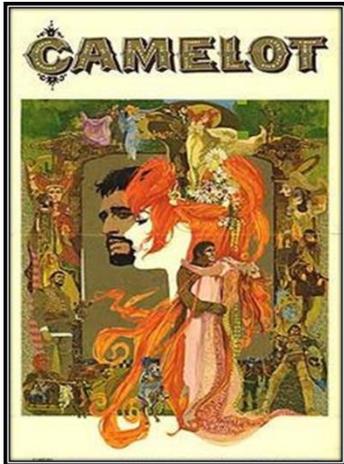


Once upon a time, many years ago and not so far away, there was a dream. God gave this dream first to one man, and then to many people. It was a dream that people might live together in ways more like what God had always had in mind, working, playing, and worshipping together in close relationship and deep friendship, red and yellow, black and white.

This dream took the shape of a new town—a new kind of town—a town that was planted in the lovely Maryland countryside. The town began to grow, and some of the Baptists who already lived in the area joined with some of the Baptists who were moving to help plant the new town and together they planted something else that was new—a new kind of church that would honor women as equal partners in leadership with men and that would bring people of differing racial backgrounds together in ways seldom seen before in the history of the world.



For the most part, the pioneers who planted this congregation were young adults in their thirties, and their families included many, many children. Things were pretty lively when these folk got together for worship and fellowship, with much laughter and singing and noisy children everywhere. Because the movie, *Camelot*, came out at about the same time, many noted that what they were experiencing together had much in common with that wonderful, mythical realm.

Time passed, as time will do, and while the wonder, the laughter, the love, and the singing continued, the children grew older, and their parents did, too. As it often happens, most of those children went off to school, to work, and to war, and not so many of them came back to settle in “Camelot.”

With their own children and grandchildren now in other places, many of the early pioneers became less interested in—and sometimes less able to help with—the congregation’s activities with later generations of children. Recognizing this need, the pioneers got together and called a staff person to focus on children’s ministry, but because not many of the pioneers really wanted to help with children’s ministry anymore, this new minister found the ground hard rather than fertile, and eventually decided that the harvest would be better in another field, and so she left.

Some of the newer and younger families who had joined the still-joyful congregation in the intervening years got together and tried mightily to resurrect a program of ministry with children that would meet the needs of their own children as well as the children of the neighborhood around the church; but they found the ground hard, too, and one by one, they sadly packed up and moved to other fields as well.

And so it was that Camelot became more and more gray and the sounds of the laughter and noise of children became more and more a memory rather than a present reality. Some of the staff and a few of the members tried valiantly to plant, cultivate and nurture a robust work with children, but for the most part, theirs was a lonely work. Everybody seemed to be of the opinion that “we should let George do it,” but to this very day, nobody has been able to find George.



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I began our Children’s Ministry Confab with this parable last Sunday night. We had a very good group for a Sunday night in the summertime, and we had an energetic discussion around the possibilities and opportunities before us with respect to our ministry with children and families.

Recognizing the realities represented by the parable, we tried to look as honestly as we could at whether we really feel called by God to provide quality ministry that includes families with preschool and elementary children at this point in our history. While ministry that focuses on adults without children (see the attachments) can certainly be a valid direction for congregations to take, the general sense on Sunday evening seemed to be that we're not yet ready to settle on such a direction. Here are some of the main points from that discussion, which you can augment by studying the handouts attached with this email.

For starters, there is certainly no shortage of families with preschool and elementary children in our neighborhood. If we're going to be able to provide meaningful ministry for them, there are at least five essential components of such ministry. Here's a short summary of what would be needed in each of those five areas, together with how we might provide for those needs in both the short-term and the long-term:

### **Area One: VOLUNTEERS**

The Need: In order to provide appropriate care for our children, every room in which we care for children needs to be staffed with at least two non-related adults over the age of 18 who have passed routine background checks. These requirements are increasingly mandated by insurance companies, and they are expected by parents whether insurance requires it or not.

The Current Reality: While we've not yet implemented an appropriate background check procedure (it's not complicated and each check can be done in about five minutes), our immediate crisis is that we rarely have two adults in any classroom during the Sunday School hour, and we often don't have two non-related adults over 18 in our rooms during worship or at other times. The truth of the matter is that we currently have a very small number of adults who have been willing to help (less than 10), and lately even those who have agreed to help haven't been showing up. Pastor Debbie usually covers for such deficits, as she did last Sunday, and last Sunday she had eight children during worship, by herself. And Pastor Debbie is going to retire in about 90 days . . . .

Short-Term Solutions: In the short-term, we really need every CBFer who is physically able to do so to complete the survey/volunteering form that is attached with this email and to use it to volunteer to help (it will also be distributed on Sunday). Having a large pool of volunteers will, when combined with the other strategies below, allow us to provide first-rate care for children in the short-term (six months to a year), without "burning anyone out."

Long-Term Solutions: As we provide excellent care for their children, we'll be able to reach increasing numbers of young families, of whom there is no shortage in our neighborhood. And as the pool of parental volunteers increases, the need for "all hands" participation in this particular ministry will decrease. Some of us, though, are likely to discover that we enjoy working with children more than we think we will!

### **Area Two: SPACE**

The Need: We need a sufficient number of attractive, safe rooms in which to care for children to be able to provide appropriate age-grading, which will allow for the very best teaching and learning environment for our children. We also need an attractive and safe playground area.

The Current Reality: Happily, The Meeting House does have a very fine playground area, so we don't have to worry about that. Our room situation, though, is more problematic. Since

the current Montessori school began renting the children's space several years ago, the lease arrangements OMI made with the school have resulted in a smaller number of rooms being available for our use than had ever been the case before. This change in room availability, when combined with our shortage of teaching volunteers, has made appropriate age-grading difficult to achieve.

Short-Term Solutions: Since we don't generally have large numbers of children at the moment (lack of equipment and volunteers having had their effect), we can probably make do with the rooms currently available to us in the short-term (perhaps a year or so).

Long-Term Solutions: The long-term possibilities related to space are quite interesting. The OMI Board is currently exploring several options by which CBF (primarily) might be provided with attractive new space in which to teach our children. While there is likely to be some financial cost involved in such provision, it seems probable that the benefits that would accrue to our congregation would far outweigh any cost.

Another, and very different, approach to space would be to build or lease our own space apart from The Meeting House. While there would be both positive and negative dimensions to such a strategy, such an approach would be much more expensive than the options currently being considered.

### **Area Three: CURRICULUM**

The Need: While keeping the children entrusted to our care safe is an essential baseline, our real goal is to provide a learning environment in which our children experience God's love and learn about God and about God's Word in attractive and age-appropriate ways. "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree," is pertinent here.

The Current Reality: Happily, there is no shortage of attractive, age-appropriate and biblically-accurate teaching material for children these days, and we already use some of it. There are a number of publishing houses from which such materials may be purchased.

Short-Term Solutions: Our DISCIPLESHIP Team and our Staff are currently reviewing ways in which we might enhance the curriculum materials we use, not just with preschoolers and children, but all across the life-cycle. We're hoping to have some initial recommendations in this regard before summer is over.

Long-Term Solutions: Over time, we hope to implement an integrated and coordinated discipleship curriculum that encourages spiritual maturity across the life-cycle, that facilitates spiritual conversations between parents and children, and between all of us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Area Four: EQUIPMENT**

The Need: Our preschool and children's classrooms need attractive, safe, age-appropriate toys and equipment that support effective biblical teaching, with convenient storage and/or access to this equipment.

The Current Reality: Since the current Montessori school began renting the children's space several years ago, the lease arrangements OMI made with the school have resulted in a very sterile environment for our own teaching events. While the rooms themselves are clean and comfortable, we haven't been able to have appropriate play and teaching equipment for our children in the rooms, and working with children in such an environment has consequently become less enjoyable.

Short-Term Solutions: While there may be other ways to address this need, one way in which we could meet the need for appropriate classroom furnishings would be to purchase such equipment ourselves (with the previous school we were able to use their equipment) and to build large wheeled boxes in which to store the equipment and in which to move it to and from the classrooms.

This approach would require funding to buy the equipment and to build the boxes. It would require persons to build the boxes, and persons to accomplish the purchase of equipment. It would require a place to keep the boxes apart from Sunday mornings (probably the chapel at this point). And it would require a set of volunteers to come early each week to set the rooms up for the teaching team and another set of volunteers to stow it after worship. This would all be quite an undertaking, but this is one way in which we could move rather immediately to improve the teaching environment for our children.

Long-Term Solutions: As we secure the necessary space and storage in #3 above, this particular need should take care of itself.

## **Area Five: TRAINING**

The Need: None of us comes into the world knowing how to work effectively with children.

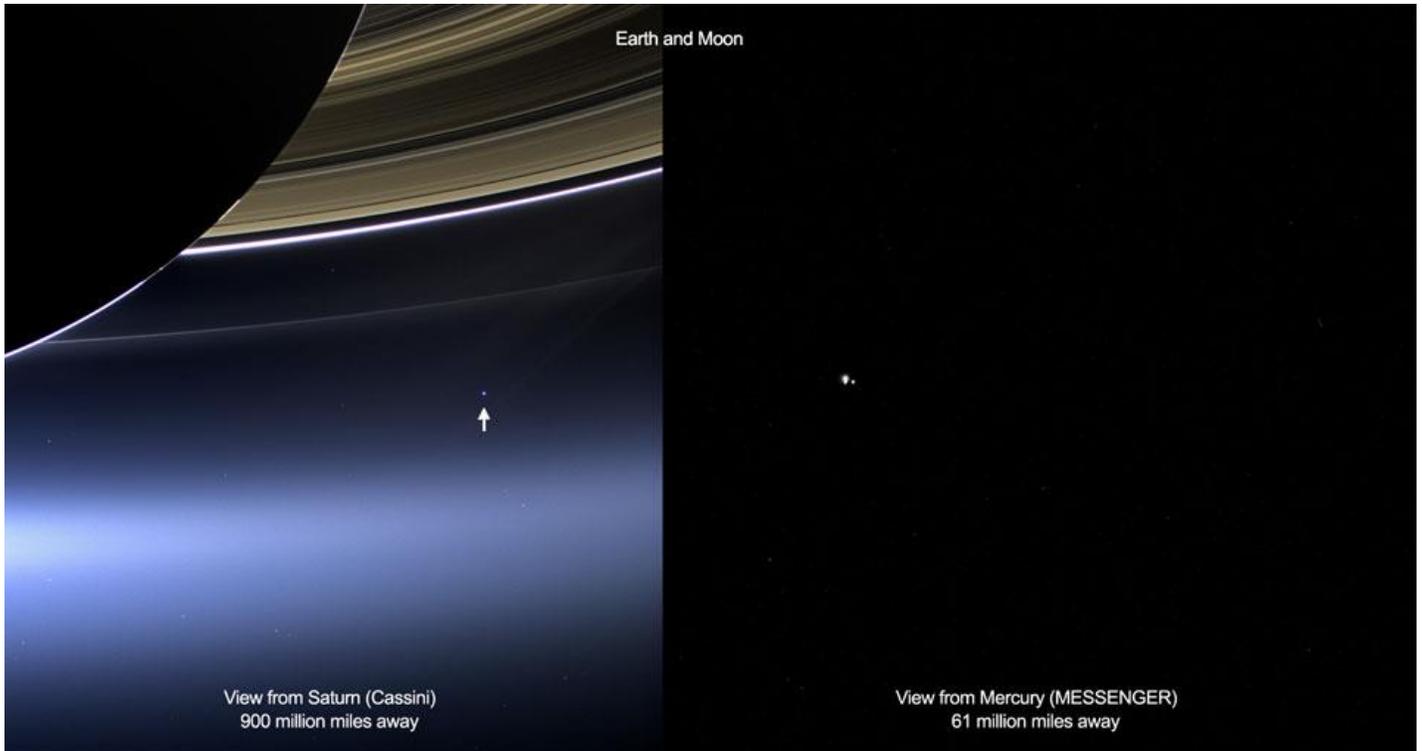
All of us have to acquire such knowledge in order to become effective parents, uncles, aunts, public school teachers . . . and Sunday School teachers. In order for CBF to provide first-rate children's ministry, we need to find ways to provide convenient and competent training in understanding and working with children and in the appropriate use of curriculum and equipment. Such training is needed before volunteers begin their work with children, and it needs to continue through continuing education and support from various ministry and teaching professionals.

The Current Reality: The BCMD (Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware) provides periodic training of this sort, and several of our staff and teachers have participated in such training in recent months. Pastor Neville has encouraged such training all along, but participation has been spotty.

Short-Term Solutions: Ms. June Holland, the BCMD Preschool & Children's Consultant, has worked with our Staff and has visited our classrooms and teaching events this spring. She is available to help us "jump start" our program of teacher preparation for preschool and children's ministry.

Long-Term Solutions: Among the many options available to us are two online resources that provide numerous short videos that teach just about any imaginable topic related to preschool and children's ministry. While providing these resources to our congregation does have an associated cost, that cost is very reasonable compared to what we used to spend to send workers to Ridgecrest, North Carolina and to similar retreat centers for such training. You can get an idea about these resources at [www.rightnowmedia.org](http://www.rightnowmedia.org) and [www.ministrygrid.com](http://www.ministrygrid.com). RightNow Media is already available to our congregation, and if you attend CBF but aren't yet connected to that resource, just reply to this email and that can be remedied forthwith!

Well, this has been quite an essay, and if you've read this far, you deserve a treat . . . so here it is:



### Two Views of Earth

**Image Credit:** [Cassini Imaging Team](#), [SSI](#), [JPL](#), [ESA](#), [NASA](#) & [NASA/JHU Applied Physics Lab/Carnegie Inst. Washington](#)

**Explanation:** In a cross-Solar System interplanetary first, our Earth was photographed during the same day from both Mercury and Saturn. [Pictured](#) on the left, Earth is the [pale blue dot](#) just below the rings of Saturn, as captured by the [robotic Cassini spacecraft](#) now orbiting the gas giant. [Pictured](#) on the right, the [Earth-Moon system](#) is seen against a dark background, as captured by the [robotic MESSENGER spacecraft](#) now orbiting Mercury. In the [MESSENGER image](#), the Earth (left) and Moon (right) [shine brightly](#) with reflected sunlight. MESSENGER took the overexposed image last Friday as part of a search for small natural satellites of the innermost planet, moons that would be expected to be quite dim. During this same day, [humans](#) across [planet Earth](#) snapped many of their own [pictures of Saturn](#). <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>



For some smiles at the end of the day, see [www.facebook.com/InheritTheMirth/photos\\_stream](http://www.facebook.com/InheritTheMirth/photos_stream).