

## Children In Worship

Contributed by Julie Blum  
Last Updated Tuesday, 15 January 2019

Children of all ages are welcome in worship. We have a children's activity bags, a book shelf of kids books and kids bulletins available at the back of the church.

Below is some information about why we welcome children to worship and how you, as a parent, can make it a more enjoyable and meaningful experience for them, please click "read more."

Why do we welcome children in worship?

Children are a part of our church family, and we share responsibility for nurturing their spiritual needs. We embraced this role at their baptism. They will thrive with our loving acceptance of them as partners in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Children add richness to the community. They bring a new perspective to old familiar rituals, they show a unique understanding of the wonder and mystery of the sacraments, and they have a fascinating way of taking nothing for granted. Their presence is essential to the vitality and growth of our church.

By welcoming children at our church's most sacred moments, they learn that nothing can separate them from the love of God. It is through our worship service that children can come to know God and not just know about God. By worshiping together with our children we pass on our traditions for experiencing God through the sacraments, music, proclaiming and hearing the good news, and offering our gifts and our prayers.

What can families do at home to prepare children for worship?

Make Sundays a special occasion. Have a special breakfast that you only eat on Sundays, listen to special music in the car, or have a lunch tradition after church on Sundays. This will help children understand that Sunday is a special day.

Try home devotions. This will familiarize children with aspects of worship and worship behavior in less stressful surroundings. Children love to learn things by heart – teach them The Lord's Prayer, favorite hymns or parts of the liturgy. They will remember on Sunday mornings.

Watch what they eat. Limit caffeine and sugar intake to prevent hyperactivity (a low sugar/high protein breakfast is great).

Look ahead for teaching moments such as baptisms, confirmation, communion and changes in the church year. Use these as opportunities for teaching and learning, explain them, then encourage children to watch for certain words or symbols on those days. It is perfectly okay if you do not know all the answers to your child's questions. Ask the pastor for more details. This is a great way to learn together!

Think ahead—Make sure your child gets a sip of water and visits the bathroom prior to worship.

What can families do to help children during Worship?

Attend worship regularly – repetition and frequent reinforcement are crucial to a child's learning.

Arrive early so you have time to get settled. Invite your child to ask questions before worship begins, and point out interesting elements of worship—how the altar is set for communion, the different colors representing the different seasons, or who your child knows who is singing in the choir.

Try sitting up front. While it may be natural to want to sit in back so you can slip out if your child gets restless, many children pay better attention when they are sitting up front where they can actually see what is going on.

Help your child participate. Even if scriptures are printed in the bulletin, give children the chance to find them in the pew Bible. Help your child remember to bring offering to put in the offering plate.

Speak to your children in a whisper, close to their ear—they may copy you by responding in the same quiet way. If your child has a question during worship, answer it!

Model participation – sing the hymns, read the scripture, say the prayers. Your child will follow your example.

Be clear about the behavior you expect during worship. State your expectations in a positive way, such as, “We all stand when we sing” or “This is the quiet time, you can talk after the next song.” Resist the temptation to add, “Alright?” You are not asking for consensus, you are simply letting your child know how you expect him or her to act in this place.

Be realistic about limits. Little ones cannot be expected to sit still all the time. However, children in elementary grades are old enough to participate in worship with your help. Set goals that are important and reachable for your family. If having quiet surroundings during the Prayers of the People is crucial to you, concentrate on helping your child recognize and observe that special time in the service. Compliment the child who reaches the goals that you set.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, children can bother those around them. Please do not feel embarrassed if you need to take your child out of the service for a few moments – everyone has a bad day occasionally. You can take your child to the basement or the nursery and return when your youngster seems calmer. Or if it seems best for you to depart with your child, please know the church will be here next week, always ready to welcome you back. When you are attending to your child's needs, you are still an important part of our church family.

Thanks to the congregation of Decatur First United Methodist Church in Decatur, Georgia for providing the outline of this helpful material on children in worship.