

**7 Pro Tips for Children’s Messages**

by Janelle Rozek Hooper, Program Director for Ministry with Children for the ELCA, ministrylinks.online

1. **The Leader leads.**
	1. You lead the direction of the message. Engage children, but not in such a way that the children responding to your questions is what you rely on to drive the subject. For example, if Leader asks, “What happens on Easter?” and children respond “We hunt for eggs!” then hard to redirect. Instead possible leader question could be, “On Easter we experience life from death. How do you think Jesus might have felt after he died and came back to life?” and children respond, “wonkey, tired, excited to see his friends…”
	2. Start with a focus statement (don’t worry that it will give too much away.) Sentence stem example: Today we will talk about…(how to wait with patience.)

2. **Keep it simple by having one focus and a clear structure.**

* 1. A “one focus” example, “Today I want to discuss with you about talking with Jesus. The Bible tells us about a mother who talked with Jesus in the hopes Jesus would heal her daughter. At first Jesus didn’t want to talk with her, but the mother was persistent because she loved her daughter and wanted her to feel better. To the disciples surprise Jesus said because of the woman’s faith he would help. Then he simply spoke words and her daughter was healed. There are a whole bunch of ways we can talk with Jesus including: speaking out-loud, writing down our thoughts, drawing pictures, walking and talking. Is there a way you like to talk with Jesus? Let’s walk over to our prayer station where we can light a candle and talk with Jesus about the people on our prayer list that we hope can find healing..
	2. A clear structure means you know before you give the message that you are (for ex) retelling a Jesus story, giving a history/church lesson, or a moral lesson[[1]](#footnote-0). Stick to one style, since you only five minutes or less. The example above is a “retelling of a Jesus story” from Matthew 15:21-28.
1. **Ask open-ended questions**. Only ask questions you do not need only one answer to in order to drive the message. If the kids answer at all it is highly likely they will not say what you have in mind. The message can not hinge on their answers. Instead, invite children to “wonder” rather than to “answer.”[[2]](#footnote-1) See ex. from #1.
2. **Keep it short**. For highest impact have a take-away statement/message. Kids thrive on repetition. Think of each word you say needing to have impact like a poem.
	1. If you have a closing prayer, one sentence prayers are recommended (it does not need summarize the whole message!) Build in a tradition such as the same prayer every week or a responsive prayer. Routines invite greater engagement.
	2. Perhaps think of your message in terms of bullet points.
		1. Focus statement
		2. Retell Jesus Story
		3. Examples of talking with Jesus
		4. Invite their examples of talking with Jesus
		5. Movement/action. (ex. going to prayer station, candle, prayer of people.)
3. **Play to your strengths**. You like to sing? Great get the kids singing.[[3]](#footnote-2) You like to read? Great, there is no of end of stories and illustrations to help children engage in faith.[[4]](#footnote-3) Let the children get to know you by using your particular gifts.
4. **Less talking, more movement.** They have been sitting a long time (in kids time). If you invite them to sit make sure you face the kids (not the adults.) They also don’t have to be center stage. Where’s best for the kid’s engagement? Can you incorporate a conga line or “simon says”? What about hand motions? Sign Language? For a baptism have all the kids sit at the font and provide a drum roll. Multi-sensory works!
5. **Stay present and flexible**. Keep to the events of this day not last Sunday or Sunday School or any other event that isn’t happening right then. Kids are thinking concretely at this stage and you need to make the most of your short time by keeping their minds right there, with you. Kids should never be a source of humor for the congregation, but that doesn’t mean curious kids don’t say the darndest things. ENJOY the ride that we call “Children’s Messages,” Jesus did! (Matthew 19:14)

**Bonus tips!**

\*This isn’t quiz time! Engage the kids but don’t quiz them.

\*It is not required to follow the lectionary or pair with your (adult) sermon.

\*Please, don’t hand out candy. Parents have a hard enough time keeping them settled.

\*Specific ideas so kids of all abilities are welcome. Go to: <https://clcnetwork.org/for-churches/roles/> then click on “Children’s Message Provide/Teacher.”

1. “I Wonder: Engaging a Child’s Curiosity about the Bible” by Elizabeth Caldwell, Abingdon Press, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. [www.godlyplayfoundation.org](http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. “Piggyback Psalms: 100+ Bible Songs to Tunes You Know” by Emily La Branche Delikat, Abingdon Press, 2018. An example is “I can Listen” to the tune of “Are You Sleeping” for the example from #2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <http://storypath.upsem.edu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)