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**The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid
the calf and the lion and the fattling together,
and a little child shall lead them.**

- Isaiah 11:6

I am old enough to have grown up in a world in which the phrase "children are to be seen and not heard" was not uncommon. Thanks be to God, that was not my parents' or my grandmother's approach to children. I grew up and thrived in a family that listened to me, regardless of my age or expertise.

Although we don't hear that phrase often today, children are often neither seen nor heard. Many adults spend more time looking at the screens on their cell phones than engaged in face-to-face, deep and attentive listening to the children and youth in their world. And we wonder why our teens don't listen to us, look at us, or have many interpersonal skills. Hmmm ...

Many adults feel that it is their role to dispense knowledge and values to children and youth, but miss the opportunity to be transformed by the wisdom of children and youth in their midst.

Our three adult children have been and still are our teachers, as are our four grandchildren. Here is just a sampling:

- Our first child, at age five, was asked to find some toys in good shape that could be donated to an inner city pastor. She chose her very best doll to give. It had been a gift from her grandmother who had recently died. She explained, "If I was a girl my age, who was only going to get one gift, this is the one I would want!" Amen.
- Our second child, stood before a dumpster, overflowing with disgusting, greasy, sticky Fourth of July picnic trash, replete with hundreds of aluminum cans and asked, "So, what are we going to do about it?" She and her father and I did some serious dumpster diving and retrieved, washed, and recycled the cans! Amen.
- Our youngest, who really loved and hoarded his money, came to the door after a panhandler had asked for money. Horrified that I had turned this child of God away, our child grabbed his stash of cash \ and ran after the man to give it all to him! Amen.
- Our oldest grandson was only four, when his father, with a twinkle in his eye, inquired, "How did you get so lucky to have a perfect father?" We all giggled, except our grandson, who said, "Dad, you know there was only one perfect person ever ... and he came so that you don't have to be!" Amen.
- Last Sunday, our second child, now an amazing adult, invited us to go to a local mosque that had been fire bombed the day before. Her dad and I went, armed with big bouquets of flowers to hand to our Muslim brothers and sisters, a sign of peace and solidarity, as they arrived to attend a parent meeting. What grace and generosity they demonstrated in welcoming us, who looked like the perpetrator, without judging us. Amen.

What have you learned from children? How have you given them the opportunity to lead you? Where have you seen the face of Jesus, heard the voice of God, and allowed yourself to be lead into kingdom work?

OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR HOMES

Cultivate intentional times of deep listening. When might those be for your family?

- Family dinners are a perfect opportunity, especially if you turn off the television and all of your collective screens, light a candle, and soak in the presence of one another. Share highs and lows or blessings and bruises. Tell about your day, about the time when you were apart.
- Put away your cell phone when you are with your child. Yes, I really mean it!
- Never stop tucking your kids into bed. In the dark, listen to what they will tell you that they might not share when the lights are on. Thank God for them. Literally. Pray together. Bless each other.
- Do dishes or rake the yard or sort laundry together.
- Turn off the radio in the car and just listen to your kids.
- Take a walk with the dog and one of your children. Just listen.
- Share who you are and what matters to you, too. Let your kids really get to know you.
- Thank God for the amazing gifts that are the children in your life.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN CONGREGATIONS?

If you have the privilege of planning for the faith formation of children and youth, train your adult teachers and leaders to spend part of their time listening deeply to the kids they serve. Ask them,

- "Where did you see God this week?"
- "What did you see this week that would disappoint God?"
- "What did you experience this week that would delight Jesus?"
- "What do you think God might be calling you to do in your world?"
- "What did you hear that violates loving God and our neighbor with everything we've got?"

Share the stories of the wisdom and insights of children with their parents, with your congregation as articles in your newsletter, with your pastor as sermon illustrations and prayers of the people.

Create opportunities for cross+generational conversations in fellowship

events and in worship to really share the deep and important insights of your children and youth.

Remember that Jesus was asked by his disciples who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He replied by putting a child in their midst and declared, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Mt. 18:3 We must change and be lead by the children in our midst!

Living in God's kingdom was counter cultural and transformative in Isaiah's day, in Jesus' time, and it is in ours. Won't you let a little child lead you? May you be abundantly blessed.

Links to learn more!

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This is the perfect opportunity to call or email Marilyn

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