

Dr. Mosser's Blog

7 September 2018

As we begin a new school year, please read what my friend Rev. Thomas Lane Butts, Jr. has to share. This "LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN" newsletter article is from FUMC, Monroeville, Alabama, a few years ago.

When I was appointed as pastor of Trinity UMC in Fort Walton Beach, in 1986, I was informed that in addition to preaching two times each Sunday morning and teaching an adult Sunday School class between the two services, I was expected to give a mini-sermon for the children at each worship service. I was horrified—not at the preaching and teaching, but at the idea of the mini-sermon for the children two times each Sunday. I had never done this before. To my utter surprise the time with the children soon became the favorite part of my Sunday morning ministry.

Children will do the teaching if you are willing to trust the process. Object lessons and sermon-ettes seemed to be an indirect way of preaching to the congregation at the expense of the children, a practice I quickly abandoned. I began to simply sit on the steps before the altar and let the children sit around me. Then I would ask them if they had anything they would like to tell me about, or any questions they would like to ask. I never knew what was coming. Parents cringed at what their children might say, but the children warmed to the process. They taught me and the congregation with their interesting questions and unvarnished insights. But the most important product of the process was that the children left church each Sunday feeling that they had been included in the worship experience. The time with the children was never dull. Sometimes it was humorous, sometimes profound, and sometimes even sad, but almost always unforgettable.

One Sunday the children gathered around and I asked, "What has been happening in your life this past week that you would like to tell us about?" A six-year old was first to raise his hand, and I put the microphone in front of him. In a quiet and trembling voice, he said, "My little brother died." There was a profound silence in which you could have heard a pin drop. The child came to me and sat on my lap and all the children crowded around to hug and touch him, for they knew instinctively what he needed. I do not remember what I said after I finally regained my composure, but I picked the child up and held him close in my arms and walked up and down the aisle of the church and started singing softly "Jesus loves me this I know." The children and the grownups joined in, softly and tearfully. I brought the child back to the pew where his parents were sitting. I continued to hold him as I said a prayer and then I placed him in his mother's arms.

Church does not happen every Sunday, but church happened to everybody there that Sunday—all because a little child had the courage to show us his broken heart.

If you want the world to know the unvarnished truth about reality, listen to the children.