

August 10, 2009



Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.  
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Dear Parents,

Worship is an integral part of our lives as Christians. Worship is not so much for us, God's people, but is our service to God through the words and actions of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and commitment. How did you learn how to worship? Where did the idea of "going to church" come from for you? Perhaps you were exposed to worship as a child, teen, or young adult and now, as a result, you desire to be in worship. It may be, however, that you have only come to know about worship as an adult. What an opportunity you have, as a parent, to share that wonderful experience with your child! At Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, we want to help you and your children experience worship together in meaningful ways. Both the Old and New Testaments include illustrations about the importance of involvement of children in the life of the faith community. Children were to be involved with the entire community in learning about God's relationship with God's people. While I don't have space in this letter to cite all the examples, you will have an opportunity to learn more about it later in the fall. Keep reading.

One of the ways Children and Family Ministries and Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church have committed to bring the entire community of faith together in worship will begin this fall by including children in worship each and every Sunday. So, instead of taking your children to the Education Building and "dropping them off" while you go to worship, you will bring your children—kindergartners through fifth graders—into the Sanctuary to worship with you. This will begin the very first fall Sunday on September 13<sup>th</sup> during the 9:30 am service. The children will experience the community of faith worshipping together and have their own time to come forward for a "Children's Moment" before being dismissed to go to church school. How will this all work? Your child (*or children*) will sit with you through the Call to Worship, the first hymn, and the Common Confession. Then, during the Gloria Patri, children will be invited to come down to the front for a brief "Children's Moment." Shepherds (*church school teachers and others*) will come down front with the children and then after the Children's Moment is over will lead the children back to the Education Building where they will be taken to their classes.

All in all, the children will be in worship about fifteen minutes—but what a meaningful fifteen minute introduction and exposure to worship that will be. If your child is a little hesitant about coming down front, feel free to accompany him or her and within a few weeks they will be comfortable coming on their own. Your children will also be able to observe the sacrament of baptism first hand and learn more about the sacrament of communion as well. There will still be a full Sunday worship experience for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders so that they experience a complete worship service on a regular basis. While this may sound a bit confusing, it will be communicated on a weekly basis so that you and your child (*especially 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders*) know when they will remain in worship after the Children's Moment. And, of course, it will be marked on your Family Ministries Calendars as "3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Graders Remain In Worship." On these Sundays, they will be able to return from the front of the church and sit with you.

To tie in with this emphasis of Children in Worship, you are invited to attend my Parenting in the Pew Class that will begin on Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup> and continue for three consecutive Sundays at 9:30 am in room 204/206 of the Education building. Also, at the Family Picnic, on Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, you will

have the opportunity to ask questions, offer suggestions and learn more about the emphasis on Children in Worship. At 5:15 pm the children will all be in the gym for a special program while adults will stay down in the Ministries Court where we can listen to and hopefully answer questions you might have.

This is a new experience, for you as families and for Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. What a wonderful time to expose children to worship! This is being communicated throughout the congregation in many different forms so that all worshipers are aware of the change and encouraged to welcome children in worship. Session is on board and the Worship Committee is very excited about this new opportunity for families to come together in such a meaningful way. I know that there will be questions, and perhaps even a few bumps in the road, but I, along with Children and Family Ministries and Session, feel that this is very important for our community of faith. John H. Westerhoff III in *Will Our Children Have Faith?* suggests that it is critical that three generations be involved in worship together. The older generation is the generation of memory. The younger generation can be the generation of vision, but only if there is memory, which is provided by the older generation. The middle generation is the generation of the present, which confronts memory and vision with reality. Children complete the family of faith. Research shows that congregations open to welcoming children in worship are also more open to everyone including the poor, the powerless, and the foreigners. Our words and actions communicate what it means to be community. So let us all, especially parents and others committed to the care and nurture of children, welcome them with open arms.

If you have any questions, as all of this is new, please feel free to call me or Children and Family Ministries Director, Carolyn Beitmann or Assistant Director, Jane Wilber. We will do our best to make sure you have all the information you need to make this a positive experience for you and your family and a positive experience for Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.

In Community Together,

Rev. Susan B. Rice

Associate Pastor for Congregational Life