

State your positive expectations and affirmations each time you enter the meetinghouse to study and worship and fellowship with your church family. It “sets the stage” for meaningful experiences.

Parents are a child’s first and most influential teachers! What will we teach them of worship?!

“I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID TO ME,
LET’S GO TO CHURCH!”
Psalm 122:1

compiled by Susan Phillips Feb.2004
credits to: Janice Haywood & Cathy Hopkins, BSC and Kay Henry, “When I Go to Church”

GOING TO WORSHIP AT SARDIS A Guidebook for parents of young children

Dear Parents,

You are entering a new stage with your child as she begins to worship with the whole congregation – like big girls and boys. It’s a big step for young children and for parents.

Worship may be one of the few times you and your children sit and listen together. Value that. Worshipping together as a family offers you the opportunity to think, pray, reflect about the most important things in life through different levels of comprehension. Children are trying to figure out their world – right and wrong, death, playing fair, God, love and acceptance. If you let them experience worship as they are capable and honestly listen to their questions and wonderings, we think you’ll experience many cherished conversations some Sunday afternoons.

Understand that worship is not as “exciting” as TV or video games. We can’t and won’t compete. There will be times it’ll just be “boring,” when it will feel like eating vegetables – so remember its nutritional value. The tips included here will help you and your child cope with the “wiggles,” but won’t remove them. There will be times you won’t get as much from a service because of your child’s restlessness. Cherish those times for one day frustrating moments will just be fading, fond memories.

We think it’s good for children, parents and the congregation to worship together – wiggles, whispers and all. Worship is “downtime” in a 24/7 world and is as important for children as adults. We value your child’s place in our church’s life. We hope worship at Sardis will help you and your child grow to love God and develop a meaningful faith.

Keys to Remember about Children & Worship

What would you want your young children to know about worship?

How wonderful if they understood that worship can happen anytime, anywhere they think about God:

- when they thank God at mealtimes
- when they ask for God's protection and help at bedtime
- when they discover with awe the beauty in God's natural world
- when they listen intently to a Bible story told in Sunday School or sing a song about God
- and what about that special set aside time at church - the WORSHIP SERVICE.

What can that hour on Sunday morning mean to our younger children?

Children should be valued as a vital, giving and receiving presence in our worshiping congregation, not as passive or frustrating observers. They are naturally spiritual with "deep" thoughts about God and unrehearsed responses to God.

Being small in number, our congregation invites relationships/friendships between adults and children. Sardis recognizes and affirms the part our youngest congregants play in "being church". We plan for children and youth to be worship leaders as acolytes and periodic scripture readers. We welcome the children's choir who boldly sings praises several times a year. We demonstrate how we value and cherish each child born into our midst through parent/child dedication services. All of that recognition says to each child, "You are important to us. We are glad you are here. We love you. God loves you. We will care for you and teach you."

7. Expect wiggling. Give back rubs & hand massages to calm. If they fall asleep, it's o.k.
8. Prayer time can include them silently asking God to care for a sick relative, etc.
9. Help capable children memorize "The Lord's Prayer".
10. Scripture readings can be followed in a pew Bible or much better would be using their own Bible.
11. During the sermon, they could count how many times they hear "God" or "Jesus". They could illustrate what they perceive the pastor is talking about. (Share with pastors!)
12. Be aware which Sundays will include communion and baptism. We encourage all baptized Christians to take communion. However, at the end of the service we ask all of our children to join our deacons in the kitchen to eat the communion elements and learn about communion. Tell them ahead of time what to expect.
13. Explain where the offering goes. (Home with the preacher?!) Give them money to put in plate.
14. Let them help hold the hymnal, stand, and hum-sing with you. Ask them after church how the music made them feel - the choir's music, hymns, and piano music.
15. When exiting the service, make a point to brag to the pastors (when appropriate) how well your child listened and participated in the service.

All efforts at "readying" your children to be willing participants in our congregation's worship service will be rewarding.

Just as you must continually remind them of family and school "rules" and behavior, so will you need to frequently repeat many of the actions suggested here. The guidance may not "work" the first time. Try, try again!

Repetition clarifies, underscores, and reassures children.

It's best not to show your frustrations in your child's presence. They then will perceive they are in control and begin the "button-pushing."

C. Make good Sunday morning preparations:

1. Get a good Saturday night sleep.
2. Let your child make clothing choices Saturday night.
3. Eat a good breakfast.
4. Talk positively on the way to church (but don't overdo it).
5. Make bathroom & water fountain stops.
6. Provide blank paper & a few crayons or colored pencils in a special "going to worship bag"(too many crayons or other items will be juggled noisily and dropped).
7. Pray for patience and God's guidance to help your child.

D. Consider these issues:

1. Where should you sit? Best is close to the front to see better. They feel more removed if in the back and don't think anyone is paying attention to them.
2. What about drawing? Encourage them to draw what they see around them.
3. Toys? NO
4. Books? It is best not to bring books for older readers who would be absorbed in the book and not gain anything from the service. Youngest children might take a small simple picture book, but must understand it will not be read to them.
5. Use the order of worship with them. Mark the times they can stand up. Draw a smiley face at all places that they can participate and a "SHHH" at places they need to be especially quiet.
6. Expect talking. Practice whispering. Maybe tell them they can whisper 2 questions you'll whisper-answer.

Though children will not understand all the words, actions, and symbols of congregational worship, they can begin to sense the importance of worship to you and other significant people around them.

Mark 9:37 tells us that Jesus believed that "whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me." So how do we as parents, grandparents, and congregants "welcome" and "...train up..."(Proverbs 22:6) these children who are ready to respond in simple, honest ways to God?

Tips to Assist your Child in Worship

I. Never underestimate the power of positive words, actions, and attitudes.

- A. Your example is the most important lesson taught about worship.
- Have you ever begun your Sunday morning complaining about how tired you are and that you'd rather sleep in?
 - Have your children overheard you griping about missing a ball game because of church?
 - Have you fussed about the noise from the nursery or a long service?
 - Have they heard you dreading out loud that they are now required to take you into the service?
 - Children quickly pick up on negativism and use it for their own "excuses".

B. Positive conversations on Sunday mornings can greatly impact a child's attitude.

- “Ms. Irena’s piano music helps me relax and think about God. Listen and see what you think.”
- “Pastor Tim has a funny sermon title, ‘_____’. I wonder what he’ll preach about today?” (Look at the order of worship ahead of time.)
- “Pastor Tillie prays beautiful prayers to God.”
- “Why do you think Ms. Pam waves her arms and smiles when we sing together?”
- “What do you see when you look at the round window (in the chancel) up front?”
- “At prayer time, help me remember to tell them about your grandmommy.”
- “I love to sit close to you in church.”
- “Mrs._____ loves it when you run up and hug her.”
- “I’m always so proud of you when you serve as acolyte.”

We should count it a privilege and vital responsibility to introduce our children to the worship service, to guide their spiritual development, and to instill a positive attitude toward worship that will last a lifetime!

II. Take time to guide your “novice” worshippers in the following ways:

A. Take a “tour” of the sanctuary.

1. Sit at different places and see what you notice.
2. Sit in the choir loft and ask what choir members would see from here.

3. Stand up at the pulpit and “talk/preach” like Pastors Tim & Tillie.
4. See and gently touch all items on the communion table.
5. Discover what’s in the pew rack. Read a Bible verse. Sing “Jesus Loves Me” from hymnal.
6. When baptism is planned, walk them up to the chancel to see the “pool” and inspect the waders the pastor wears.
7. Walk through the acolyte’s job.
8. Observe the banner in the chancel and ask what they think it represents.
9. Tour the vestibule and especially look at the bulletin board where members sign up for serving and fellowship.

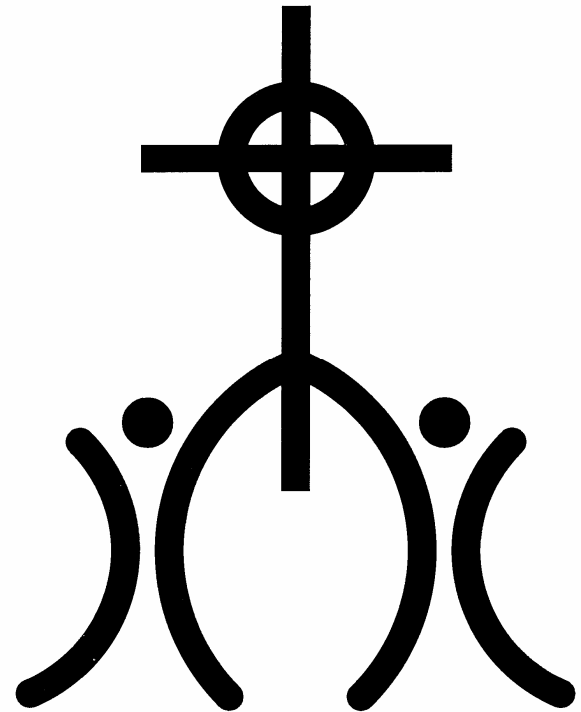
B. “Translate” words unique to worship:

1. pew (think what that means to a child!)
2. hymnal (is there a “her-nal”?!)
3. choir
4. pulpit
5. chancel
6. offering
7. communion
8. baptism
9. acolyte

Use the Worship booklet in the pews to assist you with these and other words. Each family may take one home.

sardis baptist

CHILDREN & WORSHIP



where church means people

by Susan Phillips