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Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER!

I am the church! You are the church!
We are the church together!
All who follow Jesus,
all around the world!
Yes, we're the church together!

Last month, our Cherub Choir, all preschoolers, lead us in worship with this special piece of music. I was touched to the core by their message. THIS is what I want the children to learn. THIS is what I want all of us grown ups to remember. THIS is what I want all of us to live together.

We begin the right way. In baptism, we welcome babies (and children and youth and adults) as brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow workers in the kingdom.

We tell and read the stories of Jesus blessing the children, declaring them the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, announcing that unless we become like these little children, we will never enter the kingdom of God.

But then something goes awry.

- Well intentioned greeters smile over the heads of young children to greet the adults.
- Well intentioned ushers tell parents that "We have a nursery for little children like yours" or show them to the back pews, so they won't disturb others or so they can leave the sanctuary quickly, if they cry or talk or are noisy.
- Well intentioned adults discourage parents from worshipping with young children because, really, what would they understand? What could they get out of it?
- Well intentioned adults in worship scowl or shush when a child makes a noise or asks a question or answers the pastor's rhetorical question during the sermon.
- Well intentioned worship planners don't invite children to greet or usher or read in the worship service, believing that they are too young, unreliable, or immature to lead in worship.
- Well intentioned adults applaud and say, "Oh, aren't they cute?" when the children's choir sings ... but not when the adult choir sings. Children are entertaining. Adults are serious worship leaders.

- Well intentioned adults greet one another and share the peace, reaching over the heads of the children.
- Well intentioned adults smile at the children and tell them, “You know, you are the future of the church.” Actually, no they aren’t. They are the present of the church. God has given them gifts necessary to the body of Christ ... right now!

So, how might we go about being “the church together”?

- Help children understand that the church is not just a building, a congregation, or a denomination; the church is all of the people who love and follow and serve Jesus and his family.
- Announce that they, too, are the church.
- Name the gifts that children and youth have that contribute to both your congregation and God’s world.
- Look for opportunities to do cross+generational events, service projects, and learning experiences.
- After worship, find the families that worshipped with babies and young children and tell them how much you appreciated their presence, that this is what your church family is supposed to look like and sound like. Tell them you know that it takes a lot of work to get their kids to church and to worship with them ... but this is a wonderful investment in growing lifelong faith in their child.
- Sing music in worship that children know and love.
- Include sermon illustrations about real children.
- Let the prayers of the people include prayers for the youngest people.
- Invite children to gather around the baptismal font during baptisms. Let them greet the baby. Remind them of their baptisms.
- When children sing in the choir or usher or greet or read in worship, thank them for leading you in worship.
- Learn the names of children and youth in your congregation. Greet them by name, Ask about their interests, their week, their plans for the rest of the day. Really get to know them.

What a wonderful reminders that we are, indeed, the church together.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Ask your child, “What makes you feel welcome at church?” Make sure you share the answers with your pastor and congregational leaders.
2. Volunteer as a family to be greeters or ushers together.
3. Invite an adult your child likes at church to join you for a picnic or a holiday.
4. Remind your child that “we are the church” wherever we are, and ask how we could share the love of Jesus with someone we know. Then, do it. Even better, catch your child doing just that ... being the church!
5. Praying with your child, thank God for your child’s use of their gifts to be kind, generous, welcoming, and caring to others in God’s family.