

## Worshipping together

- Sit where children can see and exit with a minimum of fuss. Sit where friends can be seen, but not necessarily with them. (A pew full of children is a guaranteed noisemaker.)
- Be prepared to explain parts of the service. Children are always full of questions. Often these come right in the middle of an important moment. This can be very annoying but it needs to be understood and accepted for the interest and involvement it shows. Find ways to respond to your child calmly and positively in the middle of worship, even if it is only to assure them that you will explain later.
- Try to remember what it was like to be a child. Be understanding of their need to move around. Accept them and care for them in the worship setting. Be appreciative of their presence and always be ready to cuddle.
- Retreat when necessary. In certain cases exit is desirable: a teething baby; a hurt, distressed child; loud, rambunctious behaviour; a toileting emergency; or if a child has set up a distracting pattern of play with another child. Exits relieve tension, teach the child what behaviour is acceptable, and underscore the “specialness” of worship, and their own “different” behaviour in that setting. When the cause of the child’s complaint is resolved, return. Exiting without re-entry is counterproductive.
- Try to keep a sense of humour. Every parent knows what it is like to feel anxious that your child is disturbing others. Most have a tendency to be overly conscious of this and can be far too critical of their children. Try to trust in the goodwill of people around you. With humour and compassion, you will naturally be able to tell the difference between energetic participation and distracting misbehaviour.



# Being with Children in Worship

## Hints for Parents, Grandparents, and ‘Adult Friends’



## Discovering time for yourself

“Sunday morning worship is my time to quietly reflect and meditate and get centred for the week. Please don’t take that away from me.” With needs and expectations such as these it is not surprising and very understandable that many people feel resentful about the presence of children during their weekly quiet time. However, the solution cannot lie in excluding our youngest members from worship. The simple truth is that those who feel this way need to be encouraged to change their expectations for Sunday morning. We need to be reminded that communal worship was never intended to be a time for individuals to conduct their private devotions. If we cultivate a daily relationship with God and make time for personal devotions during the week, when we gather with other worshippers on Sunday morning we will be able to participate generously and wholeheartedly with our children. When God is a part of our daily life, the communal purpose of Sunday worship becomes clearer.



## Preparing children to go with the flow

In order for Sunday worship to be a positive experience for everyone, children also need to have some clear expectations. They need to discover how they can take part. Most children understand routine and enjoy ritual. Their lives are full of natural moments of wonder and awe. They have an extraordinary ability to express their feelings. They need to belong and have a natural desire to participate. They love to celebrate. At a very young age children experience all these aspects of any good worship service. We simply need to help them sense the rhythm and flow of worship so that they can draw upon their own natural capacities.

- Have times of prayer and silence at home before meals. This is wonderful preparation for similar ritual moments in church.
- Help children cultivate their own relationship with God by praying with them regularly at bedtime and spontaneously when moments arise. This helps them to understand what is happening during the Prayers of the People.
- Teach children how to whisper so they are quiet when asking you something in worship.
- Sing hymns and church songs with and for your child – not piously, but naturally and joyfully.
- Talk about your own special memories of church occasions and places, and talk about ways in which God is helping you in your life right now.



## Anticipating a special day

- Talk about your own anticipation of the specialness of Sunday worship. Think about friends you are looking forward to seeing again.
- Create a Saturday evening ritual together. With your child, lay out their Sunday outfit, their offering, special service books, etc. Some families put up a “Sunday banner.”
- Agree on what quiet activities the child may do if they feel restless. Packing a “Sunday bag” with suitable soft toys, or Bible related activities, or plain paper, pencils and crayons helps head off disruptive behaviour. Remember that doodling can be a way of thinking and praying. Discuss ahead, and agree on “fair” action should a child have an attack of “ants-in-the-pants.”
- Practice the responses that occur in your church every Sunday. This enables children to master the rhythm of worship, and to feel at home in the service. It also nurtures a wonderful sense of belonging. Deeper meaning will come as children continue to worship through the years.
- Talk about the season of the Church year, and have a Sabbath tablecloth or runner of that colour. Anticipate aspects of the service that the child might watch for such as seasonal decorations, symbols, bread and wine, etc. Children who are educated to “see” these elements will feel comfortable when they actually do occur in the service.

