

August 2023

Dear families,

Years ago, families at Salford who had a three-year-old making the transition from being in the nursery to being present for the whole worship service would receive a letter like this in their mailboxes. As I recently came across it, I found the reminders to be very helpful for myself! So I've created a version that might benefit all of us with young children in the worship service, as they continue to grow as participants in worship and sermon listeners.

Having children in worship can be daunting. You may be worried that they will be bored or distract you or others. Worship is an important act of our community, and we want to support you in making it accessible even to our youngest participants. They are welcome!

We hope your child grows to find worship to be meaningful and connective. As they grow, they'll be able to participate in new ways. Here are strategies you might try—or may already be doing—to engage them in worship:

Regularly let your child know that worship is important to you and that you are excited that they can share it with you. Talk more about the content of the service than about worship behavior and focus on what a child did hear and experience rather than what they missed. Whispering during church is a perfectly appropriate way to bridge the gap between what is happening in worship and your child.

Help children use the bulletin and hymnals as they are able. Show them how to join the call to worship, read the words to hymns, and follow along with scriptures in the bible. Before they can read, they can hum along with hymns, sing repeated lines, and draw pictures in response to words that are read.

When you give them something to occupy them, **continue to seek ways to engage your children in worship**. Children are often listening as they are playing, whether or not it looks like it.

Help your child know that **speaking, singing, and listening are all a part of worship**. The truth is that most people tune in and out from sermons. Children do the same thing. We don't expect them to hear the whole sermon, but they can be taught how to tune in and out and think about what the preacher says.

Have a written or drawn conversation with your child during the sermon. Write notes or draw pictures about what you hear, feel, and think in the margins of the bulletin or in a worship journal you bring each week.

Take advantage of the ways children can participate in worship, such as being an usher with the offering, reading scripture, and offering special music. Leading worship in these ways (and more!) can help kids feel that worship is relevant to them too.

Give your child and yourself grace for their stage of development and their unique abilities. Challenges in worship are different for each kid, and some face particular challenges due to sensory sensitivity, ADHD, or other factors. “Good” engagement in worship will look different for different children. Please reach out if you need support or strategies for worshiping with your child.

Talk about the service on the way home. What are you taking away from the service? What did it make you think about differently? Ask your children what they noticed or thought about. When this happens every week, over time children learn to be ready with at least one contribution to the conversation. You may find you are more attentive to the service, too!

Children are an important part of this congregation. We hope these suggestions offer tools to support their participation in worship as they grow. Please let us know if there is any way we can help make it a more meaningful experience for you and them.

In partnership,
Jennifer Svetlik, director of children’s faith formation
and the Salford pastoral team