

Helping Children Worship

Worshipping with others of all generations is an act of spiritual formation. When we worship God together, young people learn they belong to Christ and are welcome in Christ's church. At the same time, it provides opportunities for adults to practice welcoming children in Christ's church.

The following observations are drawn from several books (Formational Children's Ministry by Ivy Beckwith; Parenting in the Pew by Robbie Castleman) and a website (Trinity Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, VA).

Why is it important to have young people in worship?

Worship and opportunity for reflection slows us down and, in this slowing down we can be spiritually formed. Children need to slow down and have time for reflection too. When they do this with parents and other loving adults, they not only practice this, they see it modeled.

When families attend church and worship services together, the children see their parents live out a priority of faith.

Children understand far more than we know, and the presence of children in worship is far more important than whether they understand everything that is said and done.

Worship provides opportunity to practice hospitality and generosity in community. When children are involved in congregational, communal worship, they have a front-row seat for these regular practices.

What might help young worshippers engage?

Through repetition, even very young children come to know the Lord's Prayer, the creeds, the responses, and the songs of our faith.

When children can read even a few words, ask them to read the ones they recognize in the Call to Worship, prayers, and songs.

When they can read well, they can hold their own bulletin or hymnal. They can mark the hymnal pages ahead of time. They can stand and sit at appropriate times.

During the reading of the scripture, a bit of creativity can help children listen well. If it's a story, they can be asked to imagine they are there where the action took place. On the way home or over lunch, discuss what they imagined. What did they see? What did they hear? What did you see? What did you hear?

If children practice participating at a young age, their sense of belonging and paying attention is more natural.

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What do young people gain by participating in worship?

They build memories of shared experiences of Christian community.

They are enriched by music and art as creative expressions of praise and as responses to God.

They begin to see Christian worship as one place where God may speak to them and be with them.

They witness the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper—both visible signs of God's grace, kindness, and favor.

They feel affirmed that they are valued as people by God and by God's people.

Engaging in worship and being more than a passive observer takes time and practice. It's a gradual learning experience for all ages. If you need a little more help for parenting during worship, in the narthex we have Worship Bags (labeled as pre-readers and readers) for the youngest children. And for about age 9 and older, we have Bible Infographic books on the shelf. Please return them to the narthex as you leave worship.

Christian Education Committee
Christ Memorial Presbyterian Church

