

A GUIDE TO WORSHIP FOR PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Worship is a gathering of the family of God to give praise and adoration to God; to pray, sing, hear the reading and preaching of the Word, to offer ourselves to God, and to receive the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. As at every family gathering, children are welcome and included in every aspect of worship.

Although little children may not understand all of the conversation, or eat all of the items on the menu, they come to the family dinner table as soon as they can sit in a high chair. As they listen, they learn how to enter the conversation and many a three year old can offer a prayer before meals and tell in detail about their day at Preschool. They have learned to do this by watching and listening. By first grade most children can share stories and ideas with the adults around them. They love to sing and enjoy being with adults. Their vocabulary grows as they hear conversation and enter into dialogue.

Children who attend worship with their parents or a caring grandparent or friend from age five or even earlier learn an amazing amount. Below are suggestions for helping your child to feel comfortable and happy in worship. Don't be concerned about paper rattling or the child moving about a little. God rejoices to find these little ones included in the family at worship. Just as they have learned to listen in school, they can learn to listen and participate in worship.

Faith in God is a personal experience which cannot be handed down from generation to generation. We can, however, model our own faith and provide a warm caring worship experience so that God becomes important in the life of the child. The earlier this experience begins, the more likely it is to become a lifelong habit.

Our approach is vital! Repeatedly let your child know that worship is important to you, and you are glad they are now part of it!

Here are some ways to help your child to enjoy and understand the worship time:

1. Talk about worship at home, explaining the different parts, using an order of worship (the bulletin).
2. Pray and sing at home as well as reading or telling Bible stories. Recognizing familiar words and tunes can make worship exciting for small children.
3. For the child just learning to read, bring a Bible and follow the readings, guiding with a finger or card as the leader reads.
4. Use a personalized worship folder (available by the doors to the sanctuary). Or you may wish to make a worship bag in which you have book marks in the colors of the seasons of the Christian year, Bible story books, paper and pencil to use in worship as aids to worship and also something to do if the sermon is too difficult to understand.
5. If parents prefer that young children through kindergarten not stay for the whole service, the nursery is provided. Children may begin worship with parents and leave after the children's time. We hope the kindergarten year will be one of transition for families, as children begin to learn to stay in worship.
6. Remember the verse, "I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the House of the Lord" was not just for adults. Children are members of the Body of Christ, and very welcome in morning worship for the whole hour.
7. Don't expect your child to listen to every word of the sermon (adults don't!). Let them doodle during the sermon. On the way home, invite her to share what she heard, and focus on what she did hear, not on what was missed. Doing this each Sunday will encourage your child to pay attention at her own level.

8. If your child should misbehave, try not to be embarrassed and impatient. Firm words of correction, if necessary, can be given in a serious, but kind and loving voice. (Example: “When you speak out during worship, I cannot hear the pastor. Please be quiet now so that all of us can listen. You may sing when the song comes or when we get home.”) Learning to participate and enjoy worship takes time just like any other learning. If your child begins to cry, you may wish to go out of the fellowship hall with him or her until calm is restored. At CPC we are working to build a “cry room” for very young children where adults will still be able to worship.
9. A comforting lap or arm around shoulders is a loving place to spend worship. In later life, that feeling and memory of warmth and security will be a part of the worship experience and teaches about God’s love as well as your own.
10. When you feel that your child is ready to receive communion, attend communion education workshop so that you may be prepared, and/or discuss the sacrament at home with your family. The church provides this workshop each fall, but the pastor can provide a version of it any time during the church year.
11. When babies are baptized in worship, discuss it with your child, recalling their own baptism, looking at the tiny clothes, pictures, and perhaps a video from their special day. Mark the date of your child’s baptism as a special day, somewhat like a birthday. It is their birthday in the church.
12. Teach your child to look for the colors of the seasons of the Christian year found in the church. They are blue for Advent, purple for Lent, white for Christmas, Epiphany and Easter, red for Pentecost and green for Sundays after Pentecost (all summer and fall).
13. Visit the church on a weekday and tour the building. Look for symbols and pictures on walls and other places which tell stories of Jesus’ life or point to God. Sit in the seats where your family sits and talk about the pew pad, prayer cards, and Bible.
14. Speak to friends after worship, and introduce your child to others, especially older friends. Both ages enjoy this interchange. Teach your child to shake hands and express friendliness.
15. Be sure your child knows the pastors and counts them as friends. Invite them to your home, go on a picnic together, or get to know them in some other way.
16. Encourage your child to “act out” worship at home. You’ll be amazed at how much of the order of worship they remember. Pretending to be worship leaders widens children’s understanding.
17. Encourage your child to participate in children’s choirs, Sunday School and other programs during the school year so that he or she will learn about worship, songs, Bible stories and learn to sing as well as lead in worship.
18. Help your child learn the Gloria, Doxology, and Lord’s Prayer by memory by practicing at home. You could obtain or make an audio copy to be played over and over. Use the Doxology and Gloria as blessings before meals. Children love the parts of worship they have memorized.
19. *Pray with and for your children always!*

adapted from a guide by Bonnie Lamberth