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Course: Children in Worship (0.5 Independent Study)
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Books

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.) The Sacred Play of Children, The Seabury Press, New York, 1983.

This book contains a number of articles with important discussion concerning the inclusion of children in worship. Jean Marie Hiesberger (Chapter 2 - 'To Celebrate with Children: A Developmentalist Approach') examines the work of child developmentalists Erikson and Kohlberg, arguing that 'if children are to do more than just be physically present, if we want them to have a positive attitude for liturgical celebration, then we must take seriously where they are now' [21].

Constance Tarasar (Chapter 5 - "'Taste and See": Orthodox Children at Worship') upholds Proverbs 34:8 as a key theme verse for integrating children into worship. Children learn to worship experientially, using all their senses to 'begin assimilating and understanding the nature of worship' [52]. Tarasar suggests two basic reasons that 'ground the willingness of children to participate in worship' [53]. Firstly, children 'naturally worship', with an innate sense of the numinous; the child is *homo adorans*. Secondly, a sense of belonging in the faith community mediates the love of God to the child and enables them to contribute freely and securely as worshippers.

Louis Weil (Chapter 6 - 'Children and Worship') contends that much of modern worship functions with the premise that children are 'pre-liturgical', emphasising rational or cognitive understanding and appropriation. In so doing, the capacity to reason is elevated 'out of all proportion to other aspects of personality, including the affective and intuitive powers which

children manifest at an early age' [56]. Our wholeness as worshippers is thus denied, and children particularly suffer through exclusion from liturgical participation. The irony is that children possess the greatest capacity for wholistic worship: they bring 'a wonderful openness to the experience of word and gesture, touch and movement - to the whole array of human elements which lie at the heart of the liturgical act' [57]. Weil calls for a rediscovery of the experiential in liturgical worship, and for the full participation of children in the experiences of worship. Though children may not be able to verbally articulate such experiences, they nevertheless truly experience, and construct meaning through experience.

Gail Ramshaw Schmidt (Chapter 13 - 'The Preschooler in the Liturgy') challenges the common perception that children are too young to participate meaningfully in the liturgy with reference to developmental understandings of the child as a 'voracious receiver of stimuli. ... An appreciation of the fullness of the interweaving of images and actions of the liturgy would lead us to conclude that young children belong in church as much as any adult' [115]. The child's inability to cognitively process liturgical ritual does not diminish their experience of it nor its power to construct and impart meaning. The liturgy 'ought to absorb children into its rich texture, just as the richness of the liturgical experience ought to be a paradigm for the wealth of life within God's kingdom' [119].

Peter M. Becker, Gary L. Bertels, Shirley K. Morgenthaler Children in Worship: Lessons from Research, Lutheran Education Journal Reprint Series, Pillars Press, River Forest, 1999.

This book reports the findings of the first phase of the Center for the Study of Children's Ethical Development's (Concordia University, River Forest IL) *Children in Worship* research study. This study was designed to test John Westerhoff's 'theoretical perspective' concerning faith formation - that the formation of faith 'takes place among role models with the presence of ritual and predictability, among other factors' - with respect to worship [2]. In the course of the study, surveys were undertaken at 100 Lutheran churches distributed across 11 locations in the USA. Sadly, the study found that 'in most congregations ... children are taken for granted and are

almost invisible' [51]. It was found, for example, that:

- There were few special arrangements for young children in the physical settings or contexts in which worship was conducted.
- There was very little use of scents or the presence of aromas in worship.
- Most congregations had no reserved areas for families.
- Many congregations limited children's participation to special services such as Christmas.

Becker *et al* conclude that, in those congregations surveyed, 'physical settings for worship are planned by adults for adults and not for children' [1999: 7]. As for the practice of worship, 'for most children, worship is a "spectator" activity. Worship is done by adults for adults. Older children can light candles; younger children can come forward for "their" message; and they can "perform" at holidays. But, on most Sundays children can "watch", if they can find a sight line. Liturgies, which contain elements that often need to be explained to children, vary so frequently children may not ever find a pattern' [8]. In response to these findings, the authors advocate greater attention to: (a) the development of multi-sensory worship to engage children at a variety of sensory levels; (b) the physical settings for worship and the ways in which these impede or promote the participation of children; (c) use of ritual and movement; and (d) predictability and repetition. Unfortunately, the book is a fairly "dry read", somewhat at odds with the wonder and joy that characterises the free participation and full inclusion of children in corporate worship. One also gets the sense that the authors would balk at the sort of liturgical innovation that may well be required to bring about full inclusion of children in intergenerational worship.

Oddbjorn Evenshaug, Dag Hallen, Roland Martinson Parenting with Purpose: Nurturing Faith and Life from Birth to Age Six, Youth & Family Institute of Augsburg College, Minneapolis, 2001.

In Chapter 21 of this book ('Children and Public Worship'), the authors offer practical advice and guidance for parents worshipping with young children. Five points are of particular significance:

1. Evenshaug *et al* point out that 'children understand more than adults presume'. Children are 'significantly engaged by seeing and experiencing' even though they may be unable to fully understand all that is said and done [171].
2. Children's learning in worship is enhanced where parents and other adult carers coach them in each aspect of the service.
3. Though children may often appear to be disengaged, they learn from the example given by other worshippers: 'the best way to teach a child the forms and content of the worship service is for parents to participate actively in the liturgy' [173].
4. Involving children in worship begins before the service actually starts. Establishing a routine for family life on Sundays can prepare adults and children alike for engagement as worshippers.
5. Devotional practices in the home can provide children with tools and greater understanding for participation in congregational worship: 'private worship at home and public worship at church can inform and support each other when planned and coordinated imaginatively' [176].

Caroline Fairless Children at Worship: Congregations in Bloom, Church Publishing, New York, 2000.

This book is a passionate call for children-inclusive worship, reflecting a great deal of creative energy and experimentation. Fairless gives readers a real insight into her learning experiences in a congregational setting and calls them to embark on a journey of their own. Efforts to

“accommodate” children in worship are rejected as insufficient, as they perpetuate an us-them mentality: ‘This is not about hospitality to children; it is not about accommodating children in church. This is about bringing near the kingdom of God’ [154]. Fairless explores the central question: ““What happens when we dare assume that children have the same claim on the space, ritual, style and content of worship as do adults?”” [11]. She provides a portrait of the possibilities for children-inclusive, intergenerational worship through her description of the worship forms developed in the course of her pastorate at Holy Family Church, Half Moon Bay (California). Fairless does not reject liturgy as such but challenges congregations to ‘peel the forms back to the skeleton and rebuild [liturgical worship] in a way that includes everybody’ [155]. The book is replete with examples of art, story-telling, and liturgical language and movement engaging both children and adults together in a common encounter with God. ‘Our task’, she writes, ‘is to develop an environment so filled with images and art and symbols of God, to recreate with our own hands and our own tongues such a portrait of God’s redemptive work, to show by the way we are with one another the irresistible reconciling love of God, that we never forget how it is with God’ [121]. Fairless’ contribution is both deeply provocative and refreshing, challenging readers to think “outside the box” concerning the worship of children in the gathered community of faith.

Sara Covin Juengst Sharing Faith with Children: Rethinking the Children’s Sermon, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, 1994.

While this book focuses on one particular approach often used to involve children in worship - the so-called children’s sermon - it includes much material helpful for gaining an understanding of children as worshippers, and therefore for guiding worship planners in their efforts to develop children-inclusive worship. Juengst communicates two important foundational principles concerning children and worship. Firstly, she asserts that the purpose of involving children in worship is not to teach them how to worship, for they are already able to do so: ‘They are ready to acknowledge, rehearse and proclaim with the gathered community. Their wonderful

openness, their colorful imaginations, and their sense of wonder all combine to put them in a state of readiness for worship. Our problem has been that we have insisted on treating them like adults. Can we instead learn how to open the gates of awe and wonder for these little ones on their terms and in their language?’ [19]. The second principle flows from the first. As children are full members of the body of Christ and are complete worshippers in their own right, the focus should be not upon forming children for adult-like worship, but worshipping *with* children as they are now able. Juengst devotes four chapters to providing background material for understanding children in relation to worship: how children think (chapter 4), how children grow in faith (chapter 5), the spiritual needs of children (chapter 5) and language and symbolism (chapter 7).

Shirley K. Morgenthaler Right From the Start: A Parent’s Guide to the Young Child’s Faith Development, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2001.

In Chapter 11 of this book, Morgenthaler addresses the topic of ‘Worship and Young Children’. She emphasises the importance of what she calls the three ‘R’s’ for childhood learning and experience in worship: ritual, repetition and relational contextualization. Ritual is sensory in nature and therefore can engage children more fully than that which is abstract and rational. Repetition brings predictability and security and it is ‘the security of sameness and familiarity that allows young children to risk the effort involved in learning and discovery. ... Children will learn more, and learn more efficiently, as their need for order and predictability is honored’ [181]. Relational contextualization concerns the context of relationships in which the child worships. Morgenthaler writes that: ‘for the young child to be energized for learning requires an attachment to an important, caregiving adult. For the young child to be stimulated for discovery, the connection to the experience and the adult hovering over the event is critical. Adults in relationship with children make learning happen. In worship, this means that it is not only the experience of worship that matters, but also the relationship with others involved in the worship. The context is defined not simply by the experience itself, but also by the relationship of the

child to the adults involved and participating in that worship' [181].

David Ng, Virginia Thomas Children in the Worshipping Community, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1981.

This book is widely regarded as a “classic” in its field. Ng and Thomas bring together theology, child development theory and matters of practical application in a strong case for the inclusion of children in worship. Central to their writing is the conviction that children belong in worship, that children offer great gifts that enrich congregational worship, and that children need what God gives to us in worship as much as other participants. The first four chapters of the book (Chapter 1 - ‘Children and Worship: Problems and Possibilities; Chapter 2 - ‘The Faith that Calls Children to Worship’; Chapter 3 - ‘The Children that Faith Calls to Worship’; Chapter 4 - ‘How to Children Learn to Worship’) outline basic understandings and principles for the full inclusion of children in worship. The second half of the book offers practical advice and instruction, looking in turn at the role of the home in leading children into worship (Chapter 5), possibilities for teaching children about worship in graded groups (Chapter 6), the use of music with children in worship (Chapter 7), means of planning for children in worship (Chapter 8), and the role and place of the pastor in enhancing the worship of children (Chapter 9). Ng and Thomas include in Chapter 6 models and designs for enriching the participation in and understanding of worship by children through teaching sessions.

One surprising aspect of the book is the relatively little attention given to ways in which the actual *event* of worship may be reformed and modified to enable the worship of children alongside others in corporate worship.

Gretchen Wolff Pritchard Offering the Gospel to Children, Cowley Publications, Boston, 1992.

This book is an interesting combination of critique on contemporary Christian teaching of children, suggestions for creative celebration of the church year with children, and discussion of

what it means to truly include children in corporate worship. Pritchard argues that what is so often communicated to and enacted with children is not the death-life, law-gospel encounter that it is at the heart of Christian faith and life but a “kiddie” gospel that obscures the reality of brokenness and sin and therefore Christ as the one who saves. The message of the gospel is reduced and distorted into ‘easy Good News, ... a simple blessing, instead of a sacrament of life out of death. God’s in his heaven, all’s right with the world, is the message - and the only thing missing is that we all have to try harder to be loving’ [33]. Pritchard issues a call for us to “get real” with children, drawing them into the heart of our liturgical encounter with God, who kills and makes alive through law and gospel. The church year is held up as a primary tool for actively engaging children with the story of God’s salvific works in history. Pritchard offers her own experiences of congregation-wide celebration around the feasts of the church year. In Part Four of the book, Pritchard focuses more directly on children in corporate worship. Her contention is that if the Sunday liturgy is to ‘engage the children with the gospel, our forms of worship will have to change much more than they have’ [144]. She strongly advocates for communion of all the baptised as a natural consequence of valuing children as full members of the body of Christ.

Elizabeth J. Sandell Including Children in Worship: A Planning Guide for Congregations, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1991.

This book is an excellent resource for congregations and congregational leaders working toward children-inclusive worship. It includes an introduction to some of the biblical, theological and theoretical principles underlying efforts to include children in worship as well as practical suggestions for embarking upon a process of meaningful congregational worship. How, asks Sandell, do we include children in worship in a way that ‘affirms who they are and how God made them to be?’ [7]. Outlines are provided for four educational sessions for adults in a congregation, and the majority of the book is devoted to offering concrete suggestions and involving and engaging children in worship.

Catherine Stonehouse Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1998.

The purpose of book is to examine the 'inner workings of development and spiritual formation during childhood' [12]. While Stonehouse does not give much attention specifically to questions of children in corporate worship, there is a great deal of material in her book that provides important foundational information for designing children-inclusive worship. Stonehouse examines in turn the contributions of Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg and Fowler toward contemporary understandings of childhood spiritual development, and explores the implications of their work for ministry with children. She also gives attention to the work of Jerome Berryman and Sofia Cavalletti as pioneers in creating developmentally appropriate curricula for engaging children in worship in age-based small group settings.

Articles

Mary Catherine Berglund 'Obeying the Mystery: Worship and the Very Young', Beginning the Journey: From Infant Baptism to First Eucharist, United States Catholic Bishops Conference, Washington D.C., 1994, 39-49.

Berglund suggests two 'striking characteristics' [43] of young children that are gifts to others in worship and that can assist adults in leading children into worship. The first characteristic is that 'children's sense of wonder is not yet jaded'; the second is that young children are 'prelogical in their reasoning processes' [43]. Together, these characteristics give children an ability to 'stand unembarrassed before mystery' in a manner impossible for many adults. Berglund discusses the Catholic children's liturgy of the word as a means of drawing children into meaningful participation in liturgy.

Teresa Bowers 'How Can We Involve Children in Worship?', Division for Congregational Ministries of the ELCA, revised 1999 - found at <http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/qa/children.html>.

This brief article advocates for full integration of children as worshippers with and alongside adults in communities of faith. The author poses the question: 'How can we worship effectively so that both children and adults are provided a means to encounter the holy?'. The importance of the senses to children's acquisition of understanding and inference of meaning is emphasised. Planners of worship with children are encouraged to give attention to: repetition; ritual actions ('children don't need to assign words to actions before they can find meaning in them'); physical movement (e.g. bodily gestures, processions); use of visuals (e.g. banners, paraments); and providing children with opportunities for worship leadership. The potential of the church year as a tool for engaging children is also emphasised.

Shelley E. Cochran 'Let the Children Come: Resources for Including Children in Worship', Reformed Worship, No. 27 (March 1993), 29-31.

This article provides a number of guidelines for the use of children's sermons and suggestions for increasing the participation of children in the total worship service. A sample brochure for parents of children in worship is included.

A. Roger Gobbel and Gertrude G. Gobbel 'Children and Worship', Religious Education, No. 74 (November-December 1979), 571-582.

The authors argue that a great deal of congregational effort concerning children and worship begins with the premise that worship is primarily an adult activity. Children's sermons, for example, typically do not integrate children in the dance that is corporate, intergenerational worship but instead 'isolate the children with their peers or become pleasant interludes or "operations" performed on the children in the presence of adult spectators' [572]. Gobbel and Gobbel contend that the question "What can we do *for* our children during worship" is

‘improper’ [581] and should be replaced with another: ‘What shall we do *along with* children, enabling them to be active participants so that all of us together can do the proper work of the gathered, worshipping community?’ [573]. Believing that children learn to be the church as they experience the church, they suggest providing a ‘rich and exciting range of events within the gathered community which will be attuned to the abilities and capacities of the children and which will enable all of us together to do the community’s worship’ [576]. This may require altering somewhat the order and forms of worship and a ‘new understanding of what is “permissible” in worship’ [578]. Verbal communication in the worship setting must involve talking *with* and not *at* children, listening with acceptance and respect and inviting them to share their understandings and feelings. The participation of children in worship should aim for child-adult interaction as worshippers in common. Ideally, the participation of children in worship is interwoven with that of others as children ‘move throughout the congregation, speaking a word from God, giving a kiss or hug, proclaiming a blessing and sharing such a simple thing as a flower or a leaf’ [573].

Hazel M. Morris ‘Children and Worship’, Southwestern Journal of Theology, 33 (Summer 1991), 16-24.

Morris emphasises the unique significance of corporate worship for children’s experience of and growth in faith. The child will ‘find a greater sense of belonging in corporate worship than through any of the church’s other ministries. The worship service is where the child belongs and where the child learns belonging’ [17]. Children are invited into worship most fully when given the opportunity to employ all of their senses: sound, sight, touch, smell and taste. Movement, silence and symbolism also add richness to the worship of children. Morris provides many examples and suggestions of ways in which this may be done.

David Ng 'Children in the Worshipping Community' Reformed Liturgy & Music, Vol. 31/4 (1997), 233-236.

In this article Ng begins with a basic theology of children and worship, focuses briefly on developmental understandings of children and makes a variety of suggestions for the participation of children in worship. He contends that the proclivity of children to worship with their whole beings may incline them to be the 'most free and "most whole" participants' in worship [234]. In worship children minister to adults, even as they are ministered to. Worship is most appropriately arranged for children when it is 'concrete, tangible and orderly, so that children can participate with some sense of understanding and security' [234]. Liturgical explanation for children is also necessary and ways of participating need to be practiced with them. Ng also suggests that parents be given 'specific methods and resources' [235] for helping their children to worship - but unfortunately gives no examples of what he has in mind.

Virginia Thomas 'Including Children in Worship' Leadership, Vol. 4/3 (Summer 1983), 54-55.

In this brief article, Thomas outlines a six-step approach to nurturing children through corporate worship based on her experiences at Westminster Presbyterian Church, New Port Richey (Florida). These steps are to: (1) state intentions clearly; (2) support parents as God's primary teachers of worship; (3) educate children for worship; (4) help children to contribute in worship; (5) plan worship for all ages; (6) work to create a climate of welcome for all. In so doing, Thomas presents a compelling vision of child-responsive, intergenerational worship and provides practical direction for initiating a process of change.

Mary Jane Voogt 'Welcome to Worship', Reformed Worship, No. 23 (March 1992), 38-39.

This article gives readers an introduction to the worship "milestones" and hymn-of-the-month program introduced by Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, to encourage children of the congregation to grow in their understanding of and participation in worship.

***Glaucia Vasconelos Wilkey 'What Children Bring: A Little Child Shall Lead Them',
Reformed Liturgy & Music, Vol. 31/4 (1997), 263-269.***

Wilkey presents a theological and philosophical case for the involvement of children in corporate worship. Firstly, she stresses the gifts that children bring to adults in worship, in leading them to 'rediscover affective, non-cognitive ways of experiencing worship, to "break forth in wonder"' [263]. Secondly, Wilkey points to the unique importance of worship in faith formation, over and above Sunday School. To show children the faith, she contends, is to 'involve them fully in worship, the primary ritual, identity-shaping activity of the church' [265]. However, this involvement must take seriously children as worshippers, for when children are primarily involved as performers 'we send wrong messages about whose worship it is, and what the nature of worship really is' [265]. Thirdly, Wilkey emphasises the place of children in Scripture. Pointing toward such biblical figures as Samuel, Naaman's slave girl and the boy with loaves and fishes, Wilkey concludes that throughout the Scriptures we find children 'ministering with and to adults, leading them to break forth in wonder' [266]. Fourthly, Wilkey asserts the particular significance of the sacraments for children in worship as gestures and symbol-actions that engage on a 'more profound level than verbal reasoning' [268]. Through worshipping and celebrating the sacraments with children, adults can 'learn anew to experience the liturgy of the church' [268].