

Intergenerational Worship Model

Super Saturday

October 20, 2018

This morning's Opening Worship for Super Saturday has been designed with our keynote theme in mind — an intergenerational worship model that is accessible to as many worshipping abilities as possible — children, young families, teens, those for whom English is a second language, those who have difficulty seeing or hearing, for instance. Of course, it is impossible to accommodate everyone completely, but we hope that you will take this model back to your congregation and make it your own. Let us all worship God together!

Prayground

A place in the front of the sanctuary (or other suitable location) where young children can experience worship through age-appropriate worship materials and tools that will help keep them engaged in worship. (Traci-Smith.com and KarenWareJackson.com)



<http://www.karenwarejackson.com/resources.html>

Children and Liturgical Language

- Children learn their native tongue by being exposed to all levels of the language at once. [Karen-Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*]
- Young children's brains are primed for language as they listen to patterns that their brains will recognize later when they begin speaking words. [Paul Bloom]
- Children stretch the language they have to approximate what is beyond language. When adults do this we call it poetry. [Jermone Berryman, *Becoming Like A Child: The Curiosity of Maturity Beyond the Norm*]

Hymns and Songs

Children learn songs quickly through repetition. Adults do, too! Selecting repetitive songs and hymns (such as "This Is the Day," TNCH #84 and "Caribbean Halleluja, TNCH #236) will help the children to learn the music of our faith along with the theological language we use. And exposure to more complex hymns and songs will allow their memories to recognize them and the language used when they hear it again later.

Visuals, Body Movement, and Sign Language

Engaging as many of the five senses as possible allows for a more complete worship experience for many people, especially children. The theory of Multiple Intelligences, developed by Howard Gardner, encourages us to use more than just listening and looking/reading for more effective learning. In the church, using music, art, movement and dance, items from God's creation, and interactive activities alongside listening, looking, and reading will enhance the worshipping experience for everyone present. We include sign language here because many of today's young parents are teaching their babies sign language to help their infants communicate with them more effectively.

Scripture

In her most recent book, *I Wonder: Engaging a Child's Curiosity About the Bible*, Elizabeth Caldwell offers Bible and scripture recommendations for children in the appendix. We are reading from the *Common English Bible* today, her recommended Bible for ages nine and up.

Wondering and Meditation

Inviting children (and teens and adults) to wonder about Bible stories is essential for spiritual development according to Elizabeth Caldwell. The wondering concept comes out of the Godly Play model of faith formation (www.godlyplayfoundation.org) developed by Jerome Berryman who based it on the Montessori method of education. The process of wondering about Bible stories and engaging children's imaginations develops their ability to think theologically at an age-appropriate level. A wondering model helps children get it right the first time so they don't have to unlearn inaccurate concepts later. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, author of several

beautiful children's Bible storybooks, says that the wondering model invites the child to hear or read the Story with question marks, not periods. See *I Wonder: Engaging a Child's Curiosity About the Bible* for many good examples of wondering statements to help engage a child in this process. For today's educational purposes, we are intentionally using more adult language, and encourage you to adapt this model to your particular group of parishioners at your church.

Working with One's Hands

Children are able to process what they hear more effectively when they have something to do with their hands. This is true for many adults as well. (Isn't that right, all you Knitters?!) When the adults are invited to hold a prayer stone or draw a prayerful image on a Post-It note alongside the children, the children not only feel more included in the service of worship, they also better understand that this is a truly meaningful and worshipful act, not just something to keep them busy.



Photo courtesy of Linda M. Davis

Blessing

Blessing children as they leave for Sunday School. Blessing prayer shawls. Blessing newly engaged couples. Blessing long-time church members who are moving to another community. Each of these times for blessing engages the entire faith community in a Christian practice of prayer. Times of blessing are perfect opportunities for children to learn this Christian practice and make it a part of their everyday lives.

What Children "Know"

- A child's sense of wonder and awe is open to the concepts of God and miracles, etc.
 - Children love rituals and repetition (Communion, Baptism, liturgy).
- Children learn best using all five senses (art, architecture, music/singing, bread, juice, water, etc.)
 - Children understand that things have meaning such as caring, sharing, singing, dancing, and other elements of praise.

How Can a Congregation Welcome Children in Worship?

- There is no need to entertain; the need is to fill spiritual hunger.
- Utilize media that transcend age divisions and that help everyone to experience God and make meaning, such as storytelling, ritual, drama, singing together, poetry, music and art, and multiple prayer styles.
- Utilize the gifts and talents of the people in the worshipping community in the ways listed above (with intergenerational worship teams or family teams).
- Of the three or four hymns/songs in each service of worship, select ones that each appeal to a specific generation/age group.
- Utilize art, art supplies, and artistic expression.
- Use visual aids including children's books, images projected on a wall/screen, liturgical symbols (candles, banners, water, stones, bread, etc.).
- Use a wide variety of prayer styles such as sung, echoed, prayer cards, prayer stones, a prayer bell, etc.
- Respect the needs, opinions, and gifts of the children and they will in turn truly participate in worship without behavior problems. (The wondering process mentioned above creates such an atmosphere.)

Resources

For more information, recommended books, blogs, and websites, visit

<https://www.ctucc.org/faithformation>

<https://www.macucc.org/>

[intergenerationalworshipministry](https://www.macucc.org/intergenerationalworshipministry)

<https://www.ricucc.org/childreneyouth>

Super Saturday Worship Leaders

Debbie Gline Allen, Consultant for Christian Education and Youth Ministry, Massachusetts Conference

Kristin Putney, Christian Education and Youth Ministry Resource Consultant, Rhode Island Conference and Director of Christian Education, Seekonk (MA) Congregational Church

Karen Ziel, Minister of Faith Formation and Leadership, Connecticut Conference