

Children belong in Worship

“Imagine you are visiting a church. Just outside the entrance to the nave is a coat rack with lots of colorful bags. Each bag has a child’s name on it and there are several marked ‘visitor.’ You enter the nave and see a soft teddy bear on the end of each pew. What would you think?” I asked during a recent visit with a parish considering the place of children in worship. “Children are welcome here!” offered one member without skipping a beat. Another shot back, “Kids and families!” Just as Jesus welcomed children when his disciples tried to keep them away, so must the Church work to include children in worship and receive children’s special gifts as signs of the grace of God.

Children learn how to worship by worshipping. Children learn how to be in worship by being in worship. There is just no way around it. I remember well how bored I was as a child sitting in church, after spending an hour in Sunday School, seeing but not hearing the pastor as he droned on for what seemed like forever. I was fortunate. My parents were firm and loving. They made certain church was part of my life through high school. However, I was only one of three that made it that far – there were thirty children my age in the kindergarten class when we all started!

Some things don’t change. That was in the ‘60s and ‘70s. I hear the same tale today as I travel about. The difference now is that some of our churches are willing to talk about it and better yet, do something about it. To be certain, the challenges are many for parishes willing to wrestle with questions like: How do we make our worship accessible to children without ‘dumbing it down?’ In what ways can children and adults participate in worship leadership side by side? How can we help children and their parents feel comfortable in church? And what about the grumblers? Let’s face it, every congregation has them (sometimes they are clergy) and to some extent grumbling is natural to those of us grieving the loss of traditions that have meant so much to us in our faith journeys.

The good news is that there is help for parishes willing to rise to the challenge of making worship formational for people of all ages. A plethora of resources is widely available. I’ll send you a book list that is too long to publish here. I’ll even come to your parish and walk through the challenges, obstacles and opportunities, if you ask! God became incarnate in the Christ CHILD. That CHILD became an adult, took children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them and blessed them. The church is called to care for, minister to and receive the ministry of children, recognizing that children are a gift from the Lord. Making worship accessible to people of all ages is one step towards the kingdom.

Things kids of all ages can do

- Illustrate the scripture for the bulletin covers
- ‘Sign’ the Lord’s Prayer
- Readers’ Theatre in place of a lesson
- Lay hands on for healing
- Write the Prayers of the People

- Liturgical Dance
- Serve as Ushers, Greeters, Lectors, Chalice Bearers, Acolytes and sing in the Choir

More Welcoming Signs to Families

- Clean, bright church and nursery
- Soft Space for young children up front
- Children's Worship Bulletins
- Children's Prayer Books
- Children in Worship brochure
- Rocking chairs
- A 'mix' of music

Most Important – Prevailing Attitude

- Children sitting with adults other than Mom & Dad
- Every child is known by name!