

Children Worship and Learning

Children are important members of our ELCA congregations. "We receive you as fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the same heavenly Father, and workers with us in the kingdom of God." (Lutheran Book of Worship, Holy Baptism, p.125.)

Worship is an important part of what the Body of Christ does. "Children learn especially by example and by trying things out. Inviting children to participate is the most powerful way to teach them. Guiding children in worship passes on to them a heritage of language and image and gesture by which they can then form their own approach to God. It is a gift they will be able to draw upon throughout the course of their lives. It is a gift which includes the clear message that they are absolutely integral to the community of faith." Julie Eileen Ryan, "Children Worshipping: the Challenges and the Gifts", Worship '93, September, 1993.

Children also learn the following in worship: they belong to Christ and we welcomed and included in God's church the beauty of music and art as expressions of praise and human responses to God are appropriate, enriching, and valued. God's gathered people hear and interpret stories from the Bible. worship is one place where God may speak to them. they are not only a part of a local faith community, but are also a part of the entire church of Christ.

The following suggestions can be used by worship and education leaders as worship and learning activities are planned. They can also be used to design a brochure for families and other adults to help them better understand the gifts and needs of children participating in worship.

Preparing at Home

Participation is much easier when we are familiar with what is being done. The following activities will give children the time to learn and reflect on what happens when we worship together:

Show your child the Lord's Prayer in the Bible (Matthew 6:9-13) or in Luther's Small Catechism. Discuss the meaning of each petition. Pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Pray at home for family, friends, work, school, needs of others beyond your neighborhood, and events of your congregation.

Read the scripture passages for the next Sunday at home during the week. Talk about themes that you might hear and see on Sunday.

Read the Words of Institution in the Bible (I Corinthians 11:23-25) or in Luther's Small Catechism. Discuss what Holy Communion means and what happens during worship.

Before Worship

The following suggestions will help children prepare for some of the specifics happening on any given Sunday.

Try to arrive in plenty of time to follow these suggestions prior to the beginning of worship.

Greeting and welcoming others before worship is encouraged in many congregations. Help children learn this by including them in your greetings. Introduce them as you introduce yourself to others.

Encourage children to include their prayer requests to worship leaders.

Use children's bulletins and/or a simplified version of your regular bulletin. Also begin to acquaint them with regular Sunday bulletins.

Encourage children to use their soft voice as soon as they enter the sanctuary.

Help children locate the hymns and liturgy for the service. Use bookmarks to mark the pages. Look together at the words, helping them to read and understand the meanings.

Comment on special events in worship such as a baptism, new members joining, a special day in life of the congregation, and changes in the church seasons and colors. Look around and discuss new banners or other visual changes in the sanctuary. Discuss symbols also.

During Worship

Assist our children during the service. Make sure they have the right page for hymns. Point out words to help them understand and participate. Let young children know when a part they are familiar with is coming. They can respond with "Hear our prayer," "Thanks be to God," and say all or part of the Lord's Prayer, for example.

Encourage children to take part in the Children's Message. Accompany them if they are timid.

Help children participate in giving to the life of the congregation by making sure they have their own offerings, regardless of the amount.

Sit close to the front of the sanctuary. Children are able to participate more fully when they can see what is happening. Provide pencil, crayons, and paper for drawing. Don't be surprised if you see symbols of the church in their drawings as they listen to what is being said around them. Hand activity can actually help them concentrate and reflect on what they experience in worship.

Put together a bag of soft toys, cloth books, etc. for young children to use only during worship. Remove young children's shoes. It reduces noise as they move around.

After Worship

Walk around the sanctuary to look more closely at the font, the altar, banners, windows, etc. Encourage your children to greet others as you stay for fellowship, prepare for Sunday school, or leave to return home. Talk with your child about what he/she heard, saw, did, and felt during worship. Make worship a regular part of the time you spend with your child. Let God's love be evident in your family life the rest of the week.

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