

Limit Use of Abstract or Symbolic Phrases

Many phrases used routinely in church may be confusing for children. Because children understand things very literally, we need to explain what we mean when we say things like “Jesus is in your heart.” One four-year-old was afraid to cough because “Jesus is in my heart and if I cough he’ll think it’s an earthquake.” When you use abstract language, consider the idea you are trying to communicate. For example, instead of saying “Jesus lives in your heart,” say something like, “We listen to what Jesus taught and try to act as Jesus would want us to act.”

Consider Options

Children’s moments—a time with children in front of the congregation—are not mandated by official orders of worship. Consider times when it is more appropriate to engage children in other ways than gathering around an adult leader, e.g.:

Let a child read the bible, offer a prayer, sing a song, teach the congregation motions to a simple song. Invite the children to stand on a pew or chair to participate (if that is safe to do). Perhaps there are booster seats that can be secured to your sanctuary seating for children to use.

- At baptisms, invite the children to come to the baptism to better see the action.
- Ask your minister to include issues and concerns of children in pastoral prayers and to consider using situations of interest to children in sermon illustrations.
- Invite older children to be part of the diaconate.

For More Help

Particularly helpful are:

- *Including Children in Worship: A Planning Guide for Congregations*, Elizabeth J. Sandell (Augsburg Fortress)
- *Forbid Them Not: Involving Children in Sunday Worship* (Based on the Common Lectionary Years A, B, C), Carolyn Brown (Abingdon).
- Contact Disciples Home Missions for other resources to help you plan for the involvement of children.

Your Sunday

You have agreed to lead the children’s moments on (date)

The Scripture lessons for that Sunday are:

The season of the church year is:

Special things happening this Sunday are:

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Leading Children’s Moments



Children's Moments Are Opportunities:

- ◊ To bring children "close to the action"
- ◊ For children to lead in worship
- ◊ To affirm that children are valued participants in the church family
- ◊ To help children participate in worship
- ◊ To proclaim the Word of God
- ◊ For children to hear other members of the church family witness to their faith
- ◊ For children to offer their unique gifts in the context of congregational worship

Children's Moments Are Not:

- ◊ Times to "get something across" to the adults
- ◊ An occasion to show "how cute" children are
- ◊ Times to entertain the congregation
- ◊ Times to advertise upcoming events

Suggestions for Meaningful Children's Moments

Practice & Prepare

The Word of God is proclaimed in many ways during worship. As the choir proclaims the Word through music, the liturgist through reading Scripture, and the

children's moments also proclaims the Word. And this act of worship requires thought and preparation. Practice your children's moments ahead of time so you will be more comfortable and careful in your delivery. Young children have short attention spans, so limit your presentation to about three minutes. Situate yourself so that you are eye level with the children. Don't tower over them.

Tell Bible Stories

Stories give meaning and coherence to children's lives, so a very effective way to deliver a children's "sermon" is to tell a Bible story. Remember, Bible stories have many layers of meaning. A Bible story can be powerful for persons of all ages, yet the message received depends on the age of the listener. Resist the temptation to "explain" the meaning of the story. Trust that God will work in the lives of the listeners so that they will take what they need from the story. Choose a Bible story based on the Scripture being read in the worship service or the theme of the worship service. If your pastor and congregation follow the lectionary, consider using one of the three texts listed. The Scripture lesson from the Gospels or Old Testament is more likely to have a story that can be told than a Scripture lesson from the Epistles (letters of the New Testament).

Let the Children Be Worship Leaders

Children can also proclaim the Word of God. Use the children's time to help them lead the congregation in an act of worship. This might include motions to a prayer, a short song that relates to the theme of the worship service, or motions



that help tell the Bible story. Remember to keep this simple so that children can feel confident as they lead the rest of the congregation.

Avoid Object Lessons

An *object lesson* means using one thing to try to explain something else, e.g., a "prop" the speaker uses to try to explain a theological concept. Although this is effective with adults, since children are primarily concrete, not abstract thinkers, the point of an object lesson usually eludes or confuses them. When using visual aids, be sure the visual is concretely tied to the story you are telling, e.g., use a picture of sheep to help children understand what a sheep looks like as you tell the story of the good shepherd. Don't use such a picture to explain Jesus as "the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world".

Don't Ask Children to Respond to Questions

One of the quickest ways to find yourself heading in a direction you don't want to go is to ask children to respond to an open-ended question. To do this is to invite children to tell stories. While it is important to create opportunities for children to tell stories, the children's time during worship is not a conducive setting. Often, when children begin telling stories, the congregation finds them very amusing, but congregation laughter does not affirm a child who is sharing a significant personal life event. Often the congregation's laughter focuses attention on the child's "cuteness" or builds competition among older children to see who can do something funny or something that disrupts the action of worship.