

Discussion Guide for

Parenting in the Pew

*Guiding Your Children
into the Joy of Worship*

by Robbie Castleman



Discussion Guide by Carrie O'Donnell

Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) is a collaborative effort of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Pastoral Education department and LCMS districts to help pastors and their wives in the transition from seminary to congregation. To learn more, visit lcms.org/pals.

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Introduction

Many PALS participants have requested materials addressing matters of parenting. As members of a pastor's family, we are often expected to have it all together. And it seems that our parenting skills are especially on display — and open for criticism — during church services. I discovered *Parenting in the Pew* when I was expecting our first child. It stimulated a number of discussions and challenged our thoughts on how to approach the way we would parent in the pew. Please understand that this book is not written by a Lutheran pastor's wife nor has it passed any doctrinal review of the LCMS. That said, it provides some helpful advice and raises interesting ideas to ponder and discuss. I am not asking you to agree with everything written in the book but take from this resource that which is helpful.

Parenting in the pew is more than just helping your children learn what and when to say something and when in the service we sit, stand or kneel. Parenting in the pew is about helping your children learn how to receive God's gifts.

While this discussion guide is written specifically for pastors' wives, the issues contained within are applicable to pastors as well as they lead their flock in worship — whether they are married or have any children of their own. The skills discussed in this book can not only be utilized by parents — whether you are a single parent in the pew or both parents are present — but by aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends and other members of the church family.

I have provided a short synopsis of each chapter for you. So if you haven't had the chance to read the book before your group meets, you should still be able to fully participate in the discussion.

The author has included discussion questions and scriptural reflections at the back of the book. Some of the questions are better than others. The following are some additional questions to help guide your discussion of this book and the issue of parenting in the pew.

Chapter One: “Daddy, I’d Like You to Meet My Children”

“Parenting in the pew can help children and parents to pay attention to what is really important.” (p. 15)

In this chapter, Castleman recognizes how hard it is to pay attention to our children and to pay attention to what is going on in church at the same time. We are challenged to move beyond getting our children to go to church because it’s the right thing to do and getting our children to sit still and be quiet. Training our children to participate in the service, to worship, is something we get to do together here in time and there in eternity. It is both immanent and transcendent.

1. My friend, Rev. Paul Beisel recently wrote: “You can learn a lot about the nature of worship in John 13, I think. How many Christians are like Peter when it comes to worship: ‘Lord, You shall never wash my feet.’ In other words, the idea is that worship is all about us doing something for God, loving him, praising him, etc. But Jesus turns all this on its head when he gets down and begins washing the disciples’ feet. It is truly Divine Service. He is showing them what he meant when he said: ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.’ And of course, he also is teaching them how they ought to love and serve one another. But when it comes to God, we are receivers, not givers.”

Is worship primarily about giving or receiving?
What do we give? What do we receive?

2. Why do you go to church? Why do most other people in the pews go? Do they understand what is going on during the service and why?

3. What do you consider appropriate behavior for children in church? What behaviors are particularly distracting? At what point should a parent take a child out of the service?

4. Why should children come to church even if they are too young to participate in Holy Communion? What do they receive?

Chapter Two: “Worship B.C. and A.D.”

In Chapter 2, Castleman draws the distinction in her worship experience “Before Children” and “After Diapers.” It’s a lot of work. Children don’t automatically know how to participate in church. But we shouldn’t separate out church from all other areas of our children’s lives that require patient training. Teaching our children to walk, to dress, to feed themselves and to read are all processes which require patient training and time. So too in church we need to help our children learn the difference between “sit still and be quiet” and “be still and know that I am God.”

Note: You’ll definitely hear some difference in our doctrinal understanding of the service done in worship expressed in this chapter and elsewhere. According to the author, worship is clearly more of something *we do* than *we receive*. The Introduction to the *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* nicely captures the dynamic between the Lord’s service to us and our response to Him present in worship. (See Appendix A)

1. Discuss this quote: “Worship is not a refueling to get us through another week. Worship is not a system of traditions built up over many years of congregational life until everyone feels comfortable. Worship is not a time to unwind, relax, tune out or take a mental vacation. Worship is not an hour of Christian entertainment. It is not what makes us good people, faithful Christians or successful parents. Worship is the surrender of our souls to a God who is jealous for our attention, time and love.” (p. 24)

2. The sound of children in worship is a blessed thing to the Lord. How can we help others to see this? (See the pew card in Appendix B. Would it be helpful to have something like this in your church?)

3. Is your church welcoming to children? In what ways is your church helpful to and supportive of families with young children?

4. In the article entitled Empty Sack at the end of this study (see Appendix C), LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison shares his attitude toward church as a child and how his parents taught him to understand and receive God’s gifts. (I would add that we come to church carrying all kinds of burdens in our sacks. We first dump these burdens out at the foot of the cross and then begin filling our sacks up as Harrison says.) Enjoy!

5. “Do as I say, not as I do.” Ouch. Most parents know that our children emulate our own behavior. They often learn best by example and through personal experience. “Children learn best by doing ... Children learn to worship by worshipping — through participation, practice and patience.” (p. 25) How can we expect our children to learn to participate appropriately and to appreciate church if they aren’t there?

6. As pastors' wives, we often feel life in the fish bowl no more so than on Sunday mornings. Castleman suggests that "if our hearts are fixed on being with our children before the Lord and not before the congregation, we will begin to experience great relief and freedom." (p. 29) How might this change in attitude affect your Sunday morning experience?

7. As pastors' wives we also may find ourselves, like Castleman, attending a church every week that may be quite different from the one where we were raised. The organist, choir or other church musicians may not have the same level of talent as others we've experienced. The architecture and furnishings of the sanctuary may not be the same. We may miss the stained glass from our previous congregation. The advice from Castleman's friend Jene helped her gain a new perspective and attitude toward her church. Have you struggled with this yourself?

Chapter Three: “Praise and Puppies”

“We need children in our churches. They can remind us vividly what it means to be great believers. Young children have the capacity to accept as truth what is told to them by adults ... Children delight in believing what adults find difficult to swallow.” (p. 33)

Although children of all ages have the capacity for worship, the way they think about God and understand the mysteries of the faith may differ according to their age. Because parents know their children well, they are the best suited to pass on the faith and help their children understand what they are hearing, seeing and experiencing during church. Conversely, children have the amazing ability to teach their parents and other adults. It is no accident that Jesus upholds the faith of children as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

1. What are some of the benefits children and youth bring to their church families? What are some of the ways they can serve and participate in the life of the congregation?

2. What about adults new to the faith themselves who aren't able to explain or lead their children through the Divine Service? How do we help them with their children? Should we whisper in their ears as well? How?

3. Read the questions Castleman included for this chapter on page 127.

Chapter Four: “Sunday Morning Starts Saturday Night”

Have you ever wondered why the wheels seem to come off the wagon on Sunday mornings? Why is it that the baby always fills their diaper as you're about to pile into the car for church? Or why is it that your son spills his juice all over himself or your daughter can't find her shoes on Sunday morning? Clearly the Devil would prefer we just stay home.

I thought I would surely avoid some of these pitfalls at my husband's first parish. We lived in an attached parsonage. Literally, we walked through the door in our living room into the back of the sanctuary. And yet ... we often barely made it into our pew while the bell was still ringing. Much to my chagrin, I also discovered that members sitting or standing in the back of the sanctuary could hear me if I gave my kids the dressing down before heading out the door — letting them know just how I expected them to act during the service. Oh, yeah. I'm sure they were all impressed.

Over time I've had to learn some of the lessons in this chapter the hard way. (And these lessons have been incredibly helpful in getting my crew out the door in time for school, as well — an added bonus!) A little preparation goes a long way. Why make myself and my kids crazy every morning running around trying to gather homework, and shoes, lunch boxes and permission slips? It is much easier to do this the night before. This little bit of planning and preparation has made all of our mornings much nicer.

1. Share some of your getting ready for church experiences. What steps have you taken in your home to make Sunday mornings a bit smoother?

2. What are some ways you can help set the tone for worship even before you leave the house and on your way to church in the car?

3. Have you developed any routines for Sunday breakfast or lunch? We sometimes bring extra and unnecessary stress on ourselves. What have you found to be most helpful in reducing your Sunday stress?

4. One of the ways we participate on Sunday morning and return thanksgiving to the Lord is through our tithe. How are you establishing the habit of tithing in your children?

Chapter Five: “Counting Bricks or Encountering God”

Parenting in the pew is a win/win. Not only do our children grow spiritually and feel a greater sense of belonging, but we tend to do a better job of paying attention ourselves, finding new meaning in what too often becomes routine.

This chapter reminds us of our children’s real spiritual awareness and needs. And it provides some helpful tips to engage our children in the service rather than simply trying to keep them quietly entertained.

1. “Sit still and be quiet.” How many of us heard this when we were growing up? How many of you have been painfully aware of every sound and movement your child has made during the service? When encouraging children to participate, we want them to move with us, speak with us and sing with us. Personally I find it less stressful to get my children to participate than to keep them still and quiet — and less stress is always good in my book.

2. Where do you sit during church? Where do families with young children tend to sit in your church?

3. As a single mom on Sunday mornings, I tried to sit near the front and enlist a church grandparent to sit near who I could trust to block the other end of the pew if one of my little ones tried to make a break for the aisle. What strategies have you found that have worked well?

How could your congregation work together to help parent younger children in the pew?

4. The author recommends that children under four years old be in the nursery or in the church for only part of the service. I kept my children with me from infancy. Jesus says “let the little children (even infants!) come to me” (Matt. 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17).

My enlisted grandparent of the day was able to keep an eye on the others if I had to temporarily take one child out to change a diaper or for discipline. Every child is different. Is there a nursery or cry room in your church? Are there any certain expectations in your congregation regarding the youngest children in the pew?

5. How do you feel about food, gum, suckers, toys, coloring pages, etc.? I have to admit that I’ve used a number of these at different ages and with different kids. One child pays better attention when they have something to do with their hands. I think it’s possible to find a happy medium to best meet your family’s needs. A snack might be helpful without having to lay a veritable Thanksgiving spread. A small toy may occupy hands without needing to set up a demolition derby of matchbox cars racing up and down the pew and crashing into one another.

6. There are some wonderful resources to help guide your children in worship. These can be utilized by parents, other relatives or friends in the church. See the resource list for ideas and share what has worked well for you.

Chapter Six: “Make a Joyful Noise”

“Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.” Martin Luther

When we were at seminary, Kantor Richard Resch taught that the hymnbook is really the church’s prayer book and that it is an excellent devotional resource and catechetical tool that we should all have at home. We now have three that we use for our morning and bedtime devotions. We generally follow the “Daily Prayer” brief service (*LSB* p. 294-295) for our morning devotions. Before bed we sing a hymn (which we repeat for at least a week at a time which is especially helpful for younger children) according to the time of the church year followed by a few short prayers.

1. How have you used hymns outside of church services? Have you found ways to introduce them to your children?

2. When my children were younger, they loved it when we would sing in church one of the songs they knew from our devotions at home. They didn’t need to read. They already knew the words and sang along with great gusto! What are some ways to lead the youngest of children through the hymns and music of the Divine Service?

3. As children get older, we can help them look beyond the words to the meaning behind the words. What is this teaching me about Jesus? What is it teaching me about what He has done for me and my relationship with Him? Discuss ways you can lead children in learning about and developing a love for the music of the church.

4. Teens need to question and understand. Music can be a wonderful way to reach the teen’s heart. The unchanging nature of Christ and the absolutes of our Christian faith are comforting to teens in an increasingly secular and relativist society. There are a number of resources which can help teens (and others) evaluate church music — *Text, Music, Context* is one great example available through Concordia Publishing House. What are some ways your church can challenge its members to pay attention to the words and meanings of the music played and sung?

5. Music is a wonderful way to engage youth in the life of the church. Are there other ways your congregation can involve your youth in the life and work of the church? Acolyte? Usher? What else?

Chapter Seven: “Prayer, Confession and Canned Goods”

Prayer is a major part of our life as Christians and it's a significant part of our worship services. Teaching our children the how, what, when, where and why of prayer begins at home and then carries into our life together in church.

1. Children have the incredible ability to accept in faith that which is unseen. How can we help our children to differentiate between the real (God) and those things which are not real (Santa and the Easter Bunny)?

2. Our Lutheran liturgies and hymns provide wonderful teaching opportunities on the different types of prayer. In every service we should hear prayers of: Adoration (Praise), Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication (Requests) — A.C.T.S. How can this modeling of prayer help set the format for prayers at home?

3. Martin Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray" also provides examples on how to use the *Small Catechism* in daily prayer. Have you ever tried this? Luther uses an I.T.C.P. method of prayer — Instruction (what is this teaching me?), Thanksgiving, Confession and Prayer. (See the example in Appendix D.)

4. How does the fact that Confession is ALWAYS followed by Absolution help model behavior outside of church?

5. Our hymnal is an incredible resource for prayer — both at church and at home. Kantor Richard Resch recounts the story of a young boy sent to his room to reflect on his bad behavior. After a few minutes, his parents could hear him quietly singing "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Having sung this repeatedly at church, this prayer taken directly from Scripture was easily accessible in his memory and on his heart when he needed it. How have you utilized our hymnal as a teaching tool at church or especially at home? Have you tried the pattern for daily prayer found on pages 294-299 of the *LSB*?

6. A child's prayer is often honest, and vulnerable and full of hope. It is sometimes interesting to see what weighs on our little ones' hearts. As a young child, my eldest son prayed daily for all the llamas and camels of the world. We still have no idea where that came from! My youngest son has daily prayed for my ankle. Clearly my ankle surgery several years ago really affected him. Have your children ever accompanied your husband on a visit to a sick or home-bound member? How did that experience affect their understanding of the prayers for these members during church? I have found that our children are often better than I am at remembering some of these dear members or their classmates in regular prayer.

7. Regarding modeling prayer, the author seems to put great importance on people praying out loud using their own words. This can be intimidating to someone new to praying — especially when done in front of others. Jesus invited us to join him in speaking to God as a child might speak to his father. Jesus also regularly prayed using Scripture — he repeated back God’s word to him. Yes, our children should know that their prayers don’t have to be fancy and use big words. But our children should also know that when they’re not sure what or how to pray, they can use hymns, scripture and written prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings (as found on pages 305–318 in the *LSB*). How do you pray when you pray with others? Have you used hymns, scripture or written prayers?

8. What are some ways to reinforce that being in church and participating in the Divine Service is a privilege? How might someone communicate to a child that being taken out of the service is a punishment and not a reward?

9. I agree that it is important to talk with children about the various ways God may answer our prayers. Sometimes God says “yes.” Sometimes He answers our prayers with “no.” And sometimes it’s “not yet.” God always knows what is best. However, I think the author’s answer about how to know if God is speaking to you is TERRIBLE: “It’s something you know deeply and distinctly.” (p. 95) Personal feelings are very capricious, and not a good basis for *knowing* God’s will. God’s Word is certain and sure, and cannot be just a guide. How will you explain to children how to discern God’s will?

Chapter Eight: “Just How Long Was That Sermon?”

Engaging children in the portions of the service that require speaking, singing and moving is one thing. But helping them to listen attentively during the quiet part, when the pastor is preaching, can be another thing altogether. “The different personalities and attention spans of children make a wide variety of behaviors possible when the long part of the worship service begins. Concentrating on the sermon is one of the hardest parts of worship for children of all ages — even when Daddy is the preacher.” (p. 98) This chapter discusses ways we can help focus our children’s attention on the sermon, the stories from the Bible, the convicting Law and sweet Gospel we all need to hear, regardless of our age.

1. What are some ways to help illustrate and draw children into the stories they hear in scripture and in the pastor’s sermons?

2. What has been your experience with children’s sermons? Pros/cons?

3. The author points out the reality that if our children become accustomed to tuning out the sermon at a younger age, they will continue to do so as they get older. What are some ways that we can challenge our young people to engage and really listen to the Word read and the Law and Gospel proclaimed in the sermons?

Chapter Nine: “Saving Up for Something Special”

Again, the author and we have a very different understanding of the sacraments. She is right, however, that they are sacred and we need to help our children to understand and to respect them. (That said, this chapter might be good to simply skim — and maybe skip pages 112–119 altogether!)

1. Children listen to what adults say, but they learn much from what we do. Confirmation class isn't the only place where they need to learn about and develop respect for the Sacraments. How can we model respect for the Sacraments?

2. Baptism is not a symbol of cleansing and inclusion (p. 109) but actually “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this” (Luther’s *Small Catechism*). How can you use the Baptisms that take place in your church to help your child better understand their own Baptism and what it means to be an heir of the kingdom of heaven?

3. Again, the Lord’s Supper isn’t just a means of helping us to remember our Lord’s sacrifice, but “in this Sacrament, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us” through the words “given and shed for you” (Luther’s *Small Catechism*). The Service of the Sacrament is rich with opportunities to teach our children. What does it mean when we say “The Lord be with you”? What does it mean to lift our hearts up to the Lord? Who are the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven with whom we sing? What are some other ways to engage and teach our children during this portion of the Divine Service?

Chapter Ten: “The Holy Hug”

Parents and children (and pastors too!) need rest for their souls that can only be found in Christ. There are times when there are so many other distractions on Sunday morning, that it is hard to feel that Sabbath rest. Thanks be to God that His gifts are not reliant on our feelings and His Word does not come back empty but accomplishes that which He intends!

1. As pastors’ families, we don’t always find ourselves in a church that we would have chosen based on our own personal preferences. What comfort do we have in knowing that Christ and the gifts he gives are the same for us regardless of where we may have been called to serve?

2. What do you think of the list she gives for why people attend church and why any one specific church? “Church selection is a matter of personal preference. The decision is often based on how a congregation matches up with what one likes. Music, sermon length, preaching style, congregational demographics, sanctuary décor, dress code, denomination and the greeters’ degree of friendliness are factors in the church-shopping enterprise. People attend church to feel better, please parents, maintain a healthy habit, set a good example, fulfill a role, get help with a problem, learn about the Bible, pray with others, teach children values, keep kids busy and to be baptized, married and buried.” (pp. 121–122) Does this sound like members of your congregation or others you’ve met in your community?

3. The author points out that our culture is experiencing a very real spiritual vacuum where lapses in morality are no longer a reason for embarrassment. We offer something real, timeless and authentic. How can we as parents and as leaders in the church help our children to see this?

4. What does it mean to find Sabbath rest for our souls? How do we find this rest in the midst of leading the Divine Service, teaching classes and parenting children?

As parents, it is our responsibility to guide and train our children to participate in the life of the church and to receive joyfully with thanksgiving the gifts God gives us in the Divine Service. We do this so our children may grow in faith and spiritual maturity, confident in their salvation, thus building up the body of Christ.

May our Lord bless you and strengthen you in this task.

Appendix A: Introduction to the Lutheran Service Book

Our Lord is the Lord who serves. Jesus Christ came into the flesh not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. On the cross He offered Himself as a spotless sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Through His perfect life and death, He accomplished forgiveness and salvation for all before the Father in heaven. By His empty tomb and ascension into heaven, He declared His victory over sin and death to all the world. Seated now at the Father's right hand, He graciously serves His Church with the gifts of salvation. On the Last Day, He will come again to gather His elect from every nation to celebrate the feast that will have no end.

Our Lord serves us today through His Holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means, He comes among us to deliver His forgiveness and salvation, freeing us from our sins and strengthening us for service to one another and to the world. At Holy Baptism, He puts His name upon us, pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts and rescues us from sin, death and the devil. Through Holy Absolution, He pronounces His forgiveness again and again. With His Holy Word, written in Scripture and preached into our ears, He daily proclaims His abiding love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life in this world. In His Holy Supper, He gives us His own body and blood to eat and drink as a priceless gift to nourish and strengthen us in both body and soul.

**The Lord's service calls forth our service —
in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to
Him and in loving service to one another.**

The Lord's service calls forth our service — in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another. Having been called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we receive His gifts with thankfulness and praise. With psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, we joyfully confess all that God has done for us, declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our song joins with the song of every saint from every age, the new song of Christ's holy people, declaring: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12).

Within the Lutheran tradition, the wedding of the Word of God to melody was modeled by the reformer himself. Martin Luther had a high regard for music and urged the Church to use it wisely as a vehicle for proclaiming the Gospel. "Next to theology," he wrote, "I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor." Retaining the best of pre-Reformation hymnody,



as well as adding a great number of new hymns to the Church's song, Luther and succeeding generations of hymnwriters continue to inspire the faithful to lift their voices in praise and thanksgiving to the triune God.

The heritage of word and song has been highly valued throughout the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Even before the Synod's formation, a new, German-language hymnal was already in development, edited by the Synod's first president, C.F.W. Walther. With the transition to English came several books: *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1889, 1912), *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and, most recently, *Lutheran Worship* (1982). Each of these hymnals not only handed on the treasures of the past but also offered contemporary expressions of word and song in service to the Gospel.

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) now continues the church's song into the twenty-first century. Officially accepted at the Synod's 2004 Convention, *Lutheran Service Book* is a careful blending of the best of *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship*. It offers treasured melodies and texts that have nourished God's people for generations.

In every age God also blesses His people by raising up hymnwriters who have honed their craft to create rich and fresh expressions of praise. Produced during the most prolific period of English-language hymn writing in the history of Christendom, *LSB* delivers a rich feast of Gospel-centered hymns from every age and from many lands.

Lutheran Service Book is offered with the prayer that it may be used in all its fullness to give voice to the prayer, praise, and thanksgiving of God's holy people as they are graciously served by Him through Word and Sacrament.

Appendix B: Children during Worship Pew Tri-fold

The tri-fold brochure that appears on the following page is a resource that could be modified and shared with families in your congregation.

Greetings in Christ!

Parenting in the pew is an art. We are always preparing, always revising, always learning, not only about being better parents, but also about being better parents in the pew, that is, in worship. Lutherans want children in the worship service — not just because of an adult emotional need for generational connections — but primarily because GOD wants to speak to children, to give them His gifts, to teach them and to do so in conjunction with all the other children of God in Christ's body: the Church.

Inside are a few tips. God bless your parenting in the pew!

Children's Activities and Helps at St. Paul's:

- › Vacation Bible School
- › Kids in the Divine Service worship inserts
- › 7th & 8th Grade Confirmation Class
- › Active Christian Teens Youth Group (High School & Middle School)
- › Time to Grow classes on Sunday mornings
- › Life Together classes on Wednesday evenings

Children IN THE Worship Service

A guide for parents



St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church
210 E. Pleasant Street
Oconomowoc, WI 53066
Phone: 262-567-5001
Email: sscharnell@splco.org
Web: splco.org



May we suggest ...

- › **Relax!** God put the wiggle in children. Don't feel you have to eliminate it in God's house.
- › **Sit up front.** Children learn more when they can see what is going on.
- › **Limit distractions by where you sit.** Children are less distracted when they're not sitting around a bunch of other distracted kids.
- › **Sit by an outside aisle.** If your little one has the wiggles or the screeches, just pick her up and slide out to the Narthex in the back or the Fellowship Hall in the basement. No problem!
- › **Use gentle touch:** an arm around your child's shoulder, your hand in his, will give reassurance and encourage appropriate attention.
- › **Explain quietly** parts of the service. (We often have a Kids in the Divine Service insert to help parents with this.) It is easy to whisper in your child's ear when they are seated on your lap or close by.
- › **Help your child** find the pages in the Bible and Hymnal (But don't be distressed if they don't find the proper page!)
- › **Sing the hymns,** pray and voice the responses. Children learn liturgical behavior by copying you. An usher will be happy to help you with books and crayons. Please feel free to let your child use these during worship.
- › Always remember that *the way we welcome children in church directly affects the way they respond to church, God and Christ.* Let them know that they are at home in this liturgy of Divine gift, prayer and thanksgiving.
- › The sound of children in worship is a blessed thing to the Lord — and to us!
- › Learning to pray starts at home. Make it a daily habit, and start talking about Sunday worship earlier in the week, so that kids can be prepared.

Want more information?

Please let us know about you and how we can be of assistance.

Are you a: Parent Grandparent Other

Your child's age (if more than one, check appropriate boxes.)
 0-5 6-12 13-18

Your church background:

Lutheran Catholic
 Protestant Other

I would like information on:

Membership Day School
 Day Care

Comments:

Name:

Address:

City, State, ZIP code:

Phone number:



St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church
210 E. Pleasant Street
Oconomowoc, WI 53066

Appendix C: “Dear God, I’ve got an empty sack” by Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison

My dad loved to go to the early service — always the early service, and the earlier the better. He would have loved to have Easter sunrise service every Sunday of the year! But it was a different story for my brother and me. Church? Forget it. I’d rather sleep in since my brother and I liked to stay up as late as we possibly could on Saturday night.

Dad had the habit of saying the most un-cool things at 7:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning: “Come on boys! Up and at ‘em!” Then, if we lay in the sack too long, he’d go grab a towel or wash cloth, soak it in the coldest water possible and come and throw it on any exposed skin (usually a face, sometimes a back).

Then the routine was simple for me. Get dressed. Wolf down any available food. Hassle my little sister until she lodged a formal complaint with my parents — you know, normal stuff. I thank God now for my dad’s dogged persistence and his no-questions-asked, we’re-going-to-church-buddy-so-change-your-attitude attitude. My parents gave me something very important. They taught me that Christians go to church, but it wasn’t until many years later that I managed to figure out just why we go to church!

Why go to church? To learn about God. To give our time, talent and treasure back to God. To show God how we care about him. To worship God. Great answers, but they all miss the main point — Jesus.

I once read a sermon by Martin Luther, which forever changed how I look at going to church. Luther said to think about going to church with an empty sack. What’s the first thing you do in church? You confess, “I, a poor miserable

sinner ...” How we love to confess, “Oh Almighty God, my brother, my dad or mom, is a poor miserable sinner,” or “I thank Thee, Lord, I’m not like other men” (Luke 17). But here, finally, there are no more excuses. The problem is ME. This is simply saying, “Dear God, I’ve got an empty sack.”

Then what happens? The pastor says, “In the stead and by the command of Christ, I forgive you.” It’s as good as Jesus saying it himself (John 20)! And at just that moment, God throws a heap of grace, mercy and peace into your empty sack! You do nothing; you only receive, mouth hanging open, looking down into your bag, amazed at the gift. And what do you say? “AMEN!” That is, “Yep! I got it God! It’s in the bag!” And then comes more.

The lessons are read, and more grace and love and mercy from God are piled into the bag! After the gospel is read you say, “Thanks be to God! Yep! In the bag!” Hymns are sung which speak of Christ and His birth, life, death and resurrection for you. Then the sermon is preached. The Gospel of free forgiveness from Jesus is dished up and delivered to you. And the very forgiveness spoken about actually happens (Rom. 1:16)! The sermon ends with an “Amen!” And don’t just let the pastor have that Amen at the end of the sermon. You say it with him. By doing so you say, “Yep! I believe it! Jesus is mine. It’s in the bag!”

Then comes the Lord’s Supper. “Take and eat ...” and you respond, “Amen! Got it!” Then comes the blessing, “The Lord bless you and keep you, and make His face shine upon you ...” You respond, “Amen, Amen, Amen! I got it! It’s in the bag! And it’s heaping full!” By the end of the service your sack is heaped full of God’s forgiveness and grace and mercy. All your sins are forgiven. Do you see how foolish it is to whine, “I don’t get anything out of it” even when the sermon doesn’t strike home?

Then, bag full, you merrily head out of church. First thing you know, your dad sins against you by thinking you did something when you didn’t;

or your sister proceeds to generally make life miserable for you; or that kid at school whom you really actually hate makes you seethe with anger. What do you do? You pull that full bag off your shoulder and smack ‘em right over the head with it? — No!

You pull that sack of forgiveness off your back and say, “Christ has given me this sack of forgiveness and love and mercy. Here, I want to give you some forgiveness.”

And so it goes through the week. Mercy and love for the teacher who drives you insane. Forgiveness and prayers for the bully who makes your life miserable. Grace to put the best meaning on things, instead of gossiping. Strength of faith and hope and love, to help someone in time of need. But you fail time and again, and scoop up that grace and mercy for yourself, until you’re back at church, back on your knees, confessing something true: “Dear God, I’ve got an empty sack.”

Luther got it exactly right. Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee went to church and prayed loudly, “Dear God, I

thank you that I’m not like other men. I pray. I fast. I give a 10th of all I get.” He was saying, “I’ve got a full sack, God. I filled it. And I’m proud of it.”

He did not realize that our relationship with God is not primarily about what we do. It’s about what God does for us in Christ. If we won’t have an empty sack, we’ll have no God to fill it for us. But standing far off from the Pharisee, there was another man. He beat his chest, knowing full well that he was a sinner. He prayed, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said. “that man went away justified — forgiven.”

This Sunday, every time you say Amen in the liturgy, or after the sermon or at the Lord’s Supper, take note of what just got dropped in your sack! It’s Jesus and His forgiveness, grace and mercy.

The Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison is president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This article originally appeared in the Winter 2003 edition of the Higher Things magazine.

Appendix D: “A Simple Way to Pray” by Martin Luther, translated by Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison

When asked by his barber and good friend, Peter Beskendorf, for some practical guidance on how to prepare oneself for prayer, Martin Luther responded by writing this brief treatise first published in 1535. *A Simple Way to Pray* is a fresh modern translation bringing us Luther’s practical instruction, using Luther’s I.T.C.P. method of prayer. This method anchors prayer in the catechism or other biblical texts, but allows the Holy Spirit to prompt thoughts via the Word, which may be chased more freely by the mind at prayer.

Instruction: Lord Christ, You instruct me here that I am to listen carefully and heed the word of my pastor when he speaks Your Word. The pastoral office is profound; my pastor is not only charged to watch over my soul, but You also call him to account for his service to me. Finally, You tell me in this text that I am to be a joy to my pastor and not a pain and this for my own spiritual benefit.

Thanksgiving: Jesus, I thank You for my pastor. In fact, I thank You for the pastor who baptized me, and all pastors who have served me in my life as a Christian. Thank You for all the sermons that have clearly shown me my sin and delivered to me the free forgiveness of the Gospel because of Your sacrifice for me on the cross.

Confession: Lord, I confess that so often I fail to pray for my pastor. I fail to be gracious to his family. I do not pay attention to his preaching. I have gossiped and failed to love and defend him and put the best construction on everything. I deserve to have my faithful pastor taken away. Forgive me my many sins, and help me to do better. Help me especially to be a joy to my pastor and to encourage him in his difficult office.

Prayer: Savior, bless my pastor with faithfulness to Your Word. Cause him to grow in knowledge of Your Word. Give him courage and strength for his tasks. I thank You for (name) and for all faithful pastors. Grant success to the work of our seminaries. Bless our professors and students. And give my pastor joy. I ask all this for Your sake alone. Amen.

Resource List

- › **A Simple Way to Pray** by Martin Luther, translated by Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012.)

When asked by his barber and good friend, Peter Beskendorf, for some practical guidance on how to prepare oneself for prayer, Martin Luther responded by writing this brief treatise first published in 1535. *A Simple Way to Pray* is a fresh modern translation bringing us Luther's practical instruction, using Luther's I.T.C.P. method of prayer. This method anchors prayer in the catechism or other biblical texts, but allows the Holy Spirit to prompt thoughts via the Word, which may be chased more freely by the mind at prayer.

- › **Behold the Lamb: An Introduction to Christian Symbolism** by Deaconess Pam Nielsen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010.)

With simple language and striking artwork, this beautiful children's book explains the rich tradition and symbols of the Church. With the help of concise language and biblical and liturgical text, readers learn about what each symbol means, and how the church has used that symbol. Although this is a children's book, this resource can be used by all ages to better understand and appreciate the symbols used by the Church. Pastors, parents, teachers and congregations can use this book to encourage, teach and promote a deeper knowledge of Christian symbolism.

- › **Feeding the Lambs: A Worship Primer for Teachers of Children** by Rev. Christopher I. Thoma (Camp Sherman, Ore.: Trusted Books, 2008.)

Receiving the wonderful gift of forgiveness in worship is at the center of our lives in Christ! Digging into and understanding this reality is crucial in our approach to youth work. In this

book, Thoma explores the depths of worship and its relevance in the lives of children while offering insights which encourage teachers of children to celebrate ancient rites and ceremonies as time-tested tools for building faith.

- › **Kids in the Divine Service bulletin inserts** by Rev. Christopher I. Thoma

This set of 52 reproducible bulletin inserts invites children and parents to explore the various parts of the liturgy and their chancel surroundings. You can find out more about these inserts and how to get your copy at lcms.org/resources/youth-in-worship.

You can also listen to an interview on KFUE with Rev. Thoma on Kids in the Divine Service at: kfuam.org/2013/07/08/faithfamily-48/.

- › **My First Catechism** (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004.)

Introduce children to the teachings of Martin Luther with *My First Catechism: An Illustrated Version of Luther's Small Catechism*. This keepsake-quality book uses accounts of biblical characters joined with engaging artwork to help children relate the meaning of the Commandments, Creeds, Lord's Prayer, and more to their lives. Written in kid-friendly language, this book will urge children ages 6–10 to learn more about their Lutheran faith.

- › **My First Hymnal** by David A. Johnson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011.)

This heirloom quality hymnal contains lyric hymns favored by grandparents, godparents and parents with beautifully conceived illustrations presenting the colors, seasons and symbols of the Church Year and the life of Jesus.

- › **Ordering Our Days in His Peace** by Heath Curtis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009.)

The Church Year not only orders our days, but

also teaches us the fundamental narratives of salvation's story. Through simple language, striking artwork, Biblical and liturgical text, *Ordering Our Days in His Peace* walks you through the three main sections of the church year: the Time of Christmas, the Time of Easter and the Time of the Church. Each part of the Church Year has something new to offer and a new piece of the story to tell.

› **Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of**

Worship by Robbie Castleman (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002.)

With infectious passion, nitty-gritty advice and a touch of humor, Mrs. Castleman shows you how to help your children (from toddlers to teenagers) enter into worship. In this expanded edition Castleman includes two new appendixes on the important issues of hyperactive children in worship and children's church for seekers. She also provides a study guide for personal reflection or group discussion.

› **Text, Music, Context** (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004.)

This resource provides a process for pastors, musicians and others involved in worship planning to work through in assessing a variety of worship materials. Far from simply providing lists of what is and is not appropriate for use in worship, the questions and commentary contained in *TMC* identify important issues regarding the theological content of texts, the nature of music in worship and larger issues concerning the nature and purpose of corporate worship. Though your teens and middle school children may not want to read the book themselves, there is a lot of good stuff in this to help them think through the music they hear and sing in church.

› **The Story Bible** by Edward Engelbrecht and Gail Pawlitz (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011.)

Throughout this Bible, high quality realistic art

from CPH's Growing in Christ series is used to fully engage the reader, rather than using cartoon artwork that might suggest to children that the Bible stories are pretend rather than real.

The intent was to keep the focus on Christ by presenting stories with Old Testament prophecies about Christ so we could present one story for all of Scripture — God's gift of the Savior. Instead of paraphrasing each story, they were drawn directly from the Bible while adjusting them for student readability. Many stories from the latter part of the Old Testament have been included so that children may begin to build an understanding of the sequence of biblical history. There is also a user's guide included to explain how to use this Bible with children at different stages of development and reading levels.

Other unique features included in this Bible are discussion questions, learning activities and prayers. These bring each story to life, making a meaningful and lasting impression on children from ages 3–8.

› **Things I See at Easter** by Julie Stiegemeier (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004.)

This is part of a series written by Mrs. Stiegemeier designed to assist parents and teachers as they help young children: identify and understand what happens in church and see Jesus at the center of the worship experience, understand the significance of the worship experience, feel a part of the worshipping community and build a foundation for regular worship.

› **Whisper, Whisper: Learning About Church** by Mary J. Moerbe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 2015.)

This book written by former PALS Facilitator, Deaconess Mary Moerbe, provides rhyming text, in-sanctuary tips and engaging, colorful illustrations help children up to age 4 understand the rituals and routine at church. Optional activities are provided to help

children focus their attention and to remind them about their behavior. Parents can use this engaging book in the home on Saturday evening to prepare children for Sunday morning. It can also be used in the pew before service or included in children's church quiet bags.

› **Worship Notes for Kids** by Emma Squire

Emma was looking for a way to engage her 8-year-old a bit more in the worship service, but also to provide a personal spot for her to put her prayers, memory work and questions during the week. She noted that though her daughter can read the liturgy with her, she had a tendency to tune out the sermon, readings and prayers after the first few minutes. After searching online for resources to draw her more into these parts of the service, she decided to create something herself. Emma's intention is to put these pages into a binder that her daughter can bring to church each Sunday and review during the week during her quiet time and family devotions or prayers. She hopes that it will draw the whole family into rich discussions that last during the week. (A sample is included at the end of this section.)

› **Worshipping with Angels and Archangels** by Scott Kinnaman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006.)

Worshipping with the Angels and Archangels: An Introduction to the Divine Service leads the worshiper through the Divine Service I, helping them understand its significance. Explore the words of the liturgy with clearly written explanations, Scripture passages, definitions and engaging artwork. Readers of all ages will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Church's worship through which God speaks His Words of forgiveness and comfort. Included is a glossary that gives concise definitions of many terms featured in the Lutheran Divine Service.

Whether used in church, school or in the home, this book will help the reader learn and appreciate what takes place in the Divine Service as we joyfully and reverently respond to God's call to worship Him and receive His gifts.

Title: *Kids in the Divine Service* Sample Page

Category: Youth in Worship

Below is a sample of one of the *Kids in the Divine Service* bulletin inserts.



What is the "Advent wreath"?

The Advent wreath is the circle of candles and evergreen branches that you see in the sanctuary during the season of Advent. Some Advent wreaths may hang from the ceiling of the sanctuary while others might be found placed on a floor stand. Either way, the Advent wreath is just one of the many beautiful things you'll see around the church during Advent.

How do we use the Advent wreath?

It used to be that the Advent wreath was used at home to help count the four weeks of Advent.

Now you can find them in homes as well as in the church sanctuary.

Each Sunday in Advent, a new candle on the wreath is lit. For example, during the first week in Advent, only one candle is lit.

During the second week in Advent, two candles are lit. We do this to remember and prepare for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World!

FOR PARENTS

Before or after the Divine Service, allow your children to walk up to get a better look at the Advent wreath. Remind them to be reverent in God's holy places. During this Advent season, try using an Advent wreath at home with family devotions. If you are unsure how to get started, ask your pastor for help.

Kids in the Divine Service by Christopher J. Tabor. Copyright © 2008 by the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. All rights reserved. To order, please place (314) 251-1711. Artwork copyright © 1991, Curators Publishing House. Used with permission.

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1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

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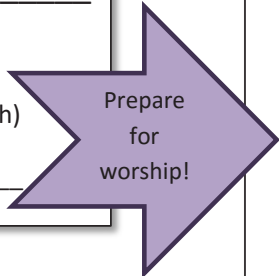
Worship Notes for Kids

Date: _____

Church Day: _____

Parament Color: _____

Anything different/special?
(communion, baptism font, banners, advent wreath)



Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up unto the Lord.

Pray About What You See

- ✓ Cross – thank Jesus for dying for our sins
- ✓ Pastor – ask God to give him love and wisdom
- ✓ Musicians – thank God for the musical gifts they share
- ✓ Hymnals – ask God to hear our prayers and praise
- ✓ What else do you see? Say a prayer!

What I learned from the sermon and readings:

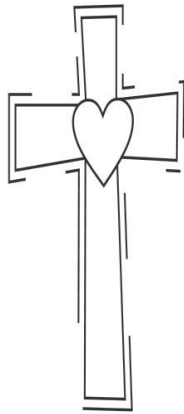
Sermon Title/Text: _____

Message Notes: _____



Words I Hear:

- Jesus
- Forgiveness
- Baptism
- Amen
- Grace
- Faith
- Hallelujah
- Pray
- Holy Spirit
- Believe
- God
- Love
- Salvation



*Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.*



My Prayers this Week:

Listen carefully to pastor's prayers in church for ideas!



My Favorite Hymn Today

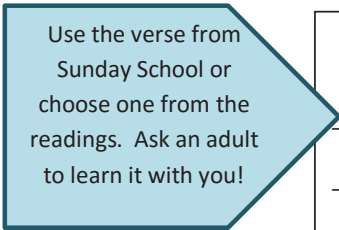


For doodles or thoughts!

Questions I have from the service today!



Use the verse from Sunday School or choose one from the readings. Ask an adult to learn it with you!



Weekly Memory Verse

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26



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CHURCH
Missouri Synod

1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295
888-THE LCMS (843-5267)
infocenter@lcms.org
lcms.org