

What about children and worship? Alternative Models

Children as:

Absent or Invisible

"Worship is for adults; no children need apply."

The gifts and needs of children are not recognized.

No conscious recognition of children in the ministry of worship.

Visible but Ignored (or barely tolerated)

"Children should be seen but not heard."

Children may be present if they are quiet and well-behaved.

Distractions

"Don't bother us; we're here to worship"

"If I'm here to worship, I can't be watching my children."

Ministry strategies:

"Cry room" or attended nursery

Child care in separate space; "playroom" activities

Christian education for children at the same time as worship

Recognized but Separated

"Of course we make provisions for children . . . elsewhere."

Ministry strategies:

"Children's church"--worship designed especially for children
or provisions such as those listed in the item above.

Note: the difference between this model and the one above is to a great extent one of congregational motivation. In this model, the goal is to provide children with significant faith experience; in the previous model, it is primarily to keep the children from distracting adults.

Limited Participants

"We give children special things to do . . . sometimes."

Ministry strategies:

Training for and ministry as acolytes

A special "time with children" during worship

("Children's Sermon," "Children's Moment;")

"Time with the Young Church")

Children's choirs (choral and/or handbell)

A special "Children's Sunday" (once a year; once a quarter)
at which children do some or all of the things listed below

Full Participants

"Children (as well as youth and older adults) are always a vital part of worship."

Ministry strategies:

Children are seen as both giving and receiving ministry.

Children and adults are helped to learn:

The skills of prayer

The use of silence and meditation

The meaning of congregational song

The life-nurturing resources of psalms and canticles

The faith-birthing and sustaining dynamics of worship.

Children are involved in the planning and presentation of worship:

Providing music, drama, or poetry for worship

Providing artwork for banners, the Holy Table frontal, etc.

Adding drama to the ministry of the Word

Writing prayers to be used in worship

Children are trained for, and then included in the rota for ministry as:

Greeters

Acolytes

Ushers

Liturgists and lectors

Leaders in prayer time

The preacher seeks to speak to children as well as adults in the homily

(e.g. the use of stories and symbols which speak to children;

the explanation of "technical theological concepts")

Note: What we learn about ministry to, with, and from children can be translated into our understanding of ministry with such groups as youth, older adults, mentally and developmentally challenged persons as well.

Note from a preacher: Reflecting on how to make concepts like "grace, faith, and salvation" accessible to children forces one to do serious theological work which is always significant to my own "adult, professional" understanding. It is not a matter of "putting the cookies on the lowest shelf" by over-simplifying. It is learning to hear the mysteries of faith with the ears of a child. Jesus tells us we must become like a little child in order to receive the kingdom! It is not that we as adults (lay and clergy) are to "dumb down" the gospel. Rather, we are to recognize that faith is not primarily a matter of intellectual mastery of Biblical and theological concepts, but the internalization of faith, and the nourishing of corporate relationships in the community of faith--an activity of heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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