

# Welcoming Children's Participation at Mass

Kathy Kuczka

Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.

—Mark 9:37

Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

—Mark 10:14

As a child, some of my earliest memories are of being at Mass. I don't remember everything, but I am certain that, like typical kids, my brother and I squealed and squirmed and fought with each other during Mass. I may not have understood everything that happened at Mass, but those early experiences of celebrating liturgy cultivated and nurtured my faith in a way that nothing else could.

Liturgy is a family affair. Parents not only have the right to bring their children to church, but they also have a duty to do so. In fact, the entire Christian community shares the responsibility to foster the faith of children, and that means welcoming their presence at Mass.

Cry rooms are, as the name suggests, a separate space provided for children who are inconsolable, but separating children and families from the assembly is not optimal. Kids will be kids. Their tiny bodies are full of energy, and sometimes that prevents them from being still. They will wiggle and occasionally wail. The work of the parent is to model the behavior they expect from their children. They do this by participating fully in the liturgy and by engaging their children in singing the songs and praying the prayers. The work of the community is to be patient and tolerant, remembering that we, too, were once children. A smile or a word of encouragement sends a strong message to parents and children. It says, "We welcome you here," and "We are all part of God's family."

## TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT MASS

If children do not understand what is taking place at Mass, they will be easily distracted. Parents and mentors in faith can help children participate more attentively in Mass by taking time to explain the parts of the Mass, the rituals, the symbols, the postures, and the prayers in language children can understand. Parishes can also support families by providing age-appropriate catechetical resources that can further help them understand the parts of the Mass.



Photo by Andrew Lewis © LTP

With suitable preparation, children can serve effectively in many ministries at Mass.

Parish ministers might also offer regular church tours where children can get up close and personal with the sacred space. During such a tour, parish guides might wish to invite children and their parents to view the ambo and the altar, explaining the important role both play in the celebration of the liturgy. They might also show children the ambry while speaking of the purpose of the oils and allow children the chance to smell the fragrant sacred chrism. Other must-see items on the tour: Take them behind the scenes to the sacristy, where an adult can light the charcoal to demonstrate how smoke comes from the burning of incense. Have the children look at the inside of *The Roman Missal* and the lectionary. The more children know about the space where they worship and the books and objects used in the liturgy, the more comfortable they will be in church.

## INVOLVE THE CHILDREN

Another way that parishes can engage children in the liturgy is to invite them to perform a specific role at Mass. While many children participate as altar servers, why not ask others to be greeters, ushers, lectors, and cantors? This can be an ongoing endeavor, or it can be limited to once a month or to a specific Mass where many children are present. Children invited to serve in these roles should be provided with basic training to prepare them to serve in their ministries. Children who are prepared to serve in a ministry will not only look forward to coming to Mass, but they will also inspire and engage the larger community.

Let us welcome all our children, as Jesus did, with open arms.

Text by Kathy Kuczka, author of *Connecting the Liturgy with Our Lives: Print and Digital Resources for Faith Formation* (LTP, 2019).  
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