



CHILDREN IN WORSHIP

Guidelines for Children, Parents, and Friends at The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration

Children are always welcome in the church services at Transfiguration. More importantly than that, they are full and important members of the body of Christ, and their presence is a joy. Worship is one of the basic ways people learn what it means to be a Christian. In the Episcopal Church, in particular, corporate worship on Sunday, rather than a Sunday School class or fellowship group, is the occasion when the whole community gathers. Children learn how to worship by participating in this Sunday gathering.

Despite the possibility for distraction, children need to worship and are needed by all of us to complete the community around God's table.

One job as adults is to create an atmosphere in which children can learn to worship in ways that are consistent with their respective levels of development. We can help our children discover that appropriate behavior in church is also the most rewarding behavior. We can help each other as parents learn what kind of worship experience best suits our children at their various stages of development.

WHEN CHILDREN WORSHIP REGULARLY, THEY:

- See that they belong to Christ and are welcome in his church.
- Learn the parts of the liturgy by heart.
- Are enriched by the beauty of music and other arts as expressions of praise of God.
- Build memorable, shared experiences of Christian community that will strengthen them throughout their lives.
- Hear Bible stories read and interpreted and, thus, form a foundation upon which moral decisions can be based.

- Share the gift of their own talents as acolytes, ushers, and choristers.
- Witness the drama of Baptism and the Eucharist as trustworthy signs of God's grace and mercy.
- Discover that they are valued as persons by God and by God's people in the church.
- Nurture their innate sense of wonder and mystery.

Bringing children to worship may not always be easy, but it is an essential part of their growth in Christ. They need it, and the body of Christ assembled needs them.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN TO WORSHIP

We welcome children as they are, with abilities and attention spans appropriate to their ages.

Preschool children come to church with:

- A short attention span
- Seemingly endless energy
- Growing curiosity about everything

These traits will bring surprises of many sorts and test all of us adults. That's a given. But there are several things parents can do to make worship with young children work better for everyone.

- Prepare for church by making plans during the week. Talk with your children about whom they will see and what will happen in church. Perhaps plan a special outfit or a special breakfast to mark the day. A positive dialogue during the ride to church will help keep children focused and looking forward to the service.
- Arrive at church in time to find a good place to sit. Sitting in the front provides the best visibility and helps many children stay attentive. If you prefer a back row, let your children sit on the aisle. Children

are going to be interested in things they can see and hear.

- Bring a book or quiet toy and allow your children to be active within the limits of the situation. Encourage adult-like behavior without overcorrecting.
- Teach your children through quiet and consistent repetition the different parts of the service.
- Associate worship with a time for special togetherness between parents and children.
- Affirm attentive behavior and participation.

School-age children have a growing capacity for listening and remembering. Parents have a great opportunity now to help their children toward greater participation in worship.

- Help them learn the Lord's Prayer, creeds, and other parts of the liturgy.
- Review the order of service in the pew bulletin and help your children look for new words. Point out parts of the service where the people respond and help your children be ready to join in.
- Ask your children on the way home what they remember and share your own thoughts and feelings with them.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Like most of us, children learn and remember best things they actually do. At Transfiguration, there are ways for elementary age and older children to become actors in the worship drama.

- **Choirs:** In choir, children learn discipline, teamwork, and theology, as well as music.
- **Acolytes:** Children may serve as acolytes, carrying banners, torches, and crosses and serving at the altar. For many adults today, being an acolyte was formative religious experience, and it can be the same for our children.

Other Opportunities: Reading Holy Scripture, leading our intercessory prayers, and ushering are special ways for older children to be involved.

THE CHILD CARE WING

Our Child Care Wing is proud of the hospitality and learning we provide our youngest members. It is one of the most important ministries of our parish. On Saturday nights (for the 5:30 service) and on Sunday mornings (for the 9:00 and 11:15 services), nursery care is available in the Child Care Wing (outside the North Transept doors) for children up to 36 months. The Child Care Wing is bright, clean, and well supervised by loving staff and volunteers. We ask parents to use their best judgment about whether to leave their children in the Child Care Wing while they worship. Some infants are easy to bring to church; others are not. Many two-year olds cannot sit through a service, while some can. Parents should leave a four-year-old in Child Care only if the child is having a particularly difficult day. Parents know their children best. We encourage families to pray together, but the Child Care Wing is there when that is not going to work.

WHAT OTHER ADULTS CAN DO

Adults who are not parents, or whose children are grown, also have a part to play. As an integral part of the community of faith, children enrich worship for all of us.

All adults can:

- Remember children's limitations and be tolerant of minor disturbances.
- Appreciate the vital role children play in our services.
- Acknowledge the children's presence (for example, when passing the peace).
- Set a good example in their own behavior.
- Help a child sitting close by who has lost his or her place in the Service Bulletin or Prayer Book, or needs help finding a hymn.

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