

Workshop 2 – Faith with Under Fives in Church Worship (creche and pew)

Children in church: with parents and carers

Children in worship

Need opportunities to play, explore, make sense of the world around them and their experience of worship.

‘I need a procession so that God will come down
and dance with us.’

Gertrud Mueller Nelson *To Dance with God: Family Ritual and Community Celebration*, Paulist Press 1986.

Primal Faith

‘We are loved into knowing and feeling, as we are loved into being.’*

Grown through love and experienced through care.

Chaotic or Intuitive faith

‘The powerful symbols of Christian liturgy and belonging will contribute deep and lasting images ... Young children who are excluded from (worship) because they “don’t yet understand” may be being cut off from a vital form of nourishment.’*

To achieve this, we need to put the child in the midst. They need to be part of us. And this is the responsibility of a whole congregation.

*Jeff Astley *How Faith Grows: Faith Development and Christian Education*, CHP, 1991

Becoming child-centred

The British Council of Churches (1976) report The Child in the Church.

‘Children are a gift to the Church. The Lord of the Church sets them in the midst of the Church...not as objects of benevolence ... but as patterns of discipleship. The Church that does not accept children unconditionally into its fellowship is depriving those children of what is rightfully theirs, but the deprivation such a Church will itself suffer is far more grave.’

Children have a place in the pew, inside the very church, experiencing worship and praise. Church needs to be a place where their voice can be heard among others.

Creche at home

Within the current restrictions, screens don’t serve the fellowship feeling, which is so important here, and they don’t serve young children well at all. So if participation by families with small children is challenging, maybe we need to remember and accept that, and deliberately supply alternatives – creche at home might sound a bit odd, but it is probably the best way to address what is possible.

How do we put this into practice?

A creche: in church or at home

Remember the key features of the world for under 5s:

Play – supremely play

Eclectic combination of experiences, ideas, images, symbols, relationships

Using the ROOTS materials as inspiration:

Play – offer a couple of directed play ideas that can be offered around the subject for the week.

Story – is time to sit down but there also needs to be objects/pictures to look at and/or something to handle.

Symbol – even before they have verbal language under 5s are using symbol, in fact for them, many things are simply symbols.

Singing – is foundational to worship and builds community.

With parents and carers in the pew

Where people have their children with them within the act of worship, there are times when children will focus and be encouraged to participate, and there are times when it is helpful if there are things that they can engage them because what is happening is unsuitable for their participation. The ideas above can be incorporated here and resources can be offered for the child to engage with as and when they wish.

Structure to help them take part

Familiarity is reassuring – It helps under 5s to have some sort of pattern so they know what to expect and where they fit in

Watch – Worship is not just about words. Worship leaders need to ensure that there are things to look at and observe.

Copy – Children of this age are great mimics: it is how they learn to talk. Ensure there are things for them to watch and imitate so that they can take part.

Supporting parents and carers as they bring their children to church

What will be the support structures you offer? How will they know they are valued, and that what they are doing is of supreme importance?

Gill Ambrose, Workshop leader