

A Letter to Parents with Young Children in Church

by Jamie Bruesehoff

You are doing something really, really important. I know it's not easy. I see you with your arms overflowing, and I know you came to church already tired. Parenting is tiring. Really tiring.

I watch you bounce and sway trying to keep the baby quiet, juggling the infant car seat and the diaper bag as you find a seat. I see you wince as your child cries. I see you anxiously pull things out of your bag of tricks to try to quiet them.

And I see you with your toddler and your preschooler. I watch you cringe when your little girl asks an innocent question in a voice that might not be an inside voice let alone a church whisper. I hear the exasperation in your voice as you beg your child to just sit, to be quiet as you feel everyone's eyes on you. Not everyone is looking, but I know it feels that way.

I know you're wondering, is this worth it? Why do I bother? I know you often leave church more exhausted than fulfilled. But what you are doing is so important.

When you are here, the church is filled with a joyful noise. When you are here, the Body of Christ is more fully present. When you are here, we are reminded that this worship thing we do isn't about bible study or personal, quiet contemplation but coming together to worship as a community where all are welcome, where we share in the Word and Sacrament together. When you are here, I have hope that these pews won't be empty in 10 years when your kids are old enough to sit quietly and behave in worship. I know that they are learning how and why we worship now, before it's too late. They are learning that worship is important.

I see them learning. In the midst of the cries, whines, and giggles, in the midst of the crinkling of pretzel bags and the growing pile of crumbs, I see a little girl who insists on going two pews up to share peace with someone she's never met. I hear a little boy slurping (quite loudly) every last drop of his communion wine out of the cup, determined not to miss a drop of Jesus. I watch a child excitedly color a cross and point to the one in the front of the sanctuary. I hear the echoes of "Amens" just a few seconds after the rest of the community says it together. I watch a boy just learning to read try to sound out the words in the worship book or count his way to Hymn 672. Even on weeks when I can't see my own children learning because, well, it's one of those mornings, I can see your children learning.

I know how hard it is to do what you're doing, but I want you to know it matters. It matters to me. It matters to my children to not be alone in the pew. It matters to the congregation to know that families care about faith, to see young people... and even on those weeks when you can't see the little moments, it matters to your children.

It matters that they learn that worship is what we do as a community of faith, that everyone is welcome, that their worship matters. When we teach children that their worship matters, we teach them that they are enough right here and right now as members of the church community. They don't need to wait until they can believe, pray or worship a certain way to be welcome here, and I know adults who are still looking to be shown that. It matters that children learn that they are an integral part of this church, that their prayers, their songs, and even their badly (or perfectly-timed, depending on who you ask) cries and whines are a joyful noise because it means they are present.

I know it's hard, but thank you for what you do when you bring your children to church. Please know that your family — with all of its noise, struggle, commotion, and joy — are not simply tolerated, you are a vital part of the community gathered in worship.

New Resources for Children & Families

POCKETS is a family devotional magazine for you and your children to use and enjoy together! Geared toward children under 13 years old, it includes short stories, a monthly family scripture reading plan, weekly ideas for how to make a difference, family activities, featured stories about a different country each month called "Where in God's world?", recipes, puzzles, games and ways to incorporate faith and service into each day and week. These is a tremendous resource to help equip families spend intentional time together and grow in Christ daily. Make Pockets part of your family routine. Get in the habit and pick up your copy today from Kathryn or at the sanctuary entrance.

New Worship Helps - Just an fyi that wiggle bags are also now available at the sanctuary entrance for use in worship. Wiggle bags include activities, crayons, and games to use for young children while in worship. Children's bulletins are also now available each Sunday!

How Do Children Learn to Worship?

Children learn to worship by worshipping with the congregation Sunday after Sunday.

- They learn they belong to Christ and are welcome in Christ's church.
- They come to know, through repetition, the Lord's Prayer, the creeds, the Doxology, and the beautiful songs of our faith.
- They build memories of shared experiences of Christian community that they may draw upon when they are older.
- They are enriched by the beauty of music and art as creative expressions of praise and as human responses to God.
- They hear stories from the Bible read and interpreted, and they begin to see Christian worship as one place where God may speak to them and be with them.
- They witness the drama of baptism and the Lord's Supper—both visible signs of God's grace, kindness, and favor.
- They discover that they are valued as people by God and by God's people at church.

Special Provisions for Children in Worship

- Children's bulletins and updated wiggle bags with games and crayons are available at the sanctuary entrance.
- Children who need a break can make use of space in the narthex or front porch for a few minutes. The service can often still be heard from there.
- Nursing mothers are welcome to use the Nursery behind the choir loft where the service can be heard/viewed.
- Changing tables can also be found in the Nursery behind the sanctuary.
- Quality childcare is available in the nursery for children three and under during worship and Sunday School.
- Children four and older are encouraged to experience congregational worship. Our pew worship cards offer great suggestions for parents and adults to help children get the most from worship. *(Sitting near the front will provide children with a better view of the service so they can see what's happening and additional floor space for Godly play. Being a "worship friend" for a child by inviting them to find the hymn or draw prayers is a special gift to parents who may be nervous about their child in worship.)*
- Pastor Norm loves to incorporate children in worship. Please let him know if your child wants to help in the service in some way. He will also offer regular opportunities and invitations to assist during services like a story for all ages or during baptism and communion.