Parenting In the Pew

*For concise recommendations for worship with your children, please see our brochure, “Children in Worship”*



Children bring special gifts to worship and grow in faith through their regular inclusion and participation in the worship of the congregation.

Book of Order W-3.1004

The parent(s) or the one(s) exercising parental responsibility should teach their children about Christian worship by example, by providing for household worship, and by discussion and instruction.

Book of Order W-5.7002

**Before Worship**

I don’t know about your house, but Sunday morning at my house is hectic. We are hunting matching shoes, tights without holes, checking hem lines, untangling hair, and getting everyone in the car as we say through gritted teeth, “Hurry up! We are going to worship God.” My children have noted more than once that my tone of voice changes and the smile appears as we enter the church doors. If only their behavior would change as well! But they are less schooled in the social graces and perhaps more authentic than I so their arguing and frustration often enters the sanctuary with them.

Robbie Castleman, author of Parenting in the Pew, states that “Sunday morning begins Saturday night.” I believe that preparing for Sunday happens every day of the week. Here are some ideas for preparing your family’s heart and home for full participation in the work and wonder of worship.

* **Make worship part of your family routine.** Just like preparing for school days, families can prepare for worship days with a regular routine that eliminates children asking each week, “Are we going to church today?” They already know the answer, “Of course, where else would we be?”
* **Prepare your heart.** Are you excited about worship? Share your enthusiasm with your children, just as you would share your enthusiasm about a special celebration. Let your children hear you say to your friends, “No, we can’t stay out late on Saturday night, we need to get up early on Sunday for worship.”
* **Talk about worship during the week.** Read the sermon scriptures and wonder with your child about them. Talk about the friends they will see at church. Sing the songs and pray the prayers we sing and pray at church.
* **Prepare on Saturday night.** Lay out clothes. Shine shoes. Lay out Bibles and offerings. Children learn so much by watching you. Talk about what you are doing to prepare and why. Sunday morning can transform from a “have to” to a “get to!”

**During Worship**

In church school over the summer, our children are learning some routines which you can enhance with your regular weekly practice.

* **Learning Your Part:**  During church school, students have been marking worship bulletins for the various movements of worship: when to stand up, when to listen, when to pray, when to sing. They will bring their special bulletins with them to worship. They will also be learning our common responses and prayers: the Gloria Patri, the Doxology, the Apostles Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Practicing these at home will help children to feel more at home in worship. These make excellent table blessings and prayers at bed time. Children will feel more like members of the worshiping community if they know their part.
* **Finding Your Place:** Today, students are making bookmarks. We hope that children will use these bookmarks to mark the hymns in their hymnals and the scriptures in their Bibles. Plan to arrive in the sanctuary early so that you can spend a few minutes finding these pages and maybe even reading over the scripture, greeting fellow worshipers or quieting yourselves for worship. Please help children read along with the scriptures and sing along with the hymns. They will enjoy “being in charge” of this part of worship.
* **Offering Gifts:** Later this summer, students will learn about tithing. They will make three part banks to learn about being good stewards of their resources. One section of the bank will be for savings, one for spending and one for offerings to God. It is a good idea to think of ways that your child can earn money or receive a regular allowance so that they can begin to bring offerings from their own resources to church and participate in this important response to God’s grace. **Another wonderful way** for children to offer something to God in worship is to use the **offering slip** they will receive with their worship bulletin. After listening to the scripture lessons, while listening to the sermon, your child may wish to draw a picture on the offering slip (which is about the size and shape of a check). This drawing should be a reflection of what they have heard in the scripture or sermon. Please make sure that they add their name, date, and scripture reference to the sheet. Then, when the plate is passed, have your child place their picture in the offering plate. Children’s offerings will be shared with the church community during the week – the cover of children’s bulletins, included with sermon CDs sent to shut-ins, added to the website…

**After Worship**

* **Talk about it:** Ask questions that go beyond recalling the facts. Wonder about the stories. “How do you think the sheep felt when he got lost?” “I wonder how Peter felt when Jesus called him out onto those stormy waves.” “Do you think our sanctuary is bigger or smaller than Noah’s ark?” Share your feelings and ask your child about theirs. “I was so happy to see my friend Sarah today. She has been in the hospital.” “I felt particularly close to God during communion today.” “The sermon reminded me how important it is to share our blessings with others.” “I noticed you smiling during the offering time. What were you thinking about?” “Did you notice the rose on the pulpit today? That always makes me feel happy to know that a new baby has been born in our church family.”

**Come!**

**Let us worship the Lord!**