

Dear FCCB Leadership:

My name is Vanessa B. I am a long-time FCCB member and mother of two young boys. My partner and I are grateful for the FCCB's community of learning, challenge, love, and support in which we choose to nurture our children.

The purpose of this letter is to propose church leadership approve the use of a dedicated space - on a trial basis - for our youngest community members (our littlest children between infant to approximately four years old) in the Narthex between the Sanctuary and the Social Hall.

Specifically, we are proposing the space behind the right window (facing the Sanctuary) be prepared in a way that is conducive to young children and their caregivers to comfortably spend time there during church service, welcoming all to participate in the service while allowing children a safe space to play in a way that is supportive to their current developmental stage. We envision an enclosed ("gated") area with cushions, age-appropriate toys, and at least for the trial period, supervised by caregivers who have children in the space.

If approved, the trial would begin Sunday, December 17, first with an enclosure (i.e. a baby gate) and a few items to create comfort and play in the space (floor pillows, and a few toys). Additional items could be added, or the space could be modified following the initial few weeks after children and caregivers have some experience with the space. The trial period does not have a defined end - however I would recommend at least a few months so that families can develop some routine around the space.

The reasons for this proposal are multi-faceted:

1. We want to be near our children to ensure their safety, enjoy their company, watch them learn, explore, and grow. For those caregivers who work full-time during the week, weekends are some of the only quality time we spend with our children.
2. We want to be able to fully listen to, see, and experience the church service while also tending to our children.
3. We want our children to be exposed to the rituals of church, to hear the music, the stories, the people. We want them to learn what it means to be in the larger faith community. They don't have to be "paying attention" to church to benefit from hearing the service and seeing the people around them.

This proposal is also rooted in our vision and goals as a faith community. We have collectively approved a vision which states: *"We are a nurturing, beloved community, growing authentic Christian faith, living Christ-inspired action."* In an effort to support this vision we have set out long-term goals and short-term action steps. Creating a new space for our children supports the vision we share. As our faith vision document explains, we have stated these as some of our long-term goals:

- 1. Be a community where all are welcome and included.**
- 2. Be a deeply-connected community.**
- 3. Be a people who worship and join in community in a variety of ways.**

Here is how this proposal supports these long-term goals:

1. **Be a community where all are welcome and included.** In the Sanctuary the space dedicated to children works well for those who can sit and read or draw quietly, who can focus their attention, and who have learned or are learning some of the patterns and rhythms of church. It is a challenging space to sustain the attention of younger children, like my two-year-old, who can only sit still for so long before it is time to *run!*

The goal of welcome and inclusion also extends those who care for children. As a parent, when we attend in person, I feel the strain of wanting to be welcomed and included in the service, to have my spiritual cup filled with sermon, prayer, and music, *and* I feel like my presence and my child's presence is disruptive to those who seek quiet, reflection space, and rest. I feel this tension deeply because *I am someone* who seeks that, too. Likewise, my partner, Max, seeks these gifts, and we are lucky to have each other to "tag team" service or allow each other time to focus, but even in a cooperative partnership like ours the challenge remains. Having a dedicated, safe space for our youngest and one of us to be near the Sanctuary would allow us to both hear the activities of church, maintain close proximity to our oldest, and be in a space somewhat together and create a shared experience for our family and with our faith community.

Further, seeing a space where children are prioritized is a welcoming gesture to new families and guests.

2. **Be a deeply connected community.** Connection starts early. Exposing children to the language, ritual, and people of the church invites a deeper lifelong connection to this faith community, and provides assurance that they are safe in this space and with these people. My children were both baptized in this church, and with that came a commitment from the community to be the church family that will love, support, and challenge them. This means they need to see and be seen by those beloved community members. Supporting a space near the Sanctuary allows children to see and be seen while it also preserves, at least to some degree, the quiet(er) sanctuary for those who seek that solace.

3. **Be a people who worship and join in community in a variety of ways.** Max and I love to come to church in person. We love the space, the people, and the inspiration that comes from the service, all of it. We are also SO grateful for an online format for the weeks where someone in the house is sick, or when what we feel our family needs most is to stay in our pajamas to snuggle and enjoy brunch while streaming church. Those cozy days are amazing, too. Having the option is good.

What *doesn't* feel good is "defaulting" to staying home because it feels like too much to support our children in the physical space at church when they are too wired, tired, and excitable to be "contained" and focused, and attending in person would feel like a chore rather than a gift. This keeps us away from connecting with our community. Again, having a dedicated space we can share with our little one and still participate in the physical act of attending church would be a gift.

We expect the impact of this proposal to be quite minimal. There is no cost to making this change on a trial basis, and I'd be happy to donate the baby gate for the cause if it can't be

acquired another way. We would only need to move some chairs and small furniture to accommodate the space. The other impact would simply be people seeing a change in the Narthex, processing that change, and responding to it. From there we listen, learn, and adjust.

Like so many in our congregation, I grew up attending this church with my family as a child. I was baptized here. I was confirmed here. I remember when the Social Hall was the Sanctuary, and when the library and the kitchen were nearly one in the same (and always smelled deliciously of coffee...). I love this place and this faith community, including all the ways it has changed over the years. I deeply desire to feel more connected to it and to create opportunities for my children to feel connected to it.

Thank you for your prayerful consideration of this request. I'm happy to speak to anyone about our experiences and hopes.

With love,

Vanessa B.