

Children and Worship

At St. John's Church, children are always welcome in our Church services. More than that, they are full and important members of the body of Christ, and their presence is a joy.

Worship is one of the basic ways that people learn what it means to be a Christian. In our Church, in particular, corporate worship on Sunday is the occasion when the whole community gathers. Children learn how to worship by participating at the Sunday Service.

Despite the possibility for distraction, children need to worship and are needed by all of us to complete the community assembled in His Name.

Our responsibility as adults is to create an atmosphere in which children can learn to worship in ways that are consistent with their respective levels of development. We can help our children discover that appropriate behavior in church is also the most rewarding behavior. We can help each other as parents learn what kind of worship experience best suits our children at their various stages of development.

When children attend the Sunday worship service, they:

See that they belong to Christ and are welcome in His Church.

Learn the parts of the liturgy by heart.

Are enriched by the beauty of music and other areas as expressions of praise to God.

Build memorable, shared experiences of Christian community that will strengthen them throughout their lives.

Hear Scripture read and explained, which becomes a moral foundation.

Share their own gifts by becoming involved as acolytes or junior ushers.

Discover that they are valued and loved by God and by His people.

Nurture their innate sense of wonder and mystery.

Bringing children to worship may not always be easy, but is an essential part of their growth in Christ. They need it, and the body of Christ assembled needs them!

How Parents Can Help their Children to Worship

We welcome children as they are, with abilities and attention spans appropriate to their ages.

Preschool children often come to church with:

Short attention spans

Seemingly endless energy

Curiosity about everything

These traits will bring surprises of many sorts and test all of us adults. That's a 'given'. But there are several things parents can do to make worship with young children work better for everyone.

Prepare the children during the preceding week for what they will see and do on Sunday at Church. A positive dialogue during the ride to church will help keep children focused and looking forward to the service. Leave home with plenty of time so no one feels rushed or pressured.

Arrive at church in time to find a good place to sit. Sitting near the front provides the best visibility and helps many children stay attentive. If you prefer a back row, let your children sit on the aisle. Children are going to be interested in things they can see and hear.

Bring a book or quiet toys and allow your children to be active within the limits of the situation. Encourage adult-like behavior without over correcting.

Quietly, consistently help your children learn the different parts of the service.

Use this time for special togetherness between parents and children.

Affirm attentive behavior and participation.

School-aged children have a growing capacity for listening and remembering. Parents have a great opportunity now to help their children toward greater participation in worship.

Help them learn the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and other parts of the liturgy.

Review the order of service in the weekly Chronicle and help your children look for new words. Point out parts of the service where people respond and help your children to be ready to join in

On the way home, ask your children what they remember and share your own thoughts and feelings with them.

Opportunities to Participate

Like most of us, children learn and remember best the things they actually do. At St. John's, there are ways for elementary age and older children to become more active participants in the liturgy itself. Younger children may serve as acolytes – carrying the candles, banners and crosses, and assisting at the altar. Older children may also read a lesson at the service, assist as a Junior Usher or Altar Guild member, or volunteer to sing in the choir.

The Nursery

Nursery care is offered during the 10am service for our youngest members, those who might find it more challenging to stay through the entire service. The nursery is located in the undercroft (be sure to ask an usher if you need directions). Nursery Care is for children under the age of 6.

We ask parents to use their best judgment about whether to leave their children in the Nursery while they worship. We prefer that

children be in church, but understand that some infants are easy to bring to church; others are not. Many three or four year olds are able to sit through a service; some are not. Parents know their children best.

Feel free to come and go during the service to meet your and your child's needs.

What Other Adults Can Do

Adults who are not parents, or whose children are grown, also have a part to play. As an integral part of the community of faith, children enrich worship for all of us. All adults can:

Remember children's limitations and be tolerant of minor disturbances.

Appreciate the vital role children play in our services.

Acknowledge children's presence.

Set a good example with their own behavior.

Adapted for St. John's from a brochure from Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh.

Worshipping with Children

Guidelines for Children,
Parents and Friends

“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” Luke 9:48

St. John's Episcopal Church

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