

## **Lesson #11: Prepare the children to gather together for worship with the whole congregation.**

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10, ESV

I love this passage! I love this picture! The great, numberless gathering of God's people from every time, every tongue, every tribe, at last all together, praising God for their salvation through Jesus. This gathering is our goal. What an amazing experience that will be! Every Sunday, when we gather together as a whole congregation, we have a little dress rehearsal for that great Day.

These weekly dress rehearsals are not just encouraging for us. They can be a wonderfully attractive witness of the gospel for non-Christians and for our children. But how do we do this when they are sitting bored and fidgety through the singing and the prayers....let along the hour-long sermon (like at our church)? Do we just throw in the towel and give them their own, customized Children's Church, while we have our grown-up one...followed by their own, customized middle school service, then their own high school service...then their college fellowship at university? If so, when do they ever get to see the beauty of the body of Christ in this weekly dress rehearsal? When do they ever have their attention spans stretched to take in these bigger truths? Are we homogenizing our kids' worship experience in a way that does not point them to and prepare them for Revelation 7.

Or, do we take the hard line and just force them to sit and stand and listen, put on a happy face and like it?

Hmmm... No one wants to turn off kids from God and the gospel. So what do you do with the little ones who might not be old enough to sit through a long service or who are bored or even show signs of hating going to church because they cannot connect with the big words? What have we done to prepare them for the real local church—a body of believers that include people who are very different from us?

I think there are ways to both be sensitive to the limits of a child's attention span and level of understanding, and yet also to be progressively, deliberately preparing them to gather with the congregation as a whole in an understandable, hopefully memorable way as they grow up. And in doing so, always be keeping the goal a little bit of Revelation 7.

Here are some ways that we have done this at CHBC:

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR EVERYONE**

We offer Sunday School classes that do not over-lap with the worship services. Children can attend these, then attend all of the worship service. The middle school Sunday School teachers sometimes bring in the bulletin for the morning worship service and use it to go through the songs, Bible readings and sermon text before the kids go into the service.

### **MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE (We have only one so the whole church can gather together)**

We do offer classes for preschoolers that run through the church service. Some parents bring their children into the worship service with them for the singing, prayers and reading of Scripture (about 45 minutes at our church), but sign them into their class for the sermon portion of the worship service (another hour). This exposes these children to the congregation gathered together in a way that most closely matches their attention span.

Our elementary school kids (K-3rd grade) join their parents for the first part of the service (singing, prayers, Bible readings), then some stay in for the sermon, while others are dismissed for Praise Factory Investigators (which takes place only during the sermon portion of the service.) Even those who do go to Praise Factory during the sermon, we are teaching them in ways which will better prepare them to stay in and gather with the rest of the congregation one day. We don't mind stretching the children's attention span a bit with the story length. We

include hymns that we regularly sing in our worship services. And, the hymn activity involves not just learning to sing the songs, but takes a close look at the words and what they mean. This, in turn, helps the children better understand what they are singing in the worship services, which also helps them to gather with the church in a more meaningful way.

Children who are in 4th grade and higher are in the whole service, from beginning to end.

We also provide two worship bulletin (one for younger kids; one for older kids) that helps them interact with what's going on in the service, space to write down sermon notes and also gives them a coloring sheet and puzzle activity. Our Children's Ministry administrator and pastor of families create these each week, based on the music, Bible readings and Scripture passage being preached on. (a sample of two of our bulletins can found in G.)

As well as being able to sit in the worship hall with everyone else, we also provide special rooms with video feed just for parents with kids. This allows even parents with very wiggling, noisy kids to hear the service...and for them to help their children to participate in the service without being a huge distraction to others.

#### SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE

This 1.5 hour service is focused on sharing, prayer and singing, with a much shorter (15 minute) devotion on Scripture. Except for the long time of silence needed during the prayer time (20-25 minutes), it is an easier service for younger children to take part in. We provide a child care for pre-schoolers for the whole service; and, a class for children only K-2nd grade, that starts after the initial singing time (first 15 minutes) ends. Again, this is exposes K-2nd graders to part of the church service and all 3rd graders to all of it.

### **Lesson #11: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting:**

1. How are you helping children to prepare to gather with the congregation?
2. How can you help them learn more about what goes on during the worship services?
3. How could you help your parents help their children during the worship services?
4. What parts of the worship services do children regularly take part in?
5. Do you only offer children's classes during the church hour? The whole service? Just the sermon portion? What difficulties does that cause when children transition into the service? Is there anything you could do to help that transition?