

Children Worship & Wonder and Faith Formation (Video Text)

Children's Ministries in the 21st century are taking on new identities. They are implementing new language, embracing new technologies, and above all, taking the focus from education-based programming to holistic faith formation approaches.

"Faith formation is understood and perceived as *an engaged process of learning and practice integrated throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life.*" This definition allows for the combining of "head" and "heart" knowledge into a more holistic understanding and embodiment [of faith], rather than creating a dichotomy between these two areas." Children Worship & Wonder is an essential part of this holistic faith formation approach and subscribes to the understanding that churches are creating lifelong disciples.

John Roberto, founder of *Lifelong Faith* outlines six Best Practices in children's faith formation. While CW&W fits with many of these best practices, CW&W *embodies* the 3rd of these best practices which says that "Faith formation with children provides an environment that allows children to encounter the living God directly." The worship environment of CW&W was created with this encounter in mind. Stemming from the groundbreaking work of Sophia Cavaletti and her program Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the environment that children enter in CW&W is different than any other Christian education program. We will look further into this in a minute.

Faith formation researchers Rev. Dr. Ivy Beckwith and Rev. Dr. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi expresses that "vital formational children's ministry is about story, ritual, and relationship." CW&W is based around a unique story-telling format that invites children into God's stories and give them tools to participate in God's bigger story. The worship approach provides rituals and spiritual disciplines that are practiced each week.

Lastly, Dr. Lizardy-Hajbi comments that "there is a strong connection between a congregation's faith formation and its worship." At a young age where children are most open to God's spirit, it is even more essential that children have an experience of worship, an experience of the living God in a community of people. CW&W creates a community of intergenerational fellowship where both the children's and adult's minds, bodies, and spirits, are nurtured and cared for as they worship together.

So What Exactly is CW&W?

CW&W is faith formation worship centered approach with storytelling, ritual, and fellowship that is used with children in churches to help them deepen their relationship with God.

Children Worship & Wonder can be used during the congregations worship service or during Sunday School. Children Worship & Wonder uses the familiar four-fold order of worship with which many congregations are familiar. To begin, the children come into a special worship space, to a storyteller waiting to greet them. They sit in a circle, surrounded by bible stories made just for them, with all materials at their height. Everything in this special place is accessible to the children. The storyteller leads the children in a time of singing and praise.

This coming together of the children follows the first order of worship which is the **gathering of God's people**.

Next, they will **hear one of God's stories** in a storytelling format told with multi-sensory materials that children of different ages, and with different learning styles can enter into and enjoy. As the story is finished the children are invited to share in a time of wonder about the story. They are asked "wondering questions" to help them dive deeper into the meaning of the story and to listen for God's still voice that is found there. These questions might sound like, "I wonder if the Good Shepherd's sheep have names?" Or, "I wonder what it was like to be in the ark for forty days...I wonder if Noah knew that God was with him?" These wondering questions ask the children how they are part of the story and how they are a part of the bigger Christian story. They begin to see that the stories in the Bible are their stories too.

Third, just as in "big" worship the children will **respond to God's story**. In "big" worship we often respond through prayer, song, offering, celebrating the Lord's Supper, commissioning, and celebrating baptisms. The children have the chance to respond to the Word in a myriad of ways as well. Some of these ways include using the story materials to tell the story they just heard, a story they heard on a previous Sunday and their own story. They may also choose to work with art and craft materials, pray at the prayer table, dance in the dance corner, or build with materials such as clay or blocks. These response materials are there to help them express their relationship with God. After they respond in a way they choose, the children come back to the circle. Here the storyteller lights the Christ candle and shows the children where the story they heard is found in the Bible. Then as a community they pray together and share in a feast.

As they leave the worship center, the children will participate in the last order of worship which is the sending out of God's people into the world. Each child will be given a special blessing by the storyteller as they leave to be God's disciples in their homes, schools, and activities.

This order is followed every Sunday. Because there is a ritual to this time together the children are free to relax into the space and go deeper into the stories. They can truly enter into a time of listening and talking with God. As children move from CW&W into "big" worship, they are familiar with the rhythm and joy of worshiping. They bring this with them as they continue participating in worship with the bigger congregation.

How do I learn to do this?

First, get a copy of the books *Young Children and Worship* (Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman). Everything you need is in this book including the order of worship and patterns for the stories. Second, find a training in your area. You can look for one by clicking the training link on this webpage. If you do not see a training in your area, contact Disciples Home Missions and they will help you find one or help you set one up at your church.

We look forward to hearing from you and wish you many blessings as you work with God's children.