

Let the Children Come:

A Guide to Worshipping with Children

[Jesus] said to [the disciples],
“Let the little children come to me;
do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that
the kingdom of God belongs.

Truly I tell you,
whoever does not receive
the kingdom of God
as a little child
will never enter it.”

And he took them up in his arms,
laid his hands on them,
and blessed them.

(Mark 10: 14b-16)

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How Can I Help my Children Learn to Participate in Worship?

With a little bit of planning and forethought, children can participate in many parts of the worship service each week. Children are not born knowing how to worship God in assembly; just like many other life-skills, they do better if they are taught. This guide gives several ways that every child can participate in the parts of the worship service. Chose only 3-5 with which to begin; it is a process, not a quest for perfection! You might even invite your child into the conversation. What parts do they already feel comfortable with? What do they want to learn? What are they excited about or willing to do? Work on your 3-5 goals until both you and your children are comfortable with them, and then return to this list to add 2-3 until your entire family is participating in the worship service together. God bless you and your family as you learn to worship God together!

In Christ,

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WORSHIP PARTICIPATION CHECKLIST: BEFORE WORSHIP

- Prepare your offering envelope.
- Encourage your kids to give.
- Prepare your bulletin and hymn book before worship begins.
- Write out the prayers you wish to share during worship.

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

- Listen to the announcements together.
- Prepare to worship God.

GATHERING

- Participate in the Confession together.
- Find and sing the Gathering Song together
- Participate in the Greeting.
- Find and sing the Kyrie together.
- Find and sing the Hymn of Praise together.
- Participate in the Prayer of the Day.

WORD

- Listen to and/or read the readings together.
- Participate in the Psalm reading.
- Encourage your children to participate in the children's sermon.
- Welcome the Gospel together in song
- Listen to and/or read the Gospel reading together.
- Engage the Word of God during the sermon.
- Find and sing the Hymn of the Day together.

FAITHFUL RESPONSE

- Profess your faith by heart.
- Participate in the Prayers of the People together
- Offer the Peace of Christ to one another.
- Teach your children how to offer their gifts to God.
- Participate in the offering prayer together.
- Pray the prayer that Jesus taught by heart.

SENDING

- Receive the blessing as we prepare to go.
- Find and sing the Sending Song together.
- Send your child to receive what they need, pray, and dismiss our congregation.

AFTER WORSHIP

- Take worship with you.
- Talk about what happened at church together.
- Revisit worship all week long.

BEFORE WORSHIP

Offering Preparation:

--**Prepare your offering envelope** before church and invite your kids into conversation. What are you giving this week/month? How did you decide to give that amount? What are you intentionally giving up to give this amount? Why do you feel it is important to give to the church? Let your kids put the money into your offering envelope and seal it. If they are old enough, you might even encourage them to fill it out.

--**Encourage Your Kids to Give:** You can also encourage your kids to give themselves. Get some small envelopes (or use old or extra envelope available at church) and let your kids decorate them before church and put their own offering in. Talk to them about giving to the church. We give generously because Jesus gave generously...what does that mean to you? Make this a regular part of preparing for worship as a family.

Bulletin/Hymn Book Preparation:

Prepare your bulletin and hymn book before worship begins: Before worship, go through the bulletin together. What is going to happen in worship today? What parts would you like to participate in as a family? What are the hymn numbers? Can you find them in the book? You can use the provided bookmarks or even different parts of the bulletin to mark the hymns so they are easy to find when it is time to sing. If we are using a setting in the book, you can also mark the beginning of the service.

Prayers of the People Preparation:

Write out the prayers you wish to share during worship: Before worship begins, you can take time to talk about what prayer you would like to offer for the prayers of the people. You will find sheets on which to offer your prayers at the end of the bench toward the middle of church. Write them together so that you will be prepared to give them when the pastor asks for them.

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

Announcements/Prayer Concerns:

--**Listen to the announcements together.** Are there any events in which you would like to participate as a family this week? Something that you think it would be fun for parents or children to participate in? Are there any prayer concerns that you hear that you could add to your own prayers at home?

--Prepare to worship God. At the end of the announcements, the pastor will offer a few moments to prepare your hearts and minds for the worship of God. What are you thinking about today? What do you have to offer to God? What are you hoping God has to offer to you? What does it mean to you to set aside time to worship God? How can you share these things with your children as worship begins?

Confession: Participate in the Confession together. Now it is time to bring our sins in front of God, to say sorry for them, and to ask for and receive forgiveness. In the time it takes for everyone to stand up and get to the right place in the book or bulletin, remind your children what part of the service is coming.

--Young children: teach them how to cross themselves. You can find a video to teach this here: <https://youtu.be/PhDirWRgwcc>

There are two times to cross yourself during the confession and forgiveness. Help them to do this, either across their body or on their forehead to remind them of the promise that God made to them in baptism that we are always forgiven of the bad things we do, no matter what.

--Pre-Readers: Children of this age can both cross themselves and say “Amen” with the congregation. During the quiet time, remind your child that this is their time to talk to God about the things they have done in the past week that they are sorry for. It could be disagreeing with a brother or sister, or disobeying a parent or teacher, or maybe just not finishing their supper in a world/state/community where other children go to bed hungry every night. After the pastor pronounces forgiveness, you could reinforce this with your child: God forgives you for everything! You could also encourage a little family “Hooray!” or give each other high fives, or just really mean it when you say “Amen!” at the end.

--Readers: After you have learned everything in the previous two sections, you can move on to reading the confession with the congregation. The worship leader speaks the words in the regular print; the people in the congregation speak the words in the bold print. Are there any words or phrases you don’t understand or need to look up? Look them up together and talk about what they mean before or after worship.

Gathering Song: Find and sing the Gathering Song together. Use the time while people are sitting down and finding the hymn and the musician is introducing the hymn to remind your child what is coming next. Find the hymn in the book where you marked it earlier. Use your

finger to follow along with the hymn if your child is a reader or a pre-reader. If your child is not yet learning to read, you can hold them on your lap and sing to them. Don't worry if your voice is not perfect; you're teaching your kids to make a joyful noise to the Lord in whatever way he has gifted you.

Greeting: Participate in the Greeting. Use the time while people are standing up and finding their place in the bulletin or the book to remind your child of what is coming next. The worship leader will greet the congregation, using words from Paul's letters in the New Testament of the Bible. You and your child can reply "**And also with you.**" If your child is pre-verbal, you might want to add a gesture that mirrors the worship leader as you say the response. They can do the motion with you, or you can even hold their arms and do it together.

Kyrie: Find and sing the Kyrie together. The kyrie is the place where we ask God to have mercy on us. "Kyrie" (key-ree-ay) is Latin for "Lord," the first part of "Lord, have mercy." If your child can read, help them to follow along as we sing. If your child is a pre-reader, you might work on memorizing the words and music. You can find a helpful video for practicing Setting #10 at home here (more are on the way!): <https://youtu.be/wzydXr4YbzQ>

Hymn of Praise: Find and sing the Hymn of Praise together. The hymn of praise is where we praise God for being powerful and merciful and awesome. We often use the words of the angel choir at Christmas ("Glory to God") or the angels welcoming Jesus at the end of time in the Bible book of Revelation ("This is the Feast"). If your child can read, help them to follow along as we sing. If your child is a pre-reader, you might work on memorizing the words and music. You can find a helpful video for practicing Setting #10 at home here (more are on the way!): <https://youtu.be/c18X0ZvryhQ>

Prayer of the Day: Participate in the Prayer of the Day. The worship leader will begin this section with a greeting, "The Lord be with you." You and your child can reply "And also with you." If your child is pre-verbal, you might want to add a gesture that mirrors the worship leader as you say the response. They can do the motion with you, or you can even hold their arms and do it together. At the end of the prayer, you can join in saying "Amen" (which means "let it be so").

--**Pre-Readers:** If they cannot read, they might want to be close to your face so that they can repeat the words just slightly after you, or they might be content to just listen and witness you praying out loud with a whole community of worshipping people.

--**Readers:** you can read the prayer together with the people of the congregation. Are there any words or phrases you don't understand or need to look up? Look them up together and talk about what they mean before or after worship.

Readings: Listen to and/or read the readings together. This is the section of worship where we hear readings from different sections of the Bible.

--**Pre-Readers/New Readers:** The version of the Bible that we read in worship is the New Revised Standard Version, which is written at an eighth grade reading level, so it can be challenging for even good readers to understand without some effort. During this part, you can encourage your children to listen and learn to give the responses. When the reader says, "The Word of the Lord" the congregation responds "Thanks be to God."

--**Readers:** If your child can read, you can use your finger to help them to follow along. They can circle or underline words or phrases they don't understand and you can look them up together later (or you can use your phone to let them satisfy their curiosity right away!).

Psalm: Participate in the Psalm reading. You can encourage a child who is able to read to follow along. During the psalm, the worship leader speaks the words in the regular print; the people in the congregation speak the words in the bold print. Are there any words or phrases you don't understand or need to look up? Look them up together and talk about what they mean before or after worship.

Children's Sermon: Encourage your children to participate in the children's sermon. You can encourage your child to go to the front during the children's sermon. If your child is not too sure about going up front, feel free to come up with them and sit on the steps, or come forward with them and sit in the front row with them on your lap. You could also sit near the front of church for worship and not move seats at all.

--Older elementary children are still encouraged to come forward and participate in the children's sermon. They can fully participate on their own, or can be encouraged to find a younger "worship buddy" to help out during the children's sermon. All of us are Children of God, and all are welcome!

Gospel Acclamation: Welcome the Gospel together in song. The gospel acclamation is the portion of the service where we stand to greet the reading of the Gospel, or the Good News about Jesus Christ in the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. We usually sing a verse of Scripture that reminds us how happy we are to get this Good News. If your child can read, help them to follow along as we sing. If your child is a pre-reader, you might work on memorizing the words and music. You can find a helpful video for practicing Setting #10 at home here (more are on the way!): <https://youtu.be/OkLe-RA5IL0>

Gospel Reading: Listen to and/or read the Gospel reading together. This is the section of worship where we hear a true story about the life of Jesus from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John in the Bible. This reading is often the story on which the sermon will be based.

--Pre-Readers/New Readers: The version of the Bible that we read in worship is the New Revised Standard Version, which is written at an eighth grade reading level, so it can be challenging for even good readers to understand without some effort. During this part, you can encourage your children to listen and learn to give the responses. When the reader begins the reading, "The Holy Gospel, according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), the __ chapter," the congregation responds "**Glory to you, O Lord.**" When the gospel reading is complete, the reader will say "This is the Gospel of the Lord," and the people of the congregation respond "**Praise to you, O Christ.**"

--Readers: If your child can read, you can use your finger to help them to follow along. They can circle or underline words or phrases they don't understand and you can look them up together later (or you can use your phone to let them satisfy their curiosity right away!).

Sermon: Engage the Word of God during the sermon. This is the portion of worship where we hear the story or reading for the day interpreted or explained, and learn to apply it to our daily lives.

--Children will receive a children's bulletin or activity during the children's message. This bulletin engages in the Bible text each week at a level that speaks to a child. It is okay to read the children's bulletin to your child at this time and engage in the activities together if you so choose. If your child chooses to put their completed bulletin on the bulletin board at church, take a picture before you exit church. You can refer back to this bulletin during conversation on the way home or throughout the week without having to keep track of a stray piece of paper. If you are a person who loves organization, you could also make a folder on your phone or tablet to keep all of these pictures, and let your child or your whole family review them from time to time.

--You might also choose to ask your child to listen to the adult sermon. This might be especially helpful as children age. They can color, draw pictures, or take notes as they listen to help them to remember important points that got their attention. Paper and colored pencils are available at church for this.

--No matter which technique you choose, plan to talk with your family about the sermon after church. What did they hear? What did they learn? What is God urging them to do this week? Who is God urging them to become? You might be surprised what a seemingly inattentive child will pick up (Don't forget; you can always check out the sermon recording online if this is the point in the service where parenting becomes more important than listening in the moment).

Hymn of the Day: Find and sing the Hymn of the Day together. Use the time while people are sitting down and finding the hymn and the musician is introducing the hymn to remind your child what is coming next. Find the hymn in the book where you marked it earlier. Use your finger to follow along with the hymn if your child is a reader or a pre-reader. If your child is not yet learning to read, you can hold them on your lap and sing to them. Don't worry if your voice is not perfect; you're teaching your kids to make a joyful noise to the Lord in whatever way he has gifted you.

Apostles' Creed: Profess your faith by heart. The Apostle's Creed dates back to 390 AD, and is an important part of Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* as a way for the family to learn what we believe as Lutheran Christians. We say it together in church as a response to all we have heard and experienced through the Bible readings, children's message, and sermon. Because it is such an important part of our faith and belief, it is a part of the service worth learning by heart.

This might take some work at home or on the go, and you may feel free to take a liturgical bulletin home with you so that you have a copy (or take a picture of this part of the service with your phone so that you always have it with you!). As you learn it, talk with your child about words or phrases that they don't understand. You can circle or underline them and look them up together. You can find a free *Small Catechism* app for your digital devices here: <http://nisynod.org/luthers-small-catechism-new-mobile-app/>

Prayers of the People: Participate in the Prayers of the People together. This is the time in the service when we talk to God as a church community about the day, the world, the nations, our community, those who are ill, hurting, or grieving, as well as the individual prayers that were gathered at the beginning of the worship service. You can ask your child to listen to the prayers and choose one thing from them that they would like to carry forward in their own prayers during the next week. You can also use the brief silence after the introduction to the prayers to remind them of the prayer response for the week, such as “Lord, in your mercy,” and “**hear our prayer**” or “Hear us, O God” and “**your mercy is great.**” If you offered prayers for this time, listen for when they come up in the prayers. How does it feel to have your personal prayers prayed out loud by the entire community?

Peace: Offer the Peace of Christ to one another. This is the time in the service when we reconcile with one another and offer Christ's peace to one another. It is a time to say “I'm sorry” and “I forgive you” to friends and family members, as well as a time to offer peace to people who might be going through difficult times we can only imagine. This might also be the only time in a week when those who are isolated or alone get to shake hands with anyone. Teach your kids how to say “**Peace be with you**” and “**And also with you.**” They can offer hugs, handshakes, high fives, or simply friendly nods. You can also make it a goal to greet a certain number of people each week and report your progress back to one another during the offering or after church.

Offering: Teach your children how to offer their gifts to God. This is the time in the service when we give of our treasure to help our church, the church across our state, the church across our country, and people in need all over the world and at home.

--Get out the offering envelopes that you prepared before church and have your child help you to put in your family offering or their own offering.

--If you give on a monthly or other scheduled basis, you might want to take this time to quietly discuss ways in which your family has been the hands and feet of Jesus in your family, community, school, and world recently.

--The music during this time is the musician's offering to God and to us, so you might also want to listen and pray quietly, thanking God for all of the blessings that your family has received from God this week.

Offering Prayer: Participate in the offering prayer together. The worship leader will begin this section with a greeting, "The Lord be with you." You and your child can reply "**And also with you.**" If your child is pre-verbal, you might want to add a gesture that mirrors the worship leader as you say the response. They can do the motion with you, or you can even hold their arms and do it together. At the end of the prayer, you can join in saying "Amen" (which means "let it be so).

--Pre-Readers: If they cannot read, they might want to be close to your face so that they can repeat the words just slightly after you, or they might be content to just listen and witness you praying out loud with a whole community of worshipping people.

--Readers: If your child can read, you can read the prayer together with the people of the congregation. Are there any words or phrases you don't understand or need to look up? Look them up together and talk about what they mean before or after worship.

Lord's Prayer: Pray the prayer that Jesus taught by heart. The Lord's Prayer is Jesus response to his disciples in the Bible when they say "Lord, teach us pray," and is an important part of Luther's Small Catechism as a way for the family to learn to talk to God in prayer as Lutheran Christians. We pray it together in church because it is a cornerstone of who we are. Because it is such an important part of our faith and belief, it is a part of the service worth learning by heart. This might take some work at home or on the go. Here is a video to help you learn this prayer together with motions: <https://youtu.be/UtvESWUw3jQ>

--As you learn it, talk with your child about words or phrases that they don't understand. You can circle or underline them (or text yourself) and look them up together. You can find a free *Small Catechism* app for your digital devices here: <http://nisynod.org/luthers-small-catechism-new-mobile-app/>

Blessing: Receive the blessing as we prepare to go. Before we are released to go and do God's work in the world with our hands, we receive a final blessing. Usually, the words are straight from the Bible. This is another opportunity to cross yourself. You can find a video to teach this here: <https://youtu.be/PhDirWRgwcc>

--When the worship leader leads this portion, help them to cross themselves, either across their body or on their forehead to remind them of the work that God gave to them in baptism to be blessed to be a blessing. They can also participate in the "Amen" with the congregation at the end. Once again, you can reinforce this with your child: God blesses you to be a blessing! You could also encourage a little family "Hooray!" or give each other high fives, or just really mean it when you say "Amen!" at the end.

Sending Song: Find and sing the Sending Song together. Use the time while people are sitting down and finding the hymn and the musician is introducing the hymn to remind your child what is coming next. Find the hymn in the book where you marked it earlier. Use your finger to follow along with the hymn if your child is a reader or a pre-reader. If your child is not yet learning to read, you can hold them on your lap and sing to them. Don't worry if your voice is not perfect; you're teaching your kids to make a joyful noise to the Lord in whatever way he has gifted you.

Food for the Journey/Dismissal: Send your child to receive what they need, pray, and dismiss our congregation. Encourage your child to join the worship leader at the back of the church at the end of the sending song to pray a final prayer, receive their "Food for the Journey" memory verse for the week, and send the congregation into the world. The worship leader will lead the final prayer in a repeat-after-me style and give the children the prompt for the sending. They will then return to you. Thank you for working so hard to include all of God's children in the worship of God!

AFTER WORSHIP

--**Take worship with you.** Take a picture of the children's bulletin or food for the journey if you plan to do so as you are waiting to be ushered out of church. Text yourself the prayer requests or concerns or church events that you want to remember from the worship service. Post an important point that you want to share on social media. Ask your children to help you with these details.

--**Talk about what happened at church together.** Talk about the sermon on the way home from the worship service or over Sunday dinner. Invite other extended family members to join in this conversation if you are joining them in person or via the internet on Sunday afternoon. What did they hear? What did they learn? What is God urging them to do this week? Who is God urging them to become? You might be surprised what a seemingly inattentive child will pick up (Don't forget; you can always check out the sermon recording online if this is the point in the service where parenting becomes more important than listening in the moment).

--**Revisit worship all week long.** Check out Taking Worship Home for more great age-appropriate resources for you and your family to extend the worship experience into the week:

<http://tri-saintsworship.weebly.com>

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