



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH WILMINGTON, NC

STORYTELLER AND GREETER

Manual

Introduction to Children's Worship and Wonder

Children Worship and Wonder is an exciting way for children to experience God while learning about Him. It is a way of helping children in a special place *apart* from the worshipping congregation so they become able to do so meaningfully *with* the congregation.

The key is providing a worship context for telling Bible stories, instead of an education perspective. There are three reasons for choosing a worship context:

- Worship is intended to help us experience and praise God. The primary way we know God is by participation in this process. God is experienced as we enter into scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth of God's word.
- Ordinary time and space is transformed into sacred time and space when we worship. This allows us to experience and to dwell in the presence of God as a way of knowing Him. We are brought into the Christian community's experience of God from the past and God's promised future. This happens through memory, imagination, and meaning when we hear God's word proclaimed. When we do this in sacred space, we are then able to experience God in every time and every place.
- Worship meets the needs of the young child. They need God and a religious community, as well as love, security, appropriate freedom, continuity, order and meaning. The ritual of worship in the worship center meets these needs.

Children need to be introduced to the meaning and actions of corporate worship in a sensorimotor way. They learn how to find "the quiet place within" which enables them to get ready to worship all by themselves. Worship and Wonder provides an atmosphere where they are enabled to encounter and worship God, and to become experienced in Bible stories, parables, and liturgical presentations that help them to make meaning and order in their lives. As this takes place, they are then able to live as Christ's ministers in the world.

(The above is a summary of the introduction to Young Children and Worship by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman.)

A Theological Basis for Worship & Wonder

Children have a relationship with God, according to the introduction in Young Children and Worship by Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman. If this is true, then we need no longer assume that we as adults have to teach children everything they need to know about God. Together in Children Worship and Wonder, children and adults have an opportunity to worship and learn about God.

In this setting, stories are told in a slow, calm manner, and with as few words as possible. In this way, the children can enter into the stories, have time to wonder about them, and connect them to their own life experiences. They have the quiet time required to glean from the stories of God and God's people the particular insights they need in their own lives. *When we recognize children as spiritual beings and respect them as such, we can give up the urge to turn every Bible story into a moral lesson. We can trust that "the story" is really enough.*

In a Children's Worship Center, little ones are given opportunities to worship God in uniquely meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways. Very young children are invited into the story circle because we recognize that they are *able to experience God long before they have developed verbal expression*. After hearing a story, they are encouraged to express their response to God through a variety of materials -- art, journals, books, puzzles, and sacred objects, as well as story materials. All of their senses and motor skills may be used.

Providing safe, beautiful spaces in which children can deepen their relationship with God is incumbent upon us as adults. We need to provide opportunities for children to learn the language of faith, and the worship experiences for expressing *that faith*. *In Worship and Wonder, children do theology. They learn about God while experiencing the presence of God.*

Children's Worship Center... The Atmosphere

Sacred space is created whenever and wherever people of faith acknowledge the presence of God. When the children come through the threshold and enter into the Children's Worship Center, they are entering into a sacred, holy space.

We understand that God is everywhere, but we often miss the holiness of places because we do not stop to acknowledge God's presence. In the Children's Worship Center, we do acknowledge the presence of God and become aware that we are in a holy space.

Our movements and words, our preparations and presentations of the stories, the careful arrangement of the room -- everything we do contributes to an atmosphere in which the presence of God is readily acknowledged and felt.

"The Children's Worship Center... is an environment where the child's activity unfolds in a meditative and prayerful manner. The Children's Worship Center...is a spiritual retreat center which...helps the child's concentration and reflection. Signs...offer us richness of the Christian mystery. Young children have a special characteristic, the quality of wonder. This quality of wonder is "focused" in the Children's Worship Center where children (and the adults who work with the children) are helped to see deeply about God and themselves: About God -- God's power to touch and satisfy the deep, vital needs in young children and to give growth to their great inner potential. About themselves -- Their tremendous capacity to fall in love and be in love with God in a manner that creates harmony and happiness within them, with others and with their world."

These quotes from The Good Shepherd and the Child-- a Joyful Journey (Sofie Cavalletti, 1993) draw attention to the importance of sanctuary, church and the place of worship for all Christians. The entire room is a place of retreat filled with signs that help the child and the adult leaders to satisfy deep needs and bring forth their inner potential.

This sense of harmony, good work and right relationship with God and people begins with being in the midst of the Biblical and liturgical stories.

WORSHIP AND WONDER...

The Worship Center

The Focus Shelf

The focal point of the Children's Worship Center is "The Focus Shelf," located at the head of the room, in a clear line of vision and easily accessible to the children. Across the top shelf can be found materials for The Good Shepherd (God the Father), the Nativity (God the Son), and the Story of the Light, with the Christ Candle (God the Holy Spirit). Thus it reminds us of the Holy Trinity. The implication is that the room is the church and Christ is the head of the church.

In addition to these are story materials for Baptism, "The Good Shepherd and the Sheep," as well as "The Good Shepherd and the Lord's Supper I and II." The Church Year Puzzle is also found here, explaining kinesthetically how the church tells time liturgically throughout the year, with special Sundays and the seasons surrounding them. Centered beneath the Nativity figures are the Bible, with stories highlighted and bookmarked, and satin underlays in the liturgical colors of the year.

Other sections of shelves contain materials for sacred stories from the Old and New Testaments, and the Parables of Jesus. As stories are told to the children each Sunday, they are then placed on the low shelves, so that children may take them during their Response time and ponder them, retell them, or create their own stories.

TYPES OF STORIES

Sacred Stories: *These are stories about the*

- *Hebrew people*
- *Life of Jesus*
- *Early church*

Many of the sacred stories are told in the desert box. They are three dimensional, using the plain but beautiful sacred objects and human figures that are carved from wood. Sacred stories include:

Old Testament:

Creation

Noah and the Ark

Abraham and Sarai

The Exodus

The Ten Commandments

The Ark and a Tent for God

The Promised Land

The Temple, a House for God

Exile and Return

New Testament:

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Jesus is Baptized

Jesus in the Wilderness

Jesus and the Children

Jesus and Bertimaeus

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Jesus the King

Jesus' Last Passover

Jesus Is Risen: Appearance to Mary Magdalene

Jesus Is Risen: The Road to Emmaus

The Ascension

Pentecost

Liturgical Stories *teach about the life of faith. These include:*

The Light

How the Church Tells Time

Lenten Puzzle

The Good Shepherd and the Lord's Supper I and II

Baptism

Stories that are both Sacred and Liturgical include:

Advent stories that show the way to Bethlehem - the Prophets, Mary and Joseph, The Shepherds, the Magi.

Christmas -- Meeting the Christ Child

Parables are stories that Jesus told. They didn't actually happen but are everyday, believable situations that he used to illustrate his message about God and God's Kingdom.

Parables are sometimes difficult to understand, and seem to have lids on them. They are stored in boxes because boxes have lids. The boxes are gold because Parables are precious like gold. Parables are two-dimensional. It is very important to tell Parables as flat to the floor as possible.

There are layers of meaning to Parables. We can "go deep" into Parables to discover the meaning underneath the surface stories. Parables include:

The Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd and the Lost Sheep

The Good Shepherd and the Wolf

The Mustard Seed

The Leaven

The Great Pearl

The Sower

The Good Samaritan

The Great Banquet

STORYTELLING

Notes from Young Children and Worship By Sonja M. Stewart and Jérôme Berryman

Pages 24 - 29

Introduction

- Stories are our primary sources for experiencing and knowing God. These shared sacred memories of the people of God continue to provide our knowledge of God, to form our identity as the people of God, and to give meaning to our acts of worship.
- In worship, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is made known to us in the hearing of the word. We bring to the text our personal experiences and the shared experiences of the church through the ages. They tell us who we are and why we are here. They confer identity, meaning, and order.
- In worship, we meet God *together*. There is no audience in worship; all are worshipers, and the storyteller wants to enter the story and disappear so that others may enter it also.

The Nature of Biblical Narrative

- Biblical stories tell only the *actions* and *description* necessary to the story. The omission of definitions and unnecessary detail provides silences, time and space through which the listener experiences the mystery, awe, and wonder characteristic to the sacred story. *This is why, when telling a story, the teller sticks strictly with the script as it is worded in the book.*

Stories for Children's Worship

- Staying close to the biblical text helps eliminate unnecessary words, while using materials to tell the story provides meaningful silences. Silence has more power to attract and retain attention than words, for our minds fill it in.
- We tell first the stories most characteristic of our formation as the people of God. Stories that deepen and provide more information for the essential stories are told later. For example, The Exodus is foundational; the children do not need to hear until later about Moses' birth, time in Egypt, etc.

- Stories continue to form and give meaning to the worship life of the Christian community, so we tell them from a worship perspective. They give a context and provide some of the words that are used in the liturgy
- These stories also correspond to the needs of children and speak to their fears. Children have needs for love, security, growth, continuity, belonging, and caring for others and the environment. They also need to create meaning and order in their lives. When they learn to enter stories and meet God, they have a tool for living.
- Young children learn through their bodies as well as their minds. So the biblical stories need to be translated into figures and materials that children can see and move about, giving them a sensorimotor way of absorbing the story by repetition and also as a means for responding to God.
- Children are helped to form images of scripture by receiving the story in visual and motor ways that allow kinesthetic, visual and auditory thinking to happen.
- The movement of the leader to the shelf is the beginning of the story, and the return of the materials ends it. Without speaking, the storyteller carries the materials with both hands, as the Bible is carried in procession. This motion conveys a valuing of the materials.
- The use of movement and underlays is essential for focusing the children's attention on the place that will become the context for the story. These draw both storyteller and children into the story.

Preparation of the Storyteller

- The storyteller must personally own and sense the greatness, mystery, and awe of God in the story.
- Begin to practice the presentation by moving the materials without saying the words out loud. When you feel comfortable with the movements, begin saying the story aloud as you move the fixtures. Here mind and body, memory and movement combine to communicate the story.
- As you practice, *keep your eyes on the materials*. Lifting your eyes will bring you out of that world. *Since you also want the children to be drawn into the story, you will avoid eye contact while presenting the story.*
- Usually, you will not speak while moving the materials, lest verbal and visual thinking be confused.
- Silence gives space for the Holy Spirit to act in the imagination. Since the children are imagining the story, they themselves are moving in it.

- When you speak, do so with an economy of words. Stick to the written script given in the book.
- Give attention to the sound and rhythm of your words. These are important to auditory thinking.

RESPONSE: WONDER and ART

- In worship the time following the reading of scripture and the sermon is a time of response to the word.
- Wondering shapes and deepens our knowledge of God and what God expects of us. It is a way the community of children come to know God and themselves. This knowing is based on their experience of God, *not on being told about God.*
- Their experience of God in the story informs their expression, and their expression, refined by the group, begins to name their world. This activity is the *foundation on which theological thinking is built.*
- The storyteller makes reflection possible through the use of "wondering" questions. These keep the scripture open by dealing with the children's experience and understanding of the story.
- Wondering questions come out of the depth of your experience in the story.
- Do whatever opens up ways to continue thinking about the story so the children don't think the Bible is closed. Knowing is not in whether they can recite back certain answers to detailed questions; rather, it comes when they enter the stories in such a way that they enter into dialogue with God and their Christian community.
- Response Time is not for free play. It is a personal time with the stories. During response time, children may work with the story, other stories they have heard, or art materials. They may also choose from secondary materials that accompany stories, such as books, puzzles, etc.
- Responses may be varied. Some are expressions of praise and love. Some follow the invitation to some and see Jesus. Others make theological connections.
- The purpose is that they meet God, love and respond to God, and experience what it means to hear scripture as remembrance, a way of reliving and abiding in the presence of God.

STORYTELLING

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Below is an outline of hints that may help you prepare and present biblical stories and parables to young children, ages three to seven. Four categories are provided for your attention: (1) Preparation of the Worship Leader, (2) Moving the Figures, (3) Telling the Story or Parable, and (4) Responding with Wondering Questions. Further information and explanations can be found in Dr. Stewart's books: *Young Children and Worship* and *Following Jesus*.

Preparation of the Worship Leader

1. Read and reread the biblical text for the story or parable.
2. Let the story be formed in you until you sense the wonder, awe and mystery of God. You are not memorizing the story but internalizing it.
3. Read the presentation from *Young Children and Worship* or *Following Jesus*.
4. Gather the materials needed for the presentation.
5. Arrange them in baskets and on the tray or in a parable box. Reread the presentation.
6. Begin placing and moving the figures without saying the precise words.
7. When you feel comfortable with the movement of the figures say the words aloud and move the figures.

Moving the Figures

1. Practice presenting, placing, and moving the figures.
2. To present a figure, hold it in front of you with both hands. Holding it at the eye level of the children, move it around the circle so the children can see it better. Keep your eye on the figure. Do not look at the children. They will look at what you are looking at. You want to bring both yourself and the children into the story.
3. Practice placing the figures on the underlay. You want to place them where you will move them the fewest number of times. You want to use only essential movements. Sometimes you need to see the movement at the end of the story to understand why figures are placed where they are earlier in the story.
4. Handle the materials with respect.
5. Hold them at the waist or feet. Do not move them by their heads or faces. No one wants to be grabbed and moved by his or her face or head.
6. Glide the figures when moving them. Do not jump, bounce, or drag them.

Storyteller's Role on Sunday

- Arrive early to organize the story in its place on the shelf, and be sure it is all there and ready.
- Confer with the Greeters about the day -- the story, Response Time options, children needing attention, songs to be used, and any other issues.
- Be seated on the floor in front of the "Focus Shelf" and settle yourself in prayerful silence.
- As the children arrive, guide them to places in the circle where they will best attend the story and be open to worship. Visit quietly until it is time to begin and all are ready.
- For the "Call to Worship," remind children that the Worship Center is a special place to be with God, and we walk more slowly, talk more softly, etc. (found in "Orientation to the Worship Center," page 57+ in book).
- Tell the story, modeling how to "enter" the story, and keeping your gaze focused on materials during the telling of the story. Look up only during wondering time to acknowledge a child's wondering or comment.
- When you have told the story, get the Christ Candle, light it, and present the Bible. Show children where the story is found, along with the bookmark and highlighted passage. Read the Scripture.
- After the Bible reading, put away the Bible and story materials and return them to the shelves.
- Then go around the circle and dismiss the children, one at a time, asking them what "work" they will do that day, to respond to the story or "talk with God." Move quickly and return to undecided children.
- If possible, stay seated on the circle and do your own work, or quietly observe the children.
- Let the children know when it is almost time to put away their work. Directions for this are also in the "Orientation" chapter of the book.
- After putting away their work, the children return to the circle for the remainder of the Worship.

- When the benediction has been prayed and the children are being dismissed one at a time, as their parents appear at the door, say a special word to each one, either still seated, or standing near the door.
- Keep an eye on those still in the room, even leading them in song if dismissal is going slowly.
- After all children are gone, help the Greeter(s) straighten the art materials and put away. Check the shelves to be sure all materials are in their place.
- Have a brief conversation with Greeter(s) to review any problems or suggestions evolving from the day.
- Make sure that attendance has been recorded.

Greeter's Role on Sunday

- Arrive early to help organize the room, put out trays and art materials, and confer with the storyteller about any children or special needs for the story.
- If nametags are being used, arrange so that they can be found quickly by each child, or by the greeter(s).
- Go with the Christ Candle signs to the adult worship site, to pick up the children. When children are dismissed, one greeter leads, the other follows the last child.
- Remind children as they approach the Children's Worship Center that it is time to walk more slowly and talk more softly.
- Assist with nametags.
- Usher each child through the Worship Center door to his/her place in the semi-circle. Do not place any child close to the storyteller. Children who tend to be disruptive should be seated *across* from the storyteller, where a greeter may sit behind him/her.
- When all children are seated, quietly close the door to the Worship Center.
- Sit just behind the circle with the children but be alert to greet latecomers.
- If a child needs to leave the story to use the restroom, accompany them out the door quietly to the restroom and back.
- Be willing and ready to move behind a child as you observe during the story.
- Always treat children in a respectful, quiet, calm manner. A light touch on the shoulder may be all the reminder a child needs, to return to the story.
- *Stay away from an attitude of punishment.* If there are problems, refer to them as children having difficult days or needing help attending to the story. Use words that promote understanding, not punishment.
- Remove a child from the story circle or the worship center only as a last resort. If you get to this point, give the child a choice of returning to the circle, sitting with the greeter at the door, taking a few minutes with the greeter outside the door, or returning to the parents.
- As children choose their work for Response Time, listen so you can help them help themselves to get a mat and a tray with their chosen materials.

- Demonstrate, if needed, how to choose and carry supplies, and set up a work area on a mat.
- Observe as children do their work, and help them if they need, with art or stories.
- Alert the children when about five minutes of work time remains. Do not flick the lights. Discuss with the storyteller what the signal will be.
- Help the children put away their work. They should keep their art, or file it for more work at another time. Remember that the work is between the child and God; it is not for discussion unless the child chooses.
- Sit with the circle when children return to it.
- Greet the parents and alert children to go to the story teller for their blessing, or if the storyteller is busy, give the child a blessing before returning them to their parents.
- Say good-bye to each child.
- When all children are gone, help put away materials, straighten the room, and discuss the day with the other greeter and storyteller.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Children Worship and Wonder

1. Assemble in God's Name

The time of gathering -- a time when the whole community prepares for the presence of God.

The Call to Worship

The Greeting

From September until Easter "The Lord be with you." "And also with you."

From Easter until September "Christ has risen." "The Lord is risen indeed."

Songs of Praise

Let children suggest. Use songs regularly used in worship, "O God, We Adore You." End Songs of Praise with "Be Still and Know that I am God." When children hear this, it is time to get ready to hear one of God's stories.

2. Proclaim God's Word

Hearing the Word of God

The story and wondering time.

Scripture Reading

The Christ Candle is lighted to remind us of God's presence at all times and in all places. Show the book mark and read the story from the Bible, so they know where the story can be found.

Change the light of the Christ Candle and put story materials and Bible back on the shelf.

Responding to the Word of God

Individual work time, working with sacred story objects, art materials, puzzles. Each child decides what his/her work will be, sets up own work space, helps to get out and put away his/her work.

3. Give Thanks to God

Prayers and/or songs of Thanksgiving

"Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." "It is right to give thanks and praise." Use other prayers, sing the "Doxology," let children offer prayers.

4. Go in God's Name

Songs

"Go Now in Peace" "Shalom"

Blessing

The saying of a "good word" -- going into the world as Christ's ministers.
"Go now with God's love." "Go in peace." "God's peace go with you."

Seasons of the Church Year

Advent - A time of preparation for welcoming the Christ Child that begins four weeks before Christmas. The liturgical color is **purple**.

Christmas - Begins Christmas Day when the birth of the Christ Child is celebrated. The Christmas season lasts for 12 days. The liturgical color is **white**.

Epiphany - Begins 12 days after Christmas and celebrates that the light of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, has come to the whole world. The liturgical color is **green**.

Lent - Begins with Ash Wednesday. It is a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter. The liturgical color of Lent is **purple**.

Eastertide - Begins on Easter Sunday when the resurrection of Jesus is celebrated. The liturgical color for Eastertide is **white**.

Pentecost - celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, the body of Christ on Earth. The liturgical color is **red**.

The Season after Pentecost - Sometimes called ordinary time. The liturgical color is **green**.

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Song Suggestions for Children's Worship and Wonder
(Titles in italics can be found on the CD "Be Still and Know")

Invocation:

Be Still and Know

Kum Ba Yah

Into My Heart

Come Into His Presence

Praise:

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

Doxology

Praise Him!

Holy, Holy, Holy (1st verse only)

God Is So Good

Awsome God

All Things Bright and Beautiful (Chorus only)

This Is the Day

Thanks:

God Our Father

Now Thank We All Our God

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Any Time

Jesus Loves the Little Children

Jesus Loves Me

Father, I Adore You

He Is Lord

Jesus, Remember Me

Benediction

Go Now In Peace

Shalom

HISTORY OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND WORSHIP

Sofia Cavelletti, an internationally-known educator and Biblical scholar, along with Montessori educator **Gianna Gobbi**, developed what is called the Good Shepherd materials. These provide for a story-based oral method of faith formation that is Biblical and sacramental in nature.

The two were greatly influenced by the guiding principles of **Maria Montessori**, an educator and physician:

- Children absorb learning from a carefully prepared environment.
- There must be freedom within the prepared environment for children to develop physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Movement starts the intellect working and children learn through movement.
- Teachers guide more than direct children. Teachers must be good observers.
- Children have a natural desire to learn and to work.

The National Association of "The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" is founded on the ideas of Cavaletti. Its purpose is "...to assist the involvement of adults and children in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood predominate."

Jerome Berryman studied with Cavaletti at the Center for Advanced Montessori Studies in Italy. Dr. Berryman is an Episcopal priest, a lawyer and educator. He is also the creator of "Godly Plan" and the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston, Texas. *His method seeks to teach children the art of using religious language -- parable, sacred story, silence, and liturgical action -- to help them become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence in their lives.*"

The late **Sonya Stewart**, an ordained Presbyterian minister, coordinated the Master's in Religious Education at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan until her retirement in 2003. She and Dr. Berryman combined their efforts to write the book Young Children and Worship, published in 1989. Dr. Stewart says that Children and Worship is "...a joyful way to worship God. It invites both children and adults to experience the wonder and mystery of God through a unique storytelling format and multi-sensory materials. It is a worship environment that cultivates the imagination and invites children to fall in love with God."

The book is the basis for the program now used in many churches across the country. Known as "**Children Worship and Wonder**," it combines storytelling with worship in a meaningful way to nourish the spiritual formation of children.

First Presbyterian Church adopted the program in the summer of 2013 under the leadership of Kathy Beach-Verhey, Parish Associate Minister for Education. It opened its doors for children ages 3 - second grade on January 5, 2014.

**Prayer of Blessing
For
The Children Worship & Wonder Sanctuary**

Almighty God, who loves us unconditionally, we ask your blessing upon all who gather in this sacred space. May the children, the greeters and the story tellers know the joy of your comforting presence as they pray, listen to your stories and fellowship with one another.

May their understanding of Jesus' teachings inform the ways they relate to one another. May their relationship with you be deepened as they share the meaning of these stories with one another.

And now, God of grace and power and wisdom, we ask your blessing upon this sanctuary. We pray that it will always be a safe space, a peaceful place for the children of this church to grow ever closer to you.

Amen.