

THE CHILD IN THE PEW

ABC'S FOR PARENTS AND OTHER ADULTS

Arrive in time to find a good place to sit. Make sure your children can see.

Bring something along for little ones to hold or look at.

Call a practice session at home. The Lord's Prayer and the Doxology can be practiced to help children.

Decide on a clue to let children know it's time to settle down.

Express joy at having children worship with you. Send an occasional smile their direction.

Free yourself of anxieties so you can relax!

Give thanks to God for the presence of children

Help parents of small children by showing your appreciation and your support of our children.

So! Bringing your child to church can be a real exercise in aggravation. But then again, so are many other facets of parenting and we manage our way through them. Of course we do not want our children to be disruptive or to hamper the church's worship, but we must remember that baptized children are members of Christ's church, and children should be among the people who worship God. They may not participate just the way adults do, but they are growing in understanding and learning to take their places in the church family.

Proverbs 22 says that if we teach a child how to live, that experience will be remembered throughout life. Young children in worship may be wiggly and noisy, but it is their birthright as Christians to Worship. Our satisfaction comes in later years when we see them stand in the midst of the church with a faith of their own.

When children come to Worship, adults sometimes wonder why!

Let us suggest that bringing children into the Sanctuary is something like letting them eat at the dinner table, even though their manners are far from elegant - it's done in the hope that, given time, they'll begin to feel a part of the family and learn from the examples of others.

Children giggle, they poke, and they swing their legs simply because they are children. But they also sing, pray and give with us. So this little pamphlet is written to suggest that we adults should accept - even value - a child's restlessness during worship trusting that they are also learning:

*that it is important to come to this place each Sunday,
that they belong to this special company of people;
that the sights and sounds and feelings of the Sanctuary are good though not
always understandable;
that something is expected of them in this place, and
that they may respond in song, in prayer, and in offering.*

Let us consider the ages of the children and what they are about:

Ages 3-5: This age child spends considerable time climbing off and on the pew, sticks fingers in the communion card holder, may wander down tile pew, insists on a personal bulletin, keeps in constant motion, and clings to it tenaciously if a parent reaches out to grab it; writes their first name on many of the ritual of friendship pages, fits toes nicely into the hymnbook racks and finds it more comfortable than letting them hang down.

But let's look for a moment at the other things that are happening at the same time: this child can be assisted with finding the page numbers of the hymns and having them ready for singing; may sing along with everybody else (albeit with unrecognizable words); joins lustily in singing the Doxology, a song everybody knows; adds voice to the Lord's Prayer, pleasing both self and parents; wants to hold the offering plate as it goes by (risky) and wants to add the parent's envelope to the contents of the plate, perhaps sensing that Worship involves giving.

Ages 6-7: Six and seven year olds (generally sit in place unless there is an acceptable reason for moving, the best one being a dropped bulletin More than once during the service this child's bulletin flutters to the floor, landing well under the pew ahead. It is always followed by a small body that wiggles under various feet and returns grinning triumphantly. This child writes the whole name plus address and phone number in the ritual of friendship pad and checks each small box. While feet are closer to the floor at this age [the hymnbook rack is still handier and more comfortable, but the increase in shoe size creates a risk that feet will get stuck causing a minor panic.

Stop to consider, however - this child can do some new things. The six and seven year old knows when to sit and when to stand; bows head during prayers; sings some of the words to familiar hymns, after having located them in the hymnbook, which they can now hold themselves; is excited to discover readable words in the bulletin; and is beginning to apply reading skills to matters of faith.

Ages 8 & up: This child can handle the bulletin with more agility - in fact, has learned to fold it into an airplane; has also learned not to sail said plane over the heads of the congregation, but enjoys threatening to do so; swings feet back and forth creating a discernible rocking sensation, often hitting the legs or bumping the pew ahead; pretends to take money out of the offering plate instead of putting it in; licks lips and looks painfully hungry when the bread and wine are served on Communion Sunday.

But there is another story; the eight year old can read the bulletin and follow along as the scripture is read. This child also knows that we read a hymnbook differently from other books and follow the hymns pretty well with a helping finger. This child usually mutters along on the Apostle's Creed and may surprise everyone by asking who Pontius Pilate was, and how Jesus rose from the dead, and why we are Christian - fairly good questions for a young Christian to be asking!