

12 REASONS TO WELCOME CHILDREN INTO CHURCH



For the full article please see the following website:

<http://sacraparental.com/2016/06/11/12-reasons-welcome-kids-church-tips-actually/>

Reason 1.

KIDS ARE PEOPLE TOO: When we welcome kids in church, we acknowledge that they are important humans in the present, not just the future

Key questions for church leaders:

What message are kids and adults at your church getting about how important children are to God? Are there new things you could try to make sure everyone understands how important kids are?

Reason 2.

When we welcome kids, we are making their carers feel welcome too

Key questions for church leaders:

Take a moment to put yourselves in the shoes of each of the people listed in the bullet points above. How would they feel at your services? Does your system, and the way you communicate, make those people feel welcome and part of things? How could you find out?

Could you consider having a play area in the church sanctuary so parents of small children can be present, while occupying their kids in the same room?

Could you make it clear to the congregation and visitors that breastfeeding is welcome in the sanctuary, so people don't fear they have to leave to feed children? Practicalities are also important. Is there room in your church for push-chairs? Do you have ramps or only stairs? Are there facilities for heating a bottle and a pleasant place to change nappies/diapers? Is there room for kids to sprawl a bit, or for a baby to lie on the floor while kids are with their families?

Reason 3.

KIDS LEARN BY PARTICIPATING: When we welcome kids, we invite

Key questions for church leaders:

What parts of normal (adult) church life can children currently participate in at your church? What are they excluded from? What could you change so they get to do more?

Tips for parents and carers:

Whether your church services are currently intergenerational or not, there are plenty of things you can do in your family group to help kids participate.

Talk to your kids as the service runs, pointing things out to them that are familiar, asking questions, redirecting their attention.

Even in the 'adult' slots, there is often a visual aid or reference to something familiar that the kids can relate to. Be persistent in directing their attention to the front, or whatever activity the church is doing together.

Sermon topics, Bible texts and songs are almost certainly chosen well before Sunday morning. If they're not already advertised in advance, ask the relevant leaders to let you know each week what's coming up, and spend some time at home helping kids to get familiar with the songs, Bible readings and ideas coming up.

For kids in church who can't read yet, learning the choruses of some of the popular songs your church sings will make them much more able to join in.

Reason 4.

KIDS CAN HANDLE SERMONS: When we involve kids in church, we expose them to deep, important ideas

Key questions for church leaders:

What are children in your church learning about God and themselves from their church experience, whatever it looks like?

How can you find out?

Tips for parents and carers:

Start a tradition of talking about the sermon and/or service at the next family meal.

Ask open questions, and brainstorm ideas for putting things into practice in the week ahead. Ask a church leader for help if you're not sure how to get started on this – I bet they'll be chuffed to be asked!

Check out <https://nz.pinterest.com/youngfam700/kids-sermon-notes/> for helping literate children to learn from sermons.

Reason 5.

IT'S GOOD FOR EVERYONE: When we include kids in church, we all get to practise being generous to each other

Key questions for church leaders:

Does your church have members with a consumerist attitude to church, who only want services to suit them and meet their needs? Do some people complain that the music is too loud, too old-fashioned, too repetitive or not 'theological' enough? What could you do to address the attitude behind these arguments?

Tips for parents and carers:

Kindness and generosity go both ways. Just as we want adults to be friendly to our kids, and offer us sympathetic smiles and not frowny tuts when they are boisterous, it's helpful to frame our requests to our kids as being about kindness: "Please remember to whisper your questions, because Sam and Lani are trying to hear from God right now, and we want to be kind to them."

Be clear in your own mind why you are part of a church and why you include your children. Find a couple of phrases about this that you say regularly to reinforce your values and redirect grumbles, for example, "Yes, I know you don't like this kind of music. Can you spot some of our friends who are enjoying it? Whenever this music is playing, we can show God that we want to follow Jesus by being happy that they are happy."

Reason 6.

IT MAKES SERVICES BETTER: When we plan for kids to be involved, we plan better, richer services

Key questions for church leaders:

Is there something for everyone in your church services? What might you be able to change or add to help all the people present connect with God?

Tips for parents and carers:

What parts of the service are your kids most interested in right now? What parts might they be able to engage with if they were helped a bit?

Consider having your children sit with an adult and stay with that adult throughout the service. Children find it very hard to engage, even in kid-friendly church content, if they are sitting with their friends. If there are one or two key moments they can enjoy, they might miss them if they're socialising.

Start a habit of talking to kids before and after the service about what went on. Take turns guessing in advance who will be doing the readings or handing out the newsletters. Pick a favourite part of the service to chat about at the next family meal.

Reason 7.

KIDS HAVE LOTS TO OFFER: When you welcome kids, they are able to contribute their time and skills

Key questions for church leaders:

What can an eager four, eight or twelve-year-old contribute in your church? What would they like to do? How can you help them learn to do it?

Tips for parents and carers:

Take a look through the church noticeboards or newsletters and think about all the jobs that adults do in your church. Do you know a child who might enjoy some of them? Helping with morning tea prep? Mowing the lawns? Setting out chairs or handing out newsletters? Baking for the staff at your local primary school? Helping deliver food parcels?

Think creatively about what your kids enjoy and how they could bring those skills to church life. Do you know a child who is into gardening or eco-friendly living? Could they bring their knowledge to church to green up the community? There really are no limits to what can be useful if someone is interested.

You might also like to read this website <http://sacraparental.com/2014/10/15/6-ways-kids-can-change-the-world-blog-action-day/> about six ways that children can change the world

Reason 8.

IT MAKES US STRONGER: When we welcome kids in church, we strengthen relationships across generations

Key questions for church leaders:

What opportunities are there in your church for kids and adults to develop stronger relationships? How could you encourage connections across generations?

Tips for parents and carers:

Invite someone without young children to adopt your family – a teenager, ‘grandparent’ figure or family friend – who can help you with keeping your kids engaged during services, and/or build relationships beyond Sundays. There may well be plenty of people who are keen to help, but they’ll usually wait for an invitation. If no one springs to mind, ask someone else in the church who is well connected for a recommendation and take the plunge.

Reason 9.

IT CAN IMPROVE PREACHING: When we include children in church, our preachers are prompted to do a better job for everyone

Key questions for church leaders:

How often do you have an ‘all-age’ sermon and/or service? Could you experiment with doing your first one? Or try for four times a year? Or monthly? How would that look? Who might feel that this was a sacrifice, and how could you address their concerns? Do you have people available who could experiment with all-age preaching and give it a shot? What training or support could you find for them?

Reason 10.

ADULTS DON’T MISS OUT: When kids are part of the church service, adults don’t have to miss out to lead or attend kids’ programmes

Key questions for church leaders:

What does it cost to run your children’s programme now, in terms of volunteer and staff time and other resources?

What might your church be able to achieve if those resources were freed up?

Tips for parents and carers:

Consider making an appointment with a key leader in your church to discuss your experience of church as a carer of small children. Make a list of ideas that might improve things for carers and take it along.

Reason 11.

When we include people from very young, they don’t have a jolting transition in adolescence

Key questions for church leaders:

What is the current trend in church attendance for young people in your congregation? Do some kids start opting out of coming along when the children’s programme is too young for them? How can you help young people transition into adult services? Or how can you involve all generations in the same services so there is no need for transition?

Tips for parents and carers:

If your children are currently attending a kids’ programme at church, have you considered how they will one day make the transition to adult church?

Give it some thought and see what questions it prompts for you and your kids.

Reason 12.

When we welcome kids in church, we demonstrate how welcome everyone is

Key questions for church leaders:

What kind of people feel most welcome at your church? Are there any changes you could make that would expand that group, so that more kinds of people would feel at home? How can you find out?

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‘BUT WHAT ABOUT...?’

Common worries about all-age worship and some responses

‘But what about mature Christians who need to be fed and extended by serious sermons?’

Key question for church leaders:

What opportunities do you or can you offer to mature and knowledgeable people in your community to extend them, outside of the sermon?

‘But worship is supposed to be respectful and solemn’

Key questions for church leaders:

What is the existing culture in your church community when it comes to church worship? What do people currently expect, in terms of style and the way things are usually done? Which of these are theologically important to your community and which could be changed to accommodate new groups of people?

WHY HERE IS NOT SUSTAINABLE:
WHAT THERE LOOKS LIKE:
STRATEGY IDEAS:

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