

ABC's of Worship with Children

ARRIVE in time to use the restroom, get water, and find a good place to sit – a place where your child can really watch what is happening. When possible, let children sit near the front or on the aisle so they can see. Don't feel you must resign yourself to the back pews!

BRING quiet toys or books for young children and gradually increase the amount of time you ask them to pay attention. Children can usually be expected to participate in most of a 60-minute service by 2nd or 3rd Grade. Remember it is important to actively participate in worship yourself. Children will see that what we do in church is important and will take their cues from you.

CREATE some family rituals about church. Spend some time “playing church” at home, practicing periods of silence, singing the doxology, etc. Consider using the Lord's Prayer at home before meals or bedtime.

DECIDE on a family signal to let children know when to settle down. Go over the service with your child or softly whisper hints about what happens next. Children like to be ready, so help them mark pages.

EXPRESS joy at having children here! During the Peace, welcome any children near you. Include them in conversation before or after the service and try to send an occasional smile their way. Children might not remember every word of a service, but they'll retain the experience of being a valued part of a faith community!

FEEL FREE to leave the service at any time if your child is crying or restless... but also know you can come back in at any time! ☺ Taking a break in the back of the church is often a good alternative to leaving the service completely. Times that are particularly easy to move with a child might be during a hymn, during the Peace or when we stand to say the Nicene Creed.

GIVE your child a chance to explore the church with you after the service is over. Although there is a holy mystery surrounding the altar, familiarity with the physical setting may make your child more at ease. You can also ask a priest to give you a tour of the church.

“Then Jesus took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around the child and said: “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me, but also the One who sent me.”

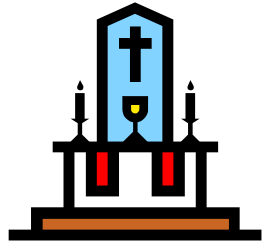
Mark 9:36-37



*“The ABC's of Worship” were adapted from materials by St. Columba's Episcopal Church (Washington, DC)
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Welcoming Children in Our Church



Adults sometimes wonder why little children are brought to church... but bringing children into church is a little like inviting them to eat with us at the dinner table. Even when their manners are far from polished, it is our hope that, given time and exposure, they will eventually become comfortable participating in our rituals in their own meaningful ways. In the meantime, children are still an integral part of our church family and so they belong here with us.

Children giggle, poke, squirm and swing their legs simply because they are children. But they can also learn to sing, pray and listen as they are able. They absorb so much more than we can imagine! This brochure is written for all adults in hopes that we will learn to welcome, accept and value the presence of children, even if it is sometimes manifested by some restlessness during worship!

As children worship along with us, they are also learning:

- ❖ It is important to come together with other believers as part of their faith heritage.
- ❖ They are part of God's family and therefore belong and are most welcome in God's house.
- ❖ The sights, sounds and feel of worship are good to experience, even when we don't understand everything.
- ❖ Something is expected of them in this holy place and they are invited to respond with us in song, prayer and in offering their gifts.

THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

Some adults may question the wisdom of including preschool children in our worship. It is true that they may sometimes distract those around them or distress parents with their behavior. However, they are vital members of our parish family and the circle at God's table is incomplete without them – noise and all.



The preschool child comes to worship with:

- ❖ A short attention span
- ❖ Seemingly endless energy
- ❖ A growing curiosity about everything

The combination of the above ingredients can test the patience of even the most understanding adult, but there are several things parents can do to help make the experience more relaxed and enjoyable for everyone:

- ❖ Sit near the front of the church where children have a clear view of the altar. Ask what they see, or play “I spy” before the service – help them notice the colors, fabrics, candles, windows, pictures, crosses, designs, etc.
- ❖ Prepare your child for different parts of the service, explaining special events like baptism ahead of time and also answering “right now” questions in a calm whisper.
- ❖ Allow your preschooler to bring a favorite stuffed animal, picture and coloring books or other quiet toys to the service. Make use of Bible stories, children's bulletins and other resources available in the back of the church.
- ❖ Try to encourage small amounts of adult-like behavior. Choose one or two things to focus on – such as standing or kneeling when the rest of the congregation does – and during other times allow your child to be somewhat active within the limits of the situation, being careful not to be too distracting to others.
- ❖ Use church quiet time as a chance for special togetherness with your child – time to snuggle them in your lap or keep your arm around them – things there may not always be enough time for during the routine of a busy week. Make church special family togetherness time.

THE PRIMARY AGE CHILD

The school-age child brings new abilities to worship:

- ❖ Longer attention span for attentive listening
- ❖ Improving reading skills
- ❖ The ability to memorize information

As these aptitudes develop, parents can foster greater participation in worship. Here are some ideas to try:

- ❖ Help your child memorize the Lord's prayer or other simple responses such as “The Lord be with you” – “And also with you”
- ❖ Review the bulletin with your child to identify new or difficult words. Make sure to point out those parts where the congregation responds so that your child will be ready to participate.
- ❖ You may want to hold onto any children's activities until the sermon begins so that your child has something new to do during the longest part of sitting still. The early part of the service has more movement and things of interest to a child. If children begin coloring as soon as you arrive, they will likely be finished before the sermon even begins!
- ❖ Help your child find hymns in the hymnal. Children this age can understand that we read a hymnal differently than other books. Many can follow the hymns fairly well with the help of a finger – either their own or a parent's.
- ❖ After church, ask what your child saw or what they liked best. It's amazing what children can absorb, so be ready for questions about how Jesus rose from the dead or why we believe in the holy “catholic” church when we are Episcopalians. Encourage questions. If you don't know, say so... and assure them you will try to find out if you can't answer right away.



Questions or Concerns?

Our priest or Christian Education Director would love to talk with you – either by phone or during a visit.



HASSLE & HOPE

Some days you will find that bringing a young child to church may be a real test of your patience! Many facets of parenting can be aggravating, but when something is important, we keep trying. Of course we don't want to be disruptive or hinder the worship service in any way, but we must also remind ourselves that children are an essential part of our church community.

Children may have difficult moments during a service, but it is their birthright as Christians to worship in our church. Remember in Baptism, we vow to “*do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ.*” Being welcomed into the church and learning about liturgy helps establish lifelong habits that will help children develop a strong faith of their own.

CHILDREN & COMMUNION

The Episcopal Church encourages full participation in our liturgy and children of all ages are welcome at our altar. When we baptize children, we welcome them into God's family, just as they have been welcomed into our individual families. It may be years before children understand the history or values of our family, but they are nonetheless valuable members. Likewise in church, children may not understand all the mysteries of communion (who does? ☺) but they are learning how the Family of God breaks bread together and receives sustenance for the journey – so as soon as your child has been baptized and is physically able to ingest solid foods, they are welcome to participate in our Eucharist.

You can help your child prepare for communion by discussing it at home. Explain in your own words what the Eucharist means to you. Explain how we remember Christ's life and how we believe Christ is present. Teach your child to hold out their crossed hands to receive the bread and say “Amen” or how to cross their arms over their chest if they do not wish to receive.

If you have questions, please contact us at the church.