

Dear Parents,

Our program is composed of a parent meeting (Thursday night), two days of instruction and interaction with the children (Friday night, Saturday morning), a second parent meeting (Saturday afternoon) followed by the final child/parent session. As you can see, it involves a time commitment on the part of the children, parents and small group leaders but the benefits are well worth the time invested.

The class is very dynamic. There are numerous modalities of teaching - lectures, PowerPoint slides, a student book, small group discussions, and most importantly the ability for the children to ask any question regarding puberty and sexuality in a safe environment. Some prefer to raise their hand, while some submit anonymous questions. The success of the weekend is obtained by using all of these teaching tools while weaving in Biblical teachings, abstinence, and God's plan for these children. Ultimately, we know that this weekend is not intended to answer every question that these children have regarding sexuality. However, it is a starting point that encourages them to talk with their parents. It also shows them that there are adults in the church willing to walk alongside them and help guide them in their path towards adulthood.

This description is hard to completely understand unless you have actually participated in the class and experienced in person how the weekend goes. Oftentimes, the children's questions help drive the discussion. In this day and age, there is so much non-Christian information that our children see and hear on a daily basis. Cell phones, social media and everyday TV and movies allow for an abundance of inappropriate information to get to our children. And yes, they still get the wrong information from peers on the playground at school. If they only get this information on their own, then how can we expect them to act appropriately when they grow up? We want to encourage them to seek answers and help from their parents, church leaders and other trusted adults when they really need it!

We have participated in the class and can attest, things have changed dramatically in the amount of information our 5th and 6th graders have and the

types of questions they are asking. Whether we like it not, things change. The discussion driven by the children's questions has changed dramatically. If a child asks a question, then an accurate scientific definition is given, followed up with God's plan on what to do with that information and then how they can further discuss these topics with their parents, church leaders and other adults they trust.

We use a student book during the program as an important reference guide. Last year, the book was rewritten to reflect the changing world in which we live. The new book is *Wonderfully Made*. Definitions for gender identity and sexual orientation are included. In this day and age, terms like homosexuality and transgender are all around us. We feel it is best for children to learn these terms in a safe environment. As those who have participated in the program in recent years, we can say that there has never been an acceptance or encouragement of any lifestyle associated with such terms. We also feel it's important for parents to share their beliefs and thoughts on these topics with their children. During the second parent meeting, Dr. Meekins will offer guidance on how to have these conversations.

A lot of thought went into writing *Wonderfully Made*. The authors sought help from pastors, children's ministry leaders, teachers, doctors and psychologists. As they wrote, their main objective was to make sure each child knows that we are created in the image of God, that God loves us more than we can imagine and that we are called to treat others the way we want to be treated.

A group was formed to review and discuss the rewritten book. We are members of the team that reviewed it and decided how to move forward. Our discussion involved many man hours over several meetings and resulted in a majority vote that the program should move forward using *Wonderfully Made*. There was much discussion about all the tools used to teach during the weekend. While the student book is one of these, it doesn't stand alone. The combination of the environment created by Dr. Meekins, the discussion with adult small group leaders, the ability to ask questions and receive honest answers, the encouragement to discuss hard questions with parents and the student book all provide a great learning opportunity for 5th and 6th graders. Above all these

experiences, they will know that they are created in the image of God and He loves them unconditionally.

Unlike our Confirmation program for 7th graders to become members of the church, this sex education program is not a requirement for our 5th & 6th graders. We see it is an opportunity for our church to partner with parents as their children navigate puberty. Parents have the choice whether or not their child participates. If you'd like to review *Wonderfully Made* before registering your child, a copy of the book can be provided upon your request to our Director of Children's Ministries, Michelle Graham.

It is our hope that you will prayerfully consider being a part of our Wonderfully Made program with your child. If you have questions, we are happy to discuss them with you.

Sincerely,

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