

## **WHY WE WELCOME LITTLE CHILDREN TO WORSHIP....**

At the time of baptism, parents, godparents and the whole congregation promise to bring children to worship. Not to do so would be like sitting down to the family evening meal but excluding the kids. Sure their manners might be far from elegant, but we welcome them because they are part of the family. Being with family is how we learn to be family. Worship is no different.



Young people giggle, they poke, they ask questions and they swing their legs because they are young children. Children learn about worship and how to participate by experience, by how they are welcomed into the community, by what they see big people doing.

## **WHAT IS WORSHIP?**

Worship is how we respond to God. When we gather in worship we all come together to encounter Christ, and we watch together for God's presence in Scripture, our own lives, and the world around us. When we worship God, we are reminded that we belong to God's love, and we are empowered by the Spirit to participate with God in loving and healing the world.

## **HOW DO YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN TO WORSHIP?**

- + By being taught they have a place in the community of the church.
- + By seeing, hearing, feeling, even smelling, the sanctuary as a place of welcome and worship.
- + By being around other children in the worship space.
- + By watching how their significant adults sing, and make prayers and offerings.
- + By sharing prayers, communion, and worship leadership alongside adults.
- + By being given ways to watch for God's presence in their own lives, and encouraged to share where they notice God and how they participate in God's love.

**ADULTS LEARN TO WORSHIP** by "becoming like a child" (Mt. 18:3). Children notice, absorb and feel deeply. They respond freely. Children perceive God. *Children learn to worship from adults and adults learn to worship from children.*

Bringing a child to church can be frustrating. Their behavior can make it hard for parents and others to worship. Then again, many facets of parenting can

be challenging. It's the rewards that make it all worthwhile. While we do not want our children to be disruptive or hamper the worship of others, all of us together need to be reminded that children are not the church of the future. They are the church of the present and are to be treasured as such. Children and adults alike are able to watch for God, and participate in God's love and healing.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN**

- + When possible, arrive in time to **find a good place to sit**. Let them sit next to the aisle, near a work station or in the front pews. Even let them stand on the pew next to you so that they can see.
- + **Tell them before they come in what will happen in worship**. Show them the parts of the service where they have an active role, and the parts where we all listen or watch others quietly.
- + **Take advantage of the worship supplies** and materials available at the door when you arrive, and bring them to your seat. Return bags and supplies to their place when you leave.
- + **Worship *with* your child**, guiding her or him through the service so they can feel what it is like to worship together.
- + **Worship at home** through saying Table Grace together, or Bedtime Prayers, or even, "God bless you." Ask your kids questions about how they noticed God's love in their day, and how they shared in it.
- + **Remember that sometimes children just plain need to run around and play**. That's why we provide a bright and safe Nursery space for your young child at any time during worship. Gather them back with you for Communion so they can experience God's blessing.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTS WITHOUT CHILDREN**

- + Be helpful to parents of small children by not making them feel awkward or unwanted.
- + Acknowledge children by smiling, or nodding in their direction, to show your appreciation of them.
- + In fact, make a child's presence a part of your worship by inviting their family to sit next to you, praying for them, taking an interest in them.
- + Make a special point of sharing the Peace of Christ with them when everyone else is greeting.
- + Find a young child before or after the service, make eye contact, introduce yourself, tell them you are glad to see them and will be looking for them next week. You might just be the reason that family returns.