

Service times @ Santa Barbara Community Church

First, the announcement itself: Beginning September 12 our church will be changing its service times from what they are presently to 9am, 11am and 5pm. Our children's program for Nursery through Fourth Grade Sunday School will be offered at all three services. The Youth Program (5th Grade through High School) will meet at the 11:00 service. For those families with Youth Group age children who cannot make the 11:00 service on a Youth Group Sunday, we will have a Youth offering at the 5:00 service. The details on this are still being developed.

Now to talk about that a bit: First, thank you for the feedback from the survey we've been taking the past few weeks. The responses we received were helpful. The comments on those surveys were all over the proverbial map ranging from, *Please don't make this change*, to, *Thank you so much, our family has been waiting for this*. Quite a few said something to the effect, *Just tell me when to show up*. . .

The question has come up from many (usually from the 4:00 service), *Why the need for the change?* The following is meant both to explain the coming changes and to give a rationale for the change itself.

We are, as a church, privileged to be in a congregation where God is on the move. We are growing in Christ, disciples are being made, others are meeting Christ for the first time, and still others are finding their way into our worship services hearing the gospel for the first time. Clearly these are exciting times for a community of believers whom God is pleased to bless and use for his kingly purposes.

As we make a significant change in our service times, the reality is that with a growing congregation not everyone will get what they want. Please know the elders are *shepherds*, that is, pastors of our church. As such, the last thing we want in un-happy sheep. But sometimes decisions need to be made that will not please everyone. We hope, and trust, that the gospel we have celebrated together for many years will be both our guide and the impetus for a gracious response to this change.

As we go into this, please know that we have a commitment as your elders to see this proposed change as a trial. Specifically, we will re-evaluate how the *new* service times are working at the end of the school year and make adjustments if necessary. We have precedent in our church life for such a reevaluation. Sometime in the 1990s we moved the 4:00 and 6:00 to 3:00 and 5:00. We had specific goals that we wanted to see accomplished with this move (namely to split our Sunday School program and diminish the number of people attending the "early" service because of space problems). After the school year it was clear the change in times didn't help a bit and we moved back to 4:00 and

6:00. Eventually we alleviated the space problem by moving to Living Faith Center.

So, what is the rationale for the change?

First, and mainly, the growth of the 10am service. Simply put, it is getting quite crowded in this service. Most Sundays the sanctuary is full or comfortably full, and the number of children / toddlers is heavily tilted toward the morning. On one recent Sunday we had, for example, 47 toddlers in child-care at the 10am service and 7 at the 4pm service.

The question has come up by many, *Will this change help? Doesn't this service time change actually make the problem worse? After all, we are moving the bulk of our youth and their parents to the morning service which is already crowded.* .

Our answer: we certainly hope it will help. The hope is that from the 4:00 (currently, perhaps, 2/3 full) some will stay in the afternoon service while others will move to the morning service. Furthermore, we know from the survey that many from the current 10am service will find themselves in the 9am service. But, to be candid, the bottom line is we are not sure how this will pan out. Studies show, evidently, that church surveys are remarkably inaccurate predictors of where people will land. We make no pretense of having this all figured out. But we are confident a change needs to be made to accommodate our growth since the merge.

Second, we have the sense and the conviction that a late morning meeting time for the youth would be more conducive to Christian education and learning. As it is, in the afternoon the body clock tends toward *snooze* and the temperature of our CE building tends toward Phoenix. In the morning, the CE building will not be an *oven* even during the hot Sundays. To put it a bit differently, there is a reason students don't go to school at 4:00. Their minds are a bit dull and their bodies a bit tired. Benji and Erik are enthused about how this might positively affect the youth program. On the other hand, maybe this time won't work for the youth. If it doesn't, we will change it.

Third, we hope for a greater integration of church life. Having two services in the morning, would, we hope, provide for more interaction of our church body between the services. We're hoping our patio will be something of a *town square* for the people coming and going to the two morning services.

Fourth, we hope for increased diversification of the afternoon service. Presently the 6:00 is quite age-specific; namely it is very young (20-30). Again, we don't know exactly how this proposed change will turn out, but we are hoping for a robust afternoon worship service that will integrate both those currently attending the 6:00 and many of those who currently attend the 4:00. To put it differently,

the young and the not-so-young. We believe that this added diversity would greatly benefit those currently attending the 6:00.

We have an understanding that change is inevitable and that change is hard. We are also convinced that any change we make now is temporary. We have no illusion that this service-time change will fix everything for the next decade or two. We will evaluate, listen and make adjustments as necessary in the months and years to come. Again, God is on the move in our church, and we believe it is our job and our joy to keep up with what He is already doing.

So, when all is said and done, we, as your elders, are asking you to embrace, or at least accept this change. It may, or may not, be exactly what you want. But we come to you as your elders who have labored long over this question, prayed through this decision and believe this is where God is leading our congregation. What is of utmost importance is that we move forward together, in unity and with the conviction that *God is really among us*, using us for his kingly purposes as we wait for his coming. May God bless us, our church, and other churches in SB as we take this step together