside the church.
- **The church must prioritize encouraging and equipping parents.** Spiritual leadership must be cultivated. It does not happen on its own. The vision of Deuteronomy 6 is vision that leaks, slowly and steadily over time. The church must do everything it can to train and equip parents to live it out in the context of their families.

Next Steps

- 1) Pastor Bill will process the meeting with the pastoral team, elder team and youth worker teams.
- 2) Pastors Derek & Bill will develop a **Spiritual Formation Team** that will guide the spiritual formation practices of our congregation from cradle to grave—including ministry to children, students & families.
- 3) The Elders will develop a process for following up with the parents of students who are not participating in the Student Ministry.
- 4) The Youth Workers will encourage regular student-led **in-reach** to non-participating students.
- 5) The Pastors will continue to provide encouragement, along with excellent training and resources for parents in the form of books, devotionals, Monthly Parent Newsletter, weekly communication, parenting seminars, ongoing partnership desserts, etc.
- 6) The **Spiritual Formation Team**, with the pastors, will **rethink** the day, time, location and content of the Middle School & High School discipleship programming (currently: Roots, Sundays, 9am).