

Bringing your young children to church

Dear parents with young children in church,

You are doing something really, really important. I know it isn't easy. I see you coming to church with your little ones and know how much of an effort you put forth to be here. I can see it in your eyes how tired you are. Parenting is tiring. Really tiring.

I see you entering the church juggling the infant car seat and the diaper bag, trying to find a seat toward the back of the church. I watch you bounce and sway and shush your infant trying to keep her quiet. I see you wince when your child cries and you feel like all eyes are on you. Not everyone is looking, but I know it feels that way.

I see you with your toddler and your preschooler. I watch you wince when your little girl announces that she has to go to the bathroom in a voice that might not be an inside voice let alone a church whisper. I watch you cringe when your little boy raises his hand during the children's devotion, not knowing what embarrassing answer he might give to the pastor's question.

I see you entering the church with a coloring book, dry cereal and your bag of quiet "church toys." I see you juggling the bulletin, the hymnal and the baby's nook.

I know you're wondering, "Is this worth it?" "Why do I bother?" I know you often leave church more exhausted than fulfilled. I know you feel like you didn't get anything out of the sermon (for the 7 ½ minutes that you were actually in the church to hear it because your little one had to go potty).

But what you are doing is so important.

When you are here, the church is filled with a joyful noise. You see, a quiet church is a dying church. A church with crying and shushing and crayons and candy wrappers and cheerios ground into the carpet is a living, breathing church.

When you are here, the Body of Christ is more fully present. When you are here, we are reminded that Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Matt 19:14). When you are here, we are reminded that Jesus instructed, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). When you are here, we are reminded that when

God gave us His Commandments He said, "Teach them to your children ..." (Deut 11:19).

When you are here, there is hope that the pews of God's Kingdom here on earth won't be empty in ten years when your children are old enough to sit quietly and behave in worship. Your children may not seem like they are paying attention now, but the Holy Spirit is at work, even during their squirming and squiggling. They may confuse the pastor with Jesus, but that's OK, because that's exactly whom the pastor represents. They are learning how and why and whom we worship ... before it's too late. They are learning that worship of our almighty, merciful, Triune God is important.

I see them learning. I hear them saying the Lord's Prayer louder than the adults. I can see them reciting the Apostles' Creed without looking at the bulletin. I see them trying to find hymn 200 and putting a bookmark in the hymnal for you. I hear their answers and see their faith in each children's devotion. I feel a great sense of pride and humility when I see these children in church, knowing that God used me to pour water and Word over their heads to bring them into God's holy family. And I pray that I'll be able to confirm, commune and marry these children in years to come in front of our church.

I know how hard it is to do what you're doing, but I want you to know, it matters. It matters to me. It matters to the other little children to not be alone in the pews. It matters to the older members who have done the hard work before you and feel a sense of pride that you are carrying on the tradition of bringing your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). It matters to your children. They see how important worship is to you.

And it especially matters to their heavenly Father.

I know it's hard but thank you for what you do when you bring your children to church. Please know that your family – with all of its noise, struggle, commotion, and joy – are not simply tolerated – you are celebrated – for you are a vital part of our Christian family gathered in worship.

Happy to see you and your children in church,

Pastor Michael Zarling