

The Small Child in the Pew:

We are SO blessed to have so many children at Worship each Sunday morning. It is the feeling of both the Board of Directors and the Pastor that all children and their parents be made to feel as welcome in Worship as possible! It is among the saints of God at Worship that their own understanding of what it is to be a child of God will be nurtured and passed on.



When little children come to church adults sometimes wonder why! Let me suggest that bringing children into the sanctuary is something like letting them eat at the dinner table, even though their manners are far from elegant. It's done in the hope that, given time, they will begin to feel like a part of the family. Children giggle, they poke, and they swing their legs simply because they are children. BUT they also sing, pray and give with us. So this is written to suggest that we adults should accept, even value, the children's restlessness during worship, trusting that they are also learning:

- * That it is important to come to this place each Sunday;
- * That they belong to this special company of people;
- * That the sights and sounds and feels of the sanctuary are good, though not always understandable;
- * That something is expected of them in this place, and that they may respond in song, and in offering.

AGE 2-5: The two to five year old spends considerable time climbing off and on the pew and often sits or kneels on the floor, may wander down the aisle if allowed to sit on the end seat, insists on a personal bulletin, keeps it in constant noisy motion, and clings to it tenaciously if a parent reaches over to grab it, fits toes nicely into the hymnbook rack and finds that more comfortable than letting them hang down.

But let's look for a moment at the other things that are happening, at the same time: one of these children can pick up the hymnal and may sing along with everyone else, albeit with unrecognizable words and possibly a very different tune, adds voice to the Lord's Prayer, pleasing both self and parents; wants to hold the offering plate as it goes by (risky) and adds an envelope to its contents, perhaps sensing that worship involves giving.

AGE 6-7: The six/seven year old generally sits in place unless there is an acceptable reason for moving, the best one being a dropped bulletin. More than once during the service the six/seven year old's bulletin flutters to the floor, landing well under the pew ahead. It is always followed by a small body that wriggles under various feet, and returns grinning triumphantly. While feet are closer to the floor at this age, the hymn book rack is still handier, but the increase in shoe size creates a risk that feet will get stuck there, causing a minor panic.

Just stop to consider though—this child can do some new things. The six/seven year old knows when to sit and when to stand, sings the choral responses, particularly if those nearby are singing; is beginning to find the hymns from the bulletin, and is a good hymn book holder, is excited to discover some readable words in the prayers or hymns, and is beginning to apply reading skill to matters of the faith!

AGE 8: The eight year old child can handle the bulletin with more agility, in fact has learned to fold it into an airplane; has ALSO learned NOT to sail said airplane over the heads of the congregation, but enjoys threatening to do so; swings feet back and forth creating a discernable rocking sensation, often hitting legs or bumping the pew ahead; pretends to take money OUT of the offering plate instead of putting it in; and licks lips and looks painfully hungry when sees the bread and wine of Communion.

BUT there is another story: The eight year old can read the bulletin and can find the place in the Lutheran Book of Worship and follow along as the Pastor or lector reads. The eight year old also knows that we read the hymns differently than other books or lessons and follows the hymns pretty well with a helping finger. There may be eagerness to sing in the choir—this is a real sign of readiness for fuller participation.

The eight year old usually mutters along on the Apostles' or Nicene Creed and may surprise everybody by asking who Pontius Pilate was and how Jesus rose from the dead, and why we believe in the “holy catholic Church” when we are Lutherans—very good questions for a young Christian to be asking!

SO! Bringing your primary age child to church can be a real exercise in aggravation. But then again, so are many other facets of parenting and we manage our way through them. Of course, we do not want our children to be disruptive or hamper the church's worship. So, if they get too noisy or antsy—there is always the opportunity to bring them to the nursery or outside for a bit of a break! Yet we must remember that baptized children ARE members of the Church, and children should be among the worshipping people. They may not participate just the way adults do, but they are growing in understanding and learning to take their place in the church family. Proverbs 22:6 says that if we teach a child how to live, that experience will be remembered throughout life. Young children in worship may have difficult moments, but it is their birthright as Christians to worship. Our satisfaction comes in later years when we see them stand in the midst of the church with a faith of their own!

