

THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

Some adults may question the wisdom of including preschool children in our worship. It is true that they may sometimes distract those around them or distress parents with their behavior. However, they are vital members of our parish family and the circle at God's table is incomplete without them – noise and all.



The preschool child comes to worship with:

- ❖ A short attention span
- ❖ Seemingly endless energy
- ❖ A growing curiosity about everything

The combination of the above ingredients can test the patience of even the most understanding adult, but there are several things parents can do to help make the experience more relaxed and enjoyable for everyone:

- ❖ Sit near the front of the church where children have a clear view of the altar. Ask what they see, or play “I spy” before the service – help them notice the colors, fabrics, candles, windows, pictures, crosses, designs, etc.
- ❖ Prepare your child for different parts of the service, explaining special events like baptism ahead of time and also answering “right now” questions in a calm whisper.
- ❖ Allow your preschooler to bring a favorite stuffed animal, picture and coloring books, or other quiet toys to the service. Make use of *The Sunday Paper* and other children's resources available in the church.
- ❖ Try to encourage small amounts of adult-like behavior. Choose one or two things to focus on – such as standing or kneeling when the rest of the congregation does – and during other times allow your child to be somewhat active within the limits of the situation, being careful not to be too distracting to others.
- ❖ Use church quiet time as a chance for special togetherness with your child – time to snuggle them in your lap or keep your arm around them – things there may not always be enough time for during the routine of a busy week. Make church special family togetherness time.

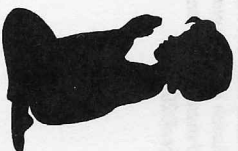
THE PRIMARY AGE CHILD

The school-age child brings new abilities to worship:

- ❖ Longer attention span for attentive listening
- ❖ Improving reading skills
- ❖ The ability to memorize information

As these aptitudes develop, parents can foster greater participation in worship. Here are some ideas to try:

- ❖ Help your child memorize the Lord's prayer or other simple responses such as “The Lord be with you” – “And also with you”
- ❖ Review the bulletin with your child to identify new or difficult words. Make sure to point out those parts where the congregation responds so that your child will be ready to participate.
- ❖ You may want to hold onto any children's activities until the sermon begins so that your child has something new to do during the longest part of sitting still. The early part of the service has more movement and things of interest to a child. If children begin coloring as soon as you arrive, they will likely be finished before the sermon even begins!
- ❖ Help your child find hymns in the hymnal. Children this age can understand that we read a hymnal differently than other books. Many can follow the hymns fairly well with the help of a finger – either their own or a parent's.
- ❖ After church, ask what your child saw or what they liked best. It's amazing what children can absorb, so be ready for questions about how Jesus rose from the dead or why we believe in the holy “catholic” church when we are Episcopalians. Encourage questions. If you don't know, say so... and assure them you will try to find out if you can't answer right away.



Questions or Concerns?

Please contact Amanda Wischkamper, Director of Children's Formation at (512) 610-3500 or amanda@stdave.org.



HASSLE & HOPE

Some days you will find that bringing a young child to church may be a real test of your patience! Many facets of parenting can be aggravating, but when something is important, we keep trying. Of course we don't want to be disruptive or hinder the worship service in any way, but we must also remind ourselves that children are an essential part of our church community.

Children may have difficult moments during a service, but it is their birthright as Christians to worship in our church. Remember in Baptism, we vow to “do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ.” Being welcomed into the church and learning about liturgy helps establish lifelong habits that will help children develop a strong faith of their own.

CHILDREN & COMMUNION

The Episcopal Church encourages full participation in our liturgy and children of all ages are welcome at our altar. When we baptize children, we welcome them into God's family, just as they have been welcomed into our individual families. It may be years before children understand the history or values of our family, but they are nonetheless valuable members. Likewise in church, children may not understand all the mysteries of communion (who does? ☺) but they are learning how the Family of God breaks bread together and receives sustenance for the journey – so as soon as your child has been baptized and is physically able to ingest solid foods, they are welcome to participate in our Eucharist.

You can help your child prepare for communion by discussing it at home. Explain in your own words what the Eucharist means to you. Explain how we remember Christ's life and how we believe Christ is present. Teach your child to hold out their crossed hands to receive the bread and say “Amen” or how to cross their arms over their chest if they do not wish to receive.

If you have questions, please contact us at the church.