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## THE MEETING OF NEW HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP ON THE LORD'S DAY

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### *A Word or Two of Explanation*

#### WHAT WE DO NOT DO

If you are a visitor to New Hope Presbyterian Church it is likely that you find somewhat strange the lack of certain programs offered by many congregations, programs that have become commonplace in modern American Evangelical church life. You will have noticed that we do not offer a “children’s church,” nor do we have a regular “Sunday school” program, either for children or adults. The Session would like you to understand that the lack of such programs is not due to neglect, but is by design.

#### WHAT WE DO

At the founding of this congregation the Session was convinced that for many the experience of morning gatherings on the Lord’s Day had become like a smorgasbord, a dizzying array that easily led to indigestion. The variety of classes and programs offered by most churches divided the family and put the worship service in competition for the attention and energies of the people. Further, the Session was concerned that many had been under the preaching and teaching of the Word for years with little to show for it, either in mature grasp of the great doctrines of the Scripture, or in practical direction for Christian living. Associated with this concern was the Session’s conviction that families should worship together on the Lord’s Day, and that the practice of removing younger children from the service for “children’s church” was unwarranted and unwise. Finally, the Session was concerned that Sunday schools had been redirected from their early purpose as missionary efforts for the children of neglectful and unbelieving parents, into a substitute for the Christian family training of the children of believing parents, by their own parents in their own homes.

Thus, from our congregation’s beginning, the Session restored the ministry of Word and Sacrament to a central place in New Hope’s Lord’s Day gathering. We begin the day with public worship, our members gathering in faith to pray, sing God’s praises, confess our sins, hear His Word, share at His Table, and express our thanksgiving in offerings. Families are united in this worship, children seated with parents as soon as they are able to sit quietly through the service. Nursery service is provided only for the very youngest members of the congregation. Recent studies have shown that children who remain in worship through their youth are considerably more likely to continue the practice into adulthood than those who were removed for “children’s church.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “There is, though, something to be said simply for having children in worship almost no matter how gruesome, stodgy, and unimaginative the liturgy may be. Proportionally, over the years, young people attending worship-only become better adult church-goers than their peers attending church-school-only.” James W. White, *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988), p. 151.

Encouraging a place for children in the service reflects our conviction that what they may not comprehend in terms of content, is more than made up for in their habituation with respect to the solemnities, sounds, and sights of public worship as a fixture in their lives. As our children mature, an accurate and thoughtful grasp of sermon content is nurtured through “active” listening, that is, children are encouraged to take notes and discuss what they have heard with their parents.

After the service the Session has appointed a discussion of the morning’s sermon led by a Pastor. Following a review of the basic content of the sermon, there is opportunity for questions and comments. The discussion is concluded with the consideration of further points of application. In this effort our congregation is engaged in a practice that studies show greatly increases the possibility of long term memory retention, allows for a consideration of questions that provides for mature understanding of difficult issues, and facilitates our calling to “stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). Our pastors always include our young people in this exercise, the first part of the session devoted to reviewing the sermon with them, while our Ruling Elders meet separately to discuss the sermon with our younger children. From their earliest days our children are taught in precept and practice that thoughtful engagement with the Word of God is at the heart of discipleship.

With respect to those Scriptural benefits sincerely sought by others through the method of Sunday School, the Session has been careful to inculcate the Scripture’s method of parental instruction in regular family worship (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:6-9; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). Such a daily ministry, under the discipline and direction of a loving parent, is far more profitable than a mere 30 to 40 minutes once a week under the direction of another. It is the Session’s conviction that regular family worship is a most powerful instrument for the spiritual growth of both children and parents, and that no program of the church should be sustained which will relieve parents in this most important responsibility and privilege.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

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- . “The Sphere of the Sabbath School.” A Memorial and Overture of the Synod of Texas to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., to meet in Macon, Ga., 1893.
- . “The Wisdom of God and the Innovations of Men.” From an AMS, UTS, Box 6, File 6/2. Text headed “For the *Christian Observer*”; listed title supplied by the editor. Original publication unconfirmed.
- Davies, Samuel; Philip Doddridge, et al. *The Godly Family. A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children*. Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993.

- The Directory For Family Worship*, approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for piety and uniformity in secret and private worship, and mutual edification with an Act of the General Assembly, Anno 1647, for observing the same.
- Kelly, Douglas F. "Family Worship: Biblical, Reformed, and Viable for Today." In *Worship in the Presence of God*. Edited by David Lachman and Frank J. Smith. Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992, pp. 103-129.
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- Smith, B.M. *Family Religion, or The Domestic Relations as Regulated by Christian Principles*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1859. Reprint, Greenville, SC: GPTS Press, 1991.
- Still, William. "Thirty-Eight Years at Gilcomston." *Banner of Truth* (Jan. 1984): 8-16.