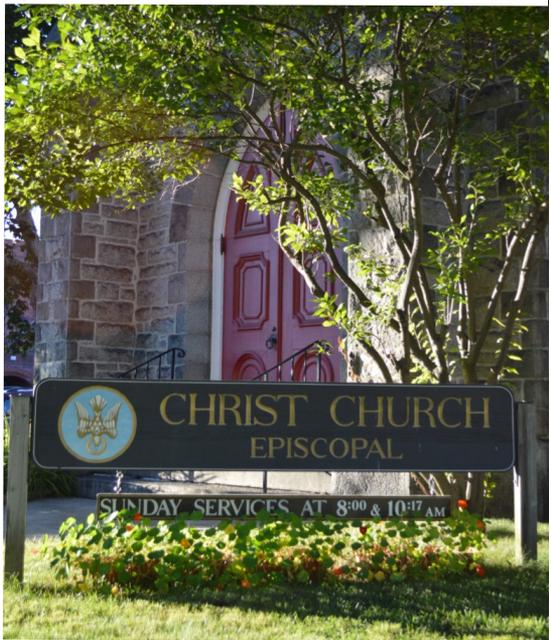
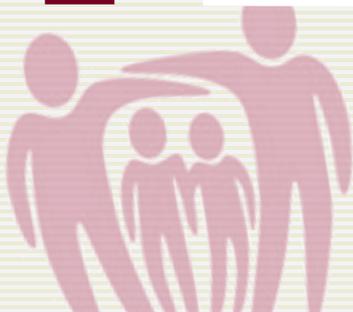


Family Ministry



Parenting in the Pew®

Preparing and Guiding our Children's Participation
in Corporate Worship



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“Worship is a time when I bring the scribbles of my life and my Father takes them and puts them all on his heavenly refrigerator - all the scribbles, not just the pretty ones or the ones that make sense. He is the perfect parent who always sees what’s really there. This is the Father of truth and grace (that our children) can know and love.” (Robbie F. Castleman, Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship)

Why Worship? >>>

Worship is where we find truth and rest. Worship is a gem of truth in a marketplace of cheap imitations. When you introduce your children to what is completely genuine, you are equipping them to judge all the other experiences and possibilities that will come to them.

Why Would You Want Children to Worship? >>>

Someone could ask: Why would you want children in the worship service? It is a formal setting for prayer, contemplative reading and singing, with a 20 minute sermon. Having your children in such a setting is sure to be a distraction to your own ability to concentrate on God, let alone being a distraction to others around you. Your children certainly will wish they were somewhere else. You will undoubtedly and repeatedly hear the phrase: “How much longer?” Even if they can sit still for that length of time, they will likely just tune out, developing more bad habits of tuning out adults. Surely there is a better place for them. Why even try to bring them into worship service?

Because: Worship is not about us or what we want: it is about God and what pleases Him. God is pleased when families worship together, when parents guide their children in worship and when

congregations welcome children into the community of faith.

From the beginning of “the church”, in the days of the early Christian community, God has ordained that his people meet together on the Lord’s Day for worship and edification of each other. As the church meets as a Body, God promises that his Holy Spirit moves among them, using the “means of grace” (preaching, singing, praying, celebrating) to change lives.

And, from the beginning, that has always happened with children present and participating. The invention of the “nursery” (or children’s church or Sunday school during the principal service) is a 20th century phenomena. (That does not make them totally bad ideas, but it does put some perspective on what we consider normal.)

In the Bible, when the people of God met, it was the whole people of God. The prophet Joel wrote: “Blow the ram’s horn in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. Gather all the people - the elders, the children, and even the babies.” (Joel: 2:15-16)

We live in a society that is generationally fragmented, where so much is compartmentalized and specialized. While there is a value to age-specific

instruction, there is also a value in significant togetherness, particularly when worshipping God. There is an energy, solemnity and awe to all the people of God gathering together to worship that is not present in other settings. In addition, there is something powerful and important for children to see their parents worshipping God and to see other adults worshipping.

There is a power in the songs and prayers of God's people; in the proclaiming of His word; and that power is present and true even if children are bored, even if we think it is not profitable to them. In fact, children can absorb so much more than we realize.

Preparing our Children for Worship >>>

Preparation Begins in the Home

Children need to learn that worship is more than Sunday. If you don't learn to worship the rest of the week, the worship on Sunday will not make up for it. Sunday worship is the culmination of worship, not the extent of it.

Consequently, family worship is crucial for the preparation of your children because it teaches them that worship is all of life.

Family worship at home does not have to

be scary or difficult or overwhelming. The rule of thumb: KISS method! (Keep It Simple Silly!) 10-15 minutes may be all you need and this can happen at meal time or before bed. Saying grace before meals; memorizing a Bible verse as a family; singing a song from last week's service; reading a Children's Bible or devotional book with your family before bedtime: all of these are simple possibilities for creating worship at home.

Before Sunday

It is important to promote Sunday as the day you look forward to as a family. It needs to be an exciting day in your family...the best day of the week. It is the day when we are with our best spiritual friends, when we most enjoy the presence and blessing of God. It is the day we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, remember the salvation he has accomplished for us and renew ourselves with his Body and Blood. We need to speak to our children about Sunday worship as something powerful and exciting...and this means, as parents, we need to have this same perspective.

John Piper, a preacher and author from Minnesota, has written (with his wife): "The greatest stumbling block for children in worship is that their parents do not cherish the hour. Children can feel the difference between duty and delight.

“...young people like to be challenged. Parents need to expect more from their children in church.” Robbie F. Castleman, Parenting in the Pew: Guiding your Children into the Joy of Worship.

Therefore, the first and most important job of a parent is to fall in love with the worship of God. You can't impart what you don't possess.” (The Family: Together in God's Presence, 1995)

Cultivating relationships in the church is an important part of cultivating this attitude. It makes a tremendous difference when parents help their children cultivate a relationship with their pastors, KIDZone teachers, Youth leaders, choir director, acolyte leader, head usher and other adults of the church. This is what makes the times of preaching and listening to 16th century music personal and real to them. When parents exercise such hospitality on Sundays, it causes their children to look forward to the day. They come to see Sunday, the Lord's Day, as a day of celebration in which they also want to be active participants.

So...parents must prepare for Sunday on Saturday. As you pray at meals, pray for God's blessing on the teachers and everyone participating in the service the next day. Plan your schedule Saturday night as much as possible so the whole family can be rested for Sunday. It may help to prepare clothes and food the night before so that Sunday mornings are less stressful on the family. Worship is rewarding work; it neither comes easily or naturally. We cannot do it on leftover

energy of a long week and late Saturday night. In addition, the “Prelude” to worship begins long before the first note of the organ. It begins with the sound of the Sabbath alarm clock. Getting up early means that you are not rushed, unprepared, short-tempered, late. Satan delights in hypocrisy and distractions. Spiritual warfare on Sunday mornings is a reality as we strive to “remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy”. (In the Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, Screwtape, writing to his nephew Wormwood, a demon in training, about tempting humans: “Why use murder when cards will do.”. To paraphrase Lewis, “why tempt parents with murder or cards when a rushed, tense Sunday morning will do”.)

Children need to sense our excitement about worshiping with God's people. Gratitude and faith are easier to have when Sunday morning is more holy and less hassle.

Taking Part in the Service >>>

When the 909 ends, make every effort to have your children visit the bathroom. It is indeed one of the great mysteries how children can go for hours without using the bathroom, but suddenly (and inevitably), during the worship service,

inevitably), during the worship service, they have an emergency situation. It just involves training your children to avoid the potty parade during the Sunday service. Emergencies do happen, but more often than not, your children are hypersensitive to their bodies, because they do not want to pay attention to anything else. Set clear expectations for children's behavior during the service...

- Get crayons, construction paper and a copy of KidsWord/Little Kidsword before the service begins.
- If they can read, read and sing the songs together. Read the scripture passages together. This helps engage your child in every syllable of the worship service.
- Smile at your children often. Hold their hand, allow them to cuddle, to stand on the pew to be the same height as you.
- Try to sit together as a family, particularly when children are young.

Children are often the leaders in boldly approaching the throne of grace. An encounter with God may not look like one at first. We must trust the fact that God can surprise us with his presence in our children's lives.

If your child needs to be corrected, much can be handled by keeping them close to

you and whispering in their ears. But if your child becomes loud and disruptive for more than a few seconds, you should take them out of the service and find a quiet place where your child can regain composure. (It is important to communicate to your child that you are serious about behavior for their benefit and the benefit of their fellow parishioners.)

Some children are more active and will take longer than others to become comfortable in corporate worship. This can be a source of embarrassment and frustration to parents and a distraction



from worship. However, as parents you must remember that you are worshipping a God of grace; your righteousness is not in your parenting, but in Christ Jesus. Jesus said: "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them. For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children." (Mark 10:14)

During the sermon, allowing children to draw is perfectly normal. They can do this on the construction paper or in their Kidsword leaflet. As they grow older and their comprehension skills grow, you can begin to encourage them to listen more closely to the sermon. They will probably discover they can understand more than they thought. (Having their own bulletin will allow older children to take their own notes during the sermon.) You might also encourage children to take notes on what songs were sung, what scripture was read...either by using words or by drawing pictures from the songs and scripture. Your children may have questions that arise in their minds from something which is said or sung; some quiet interaction with your child might be



appropriate (as long as it is not distracting to others). Sometimes, just tell them that you will explain a point after the service...and remember to do so! If the preacher answers your child's question (later in the sermon or the question is answered in the eucharistic prayer), poke your child to encourage them to listen to that point. At the same time, be realistic about your child's attention span. Dozing off is not the end of the world.

However...do not simply turn their participation into your project. They need to see that you are participating for yourself, that you are personally affected by the hymns, songs, God's Word and the Eucharistic prayer: that you value it for yourself.

Consequently, reminding them, at times, that you want to listen is important.

Initially, interaction with your children in worship can seem like a distraction from your ability to worship yourself. It can feel too much like work and you may find yourself resenting the effort it takes to help your children and also pay attention yourself. But worship is indeed work! We often refer to the service as the "liturgy", a Greek word which means "a public duty" "a public work". And working at worship may actually grow your appreciation of it even more.

Follow-up

When the service ends, worship (and

service) do not. Have your children join you in straightening up your pew: returning crayons to their bins at the doors, collecting their artwork and bulletins, etc. Teach your children to interact with adults and others after the service. One way to do this is to encourage them to talk to at least one adult around them after the service... before joining other children their age. Later in the day-- on the way home, at home - spend a few minutes sharing your thoughts/reactions from the morning's service. Ask your children some basic questions about their Sunday School lessons, the songs, the sermon. And end the day with a time of prayer, as a family.

Final Practical Thoughts >>>

Enroll your children in the Children's Choir (ages 7-12) or your teens in Voice of Hope (12-adult). (This is not quite the same thing as asking them if they want to be in the choir.) Regular singing of hymns, songs and anthems plants the words and basic concepts of the Christian faith in children. Think of the pop songs, advertisements, slogans, and jingles you remember from your youth - they are at an age when almost everything "sticks". Why not use that 'ability' for a larger purpose?

Sign your children up as acolytes, ushers or readers. Being closer to the action and having an important part in

presenting the liturgy makes it more interesting. Young brains are taking in new things all the time - putting them close to the center of the liturgy is one way they can begin to absorb the meaning of worship before they can understand or articulate that meaning. (Acolytes - 3rd grade or older; ushers and readers - 7th grade or older).

Ask your child to mark the service. Hymn numbers are listed in the bulletin; have your child find the hymn numbers and use their construction paper as a bookmark. When you get to that part of the service, they can help you by opening the hymnal to the correct page and sharing their hymnal with you.

Include your children when you serve as an usher, host coffee hour, serve on Altar Guild, etc. They can be full partners in the necessary elements of our life together.

Ideas based on Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship, Robbie F. Castleman, © Inter-Varsity Press, 1993.

Additional ideas offered by newsletters from Bearden United Methodist Church, Knoxville, TN, St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Ridgewood, NJ and Spring Run Presbyterian Church, Midlothian, VA.



What is Family Ministry?

Family Ministry is a coordinated approach to providing support and strength to multiple parts of the family of God, children, parents and adults of all ages.

Are there any 'guiding principles' for Family Ministry at Christ Church? >>>

There are four simple guiding principles, emerging from 1 Corinthians 12.

- ↳ God's love for you is unconditional and endless: each family member matters to God!
- ↳ God embraces you every moment of every day.
- ↳ God blesses you with special gifts.
- ↳ God empowers us to use our gifts to make a difference in His kingdom on earth.

¹⁸*[Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.]* ²²*In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.* ²³*And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. ...* ²⁴*So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.* ²⁵*This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.* ²⁶*If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.* ²⁷*All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. (1 Cor. 12:18, 22-27)*



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