



MINISTERING WITH
(CHILDREN)
THROUGHOUT THE ELCA

YMN Extravaganza! 2020
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What Kids Can Teach Us About Imagination



What do we notice in this picture?

Description: We are born curious with wild imaginations. Jesus reminded his disciples that the kin-dom of God comes about when we become like children. This workshop will practice the gift of imagination, as well as other gifts that children remind us are essential to the kin-dom.¹

Takeaway: Participants will leave with practical ways for children's gifts to be recognized and lead change in the church.

**Workshop largely based off "Incorporating Children in Worship: Mark of the Kingdom" by Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom and David D. Bjorlin. Cascade Books: Oregon, 2014. and Godly Play by Jerome Berryman, godlyplayfoundation.org*

Mark 10:13-16 The Message

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. **These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom.** Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

What do we notice in this scripture?

¹ In her work, "Kin-dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal," Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz challenges the scriptural view of a Kingdom of God as a metaphor for a coming world order. Conceding the imagery is clearly located in scriptural passages, Isasi-Diaz interprets this idea as reflective of the dominant, often oppressive cultural experience of societies during Biblical times. Isasi-Diaz uses the metaphor of "Kin-dom," grounding the concept in the hopes and dreams of family and relationship as a sustaining foundation for all societal and spiritual experience. Intrinsically linked to the honor of family, this framework is a multi-generational union of voices and experiences in which there is room for all.

“God’s grace often works in that which is small,
and God’s saving history would look radically different without children
--- to the point that it would not be recognizable as Christianity.” p.8

“But do Christians believe that ‘people in progress’ are part of the body? p.102

“Without (children), we risk the possibility of becoming rigid and overly bound.
With them, we risk the possibility of being challenged and transformed.” p.9

Pick an above statement and discuss with your neighbor.

WHAT KIDS CAN TEACH US ABOUT: Imagination, Thankfulness, Hope and Charity

“The child’s openness can lead the congregation toward a hope that loosens adults’ attempt to control the future.” p.118

1. Imagination (Openness): “**Childhood is openness**”...within the life of a child, this openness leads her to believe that anything is possible....whether through socialization or the ability to delay gratification, many adults can endure even the most tedious of sermons or pastoral prayers. Because children live in the present, however, they expect the present to be worthy of their attention.” p.117
2. Thankfulness: “Sunday school curriculum teaches the content of Scripture’s narratives. Youth education often includes indoctrination through confirmation...so that belief is grounded in right knowledge... However, intellectual assent does not cover the entirety of faith...**Faith is also a gift from God**... the cultivation of faith rests on the capacity not only to receive but also to be **thankful**.” pgs.93&94
3. Hope: “The **virtue of hope**, as God’s gift of presence made known in both lament and thanksgiving, gives worshipers the courage to be **startled by beauty, awed by the cosmos, and lost in the wonder** of God’s extravagant and overabundant love.” p.97
4. Charity: “**Charity is about relationships**, and in this regard, the activity of play points to inviting ways that children form relationships...
...(too often) worship promotes thinking about God rather than entering into the experience of God...lack of one or the other impedes relationship growth, and hence charity.” p.121

“In his *Apology for Wonder*, philosopher Sam Keen offers an image-laden definition of childhood wonder:

‘Wonder, in the child, is the capacity for sustained and continued delight, marvel, amazement, and enjoyment. It is the capacity of the child to approach the world as if it were a smorgasbord of potential delights, waiting to be tasted. It is the sense of freshness, anticipation, and openness that rules the life of a healthy child. The world is a surprise party, planned just for me, and my one vocation in life is to enjoy it to the fullest - such is the implicit creed of the wondering child.



Reality is a gift, a delight, a surprise - in fact a toy; it is an excessive, superabundant cafeteria of delights, and should any experience begin to be jaded by boredom and staleness, all one has to do is move on to the next. To wonder is to live in the world of novelty rather than law, of delight rather than obligation, and of the present rather than the future.’ pgs.118-119

(Answer the following on your own.)

How would the worship life of faithful communities be transformed were they infused with Keen’s description of childlike wonder?

GODLY PLAY: Experience of “Lydia from Acts,” followed by discussion.



WORSHIP: “All persons incorporated into the church through baptism have the responsibility and need to enact God’s story through worship in order to find their place in the dramatic story...” pg.42

“If worship is not under pressure to create a perfect atmosphere of peace and tranquility in order for adults to feel God, then children will no longer be seen as nuisances to put up with or distractions that must be ushered out of the sanctuary during the serious parts of the service.” pgs.36-37

“Perhaps many worship services miss the central components of awe, mystery, and wonder because children- those people uniquely suited to see the awesome, mysterious, and wonderful - are missing from the larger worshipping community.” p.38

Pick an above statement and discuss with your neighbor.

HANDOUT: 7 Pro Tips for Children’s Messages

“If we truly believe the message of Paul that the ‘members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor’ (1 Cor 12:22-23), it is incumbent upon the church to offer children an indispensable, honorable position within its life of worship. Embodied children thus become a part of liturgical leadership on Sunday morning...” p.47

Discuss pictures and examples in large group.

“Children model trust, openness, receptivity, presence, endurance, and unconditional love. Adults model doctrinal assent, faithful giving, stewardship, and reconciliation.

Because the unity is in Christ and not sameness, they have great potential to enact the liturgy in ways that make room for difference.”
p.132



WHAT KIDS CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE KIN-DOM: “Children’s practice of virtue has the capacity to push the entirety of the worshiping community more deeply into unity with God and with one another.” p.77

Write examples under each quote of how you might share the virtues of children to broaden their experiences in your setting.

1. Faith: “Using assent as the marker for participation for the sacraments represents one way that worship privileges the dominant group and neglects those voices who are not in power”...**faith is indeed about being receptive to God** and not other competing powers, and **children** have great capacity to **embody those characteristics of faith.**” p.112 &113

2. Trust: “(Children) trust not because they have some special power to trust - they trust their caretakers because they have to... Children, then, are not only helpful **examples of what God is looking for in faith as trust**; they are necessary for practicing faith in its fullness.” p.113

3. Humility: “The ability of the community of faith to **demonstrate humility before children reveals possibilities** for the faithful to incorporate other, perhaps more threatening, kinds of difference.” p.8

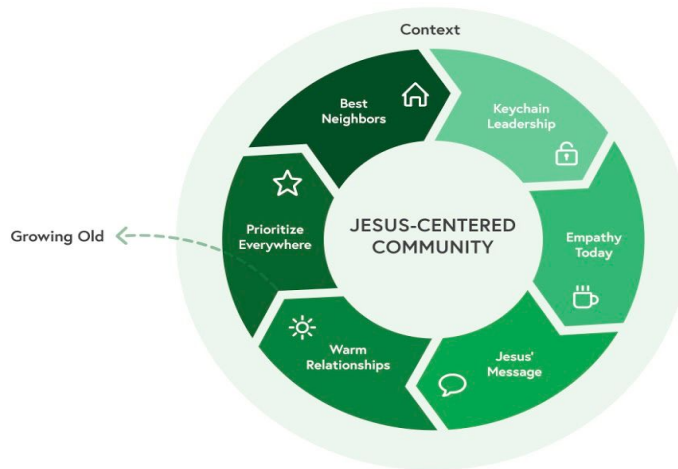
4. Welcome: “The tendency is to ask what one gets out of worship rather than what one brings to worship. **Otherness** becomes a barrier to the dominant group getting what it wants: predictability, preferred music...

The dominant group shapes worship in its own image, eliminating what it deems to be unnecessary... **Incorporating otherness, beginning with children,** opens congregations to consider what may need to be destroyed... pgs. 127&129

Incorporating those who are different in worship risks reforming the liturgical and ecclesial life of the church toward the end of advancing God's kingdom.²

PRACTICAL WORK:

The 6 Core Commitments of Churches Growing Young



Unlock keychain leadership:

Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.

Empathize with today's young people:

Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.

Take Jesus' message seriously:

Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.

Fuel a warm community:

Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere:

Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.

Be the best neighbors:

Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.

² The work of incorporation is risky because it requires leaders and laity to cede power and to radically open themselves up to the other... and power shifts.

When worshipers commit to (this), they invite sorrow and failure, but also open themselves to...Christ - **the great other** - (who) ceded divine power to become human... His ministry was marked by a risky openness. A courageous congregation follows Christ's model fearfully, learning to risk the right things...**we would do well to open ourselves fully to God's work in small, disruptive ways, beginning with the children in our midst**" pgs. 127&129