

## **Children in Worship<sup>1</sup>** *Hope Presbyterian Church*

Our approach to including children in worship at Hope Presbyterian Church is rooted in three core convictions from Scripture:

1. **Children have inherent dignity and worth.** They are to be treasured as gifts from God's own hand, and we are to celebrate, enjoy, and love our children rather than pushing them to the periphery of our busy lives and communities or bowing down to them in idolatry.
2. **Children, by virtue of being made in God's image, have the capacity to know God** – to enjoy him, cultivate and steward authentic relationship with him, and worship him in spirit and truth.
3. **Worship is at the heart of our faith and the Christian life.** As we worship in community, we are also transformed and grow as followers of Jesus.

Our aim is to welcome and encourage children to be in worship so that we can facilitate and enable such a vital communion with the living God. Children need to be in worship just as much as adults do!

### ***Our Covenant Children***

Children giggle, they poke, and they swing their legs simply because they are children. But they also can sing, pray and give with the congregation. Their presence in worship grows out of the biblical tradition and the Reformed theological conviction that children are members of the covenant community.

At Hope, we earnestly desire to prepare life-long worshippers of the living God, and we deliberately engage our children as a crucial part of the covenant community towards that goal. We want to equip them for a lifetime of knowing God face-to-face and praising him for his goodness and grace.

While we are committed to the preparation and formation of our children into lifelong worshippers, we also want to honor them as present-tense worshippers of the living God by providing meaningful outlets for age-appropriate expressions of worship as well as participation in the congregational worship of our community, too.

### ***How Do Children Learn to Worship?***

Children learn to worship by worshipping with the congregation Sunday after Sunday.

- They learn they belong to Christ and are welcome in Christ's church.
- They come to know, through repetition, the Lord's Prayer, the creeds, the Doxology and the beautiful songs of our faith.
- They build memories of shared experiences of Christian community that they may draw upon when they are older.
- They are enriched by the beauty of music and art as creative expressions of praise and as human responses to God.
- They hear stories from the Bible read and interpreted, and they begin to see Christian worship as one place where God may speak to them and be with them.
- They witness the drama of baptism and the Lord's Supper—both visible signs of God's grace, kindness and favor.
- They discover that they are valued as people by God and by God's people at church.

### ***How Do Parents Help Children?***

Bringing your child to church may, at times, be a real exercise in patience. So are many other facets of parenting that we manage to get through. We must remember that baptized children are members of Christ's church, and they need to be among the people who worship God. They may not participate just the way adults do, but they are growing in understanding and learning to take their places in the church family. Young children in worship may be wiggly and noisy, but it is their birthright as Christians to worship. Our satisfaction comes in later years when we see them stand in the midst of the church and go out into the world with a faith of their own.

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<sup>1</sup> We are thankful for the work of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, VA and for their approach to and articulation of how to welcome children into their worship services. Hope PCA has borrowed from their work in language and theme in this paper.