

Sixty simple ways to involve children in your church service right away

Ten ways to involve children in the congregational prayer:

1. Invite a group of children to write different sections of the congregational prayer and then pray them in sequence.
2. Invite older children and teens to create an attractive PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the different sections of the prayer, the people and situations being prayed for, etc.
3. Teach children over six years of age (some younger children can manage this too) how to pray simple prayers for other people in the congregation. Invite those who'd like the children to pray for them to put up their hands. The children can find them, ask about their requests, and then pray short prayers for them.
4. Invite a small group of children to act out the Lord's Prayer with actions (see Resources for instructions) or to teach it to the rest of the church.
5. Print off the following words, two to a page on different coloured paper, so they can be cut in half:

Yellow paper: Praise
Blue paper: Sorry
Green paper: Thanks
Pink paper: Please

Stick one of each of the printed words onto a gift bag that's the same colour as the paper. Place these at the front of the church. Give one set of the four different coloured papers to each person in the congregation. Invite them to write sentence prayers on the papers. So, they would write a sentence praise prayer on their yellow sheet of paper with the word 'Praise' printed on it, etc. Small children can draw pictures on their paper instead of writing sentences. Invite the children to collect all the coloured papers and bring them to the front of the church. Then they can post them in the correct bag – matching the colour of the paper to the bag. Pick up one bag at a time and present it to God as a congregational prayer. Then pull a few of the papers out of each bag and read them aloud, prayerfully. This is a useful way to involve everyone in the prayer.

6. The week before you want to do this activity, invite the children to search for objects that represent things they want to thank God for. Arrange all the objects on a table at the front of the church. Ask some of the children to tell the congregation why they chose the objects they brought along. Use some of their items in your prayer of thanks. Or ask each child to say 'Thank you God for...' whatever they brought along.
7. Ask the children to create attractive prayer postcards, decorating them with their artwork, or a simple collage. Send these cards to home-bound or sick church members to let them that their church has been praying for them, or write a short prayer on the card and post it to their home.
8. Pray a pray-dough prayer of confession. Give each person a piece of white playdough and invite them to make an object that represents something they want to ask God to forgive. Let them hold the object in their hands as you pray a prayer for forgiveness. As you pray you can also invite them to squash their dough into a ball, and then form it into a pure, white heart-shape. They can take their heart home with them as a

reminder that God can take all of our sins away forever, leaving us with lovely clean hearts again.

9. Find a small 'tree': a bare, twiggy, branch that you can place in a pot. Give everyone, including the children, green card leaves that have a hole punched in one end, and a short piece of raffia or string attached. Invite people to write the names of those who are sick and need healing onto the leaves, including some brief details of their illness or injury. The leaves can be brought forward and tied onto the tree, and the whole tree of healing prayer requests can be presented to God. The tree can have a place in the church, and, when healing has occurred, a coloured paper flower can be stuck to the leaf representing the person who has been healed. If someone dies a white flower can be attached to their leaf and talk about how healthy they will be when Jesus raises them from the dead.
10. Invite the children to write a praise prayer to God. Give them lots of large photos of nature scenes (such as those from calendars) and let them choose one and take it home. Ask them to write a sentence or two praising God for the things they can see in the picture. Then let them hold up their picture for everyone to see, and say their praises as part of your prayer time. Remember that it's alright for us to pray with our eyes open! God doesn't mind!

For more ideas see '100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids and grown-ups too!' Karen Holford, 2003, Pacific Press, available from the ABC.

Ten ways to involve the children in the Scripture reading:

1. A group of children could each learn one of the Bible verses in the passage, and then repeat their memorised verses in sequence to complete the Scripture reading.
2. Older children and teens could be invited to create an attractive PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the Scripture reading.
3. Ask children to read the scripture readings and then say a few words about what the passage means to them.
4. Invite some children to create a mime, or actions, to illustrate the scripture reading.
5. If the Bible passage is also a scripture song, a family or Sabbath School class could learn the song and sing it instead of reading the verses.
6. Ask the children to do a silent action each time certain words in the scripture are read, such as pointing to heaven when God is mentioned, or making a heart shape with their hands when love is mentioned, etc.
7. Older children could research the context for the passage and say a few words about the background to the verses before the Scripture reading.
8. Choose several children and give them different Bible verses from the scripture reading. Ask them to illustrate the verse in any way they like – a photo, some abstract art, a painting, etc. Photograph their work and use the pictures to create a PowerPoint presentation of the scripture reading.
9. Make a word-search puzzle using an Internet puzzle-maker site. Include the key words from a long scripture passage, or all the words from a shorter reading. As the children search for the words during the service, the important message from the scriptures will be seeping into their

memory. Or create a coded text or Rebus version of the passage for the children to unscramble.

10. Help children to remember the scripture reading by giving them attractive, printed bookmarks of the key texts. Or let them hunt for the words of a text around the church, and hold them in the correct order in front of the congregation. Use the theme of the text to suggest an activity that might involve the children.

For more ideas see '100 creative ways to learn memory verses' by Karen Holford, 2010, Autumn House Publishing.

Ten ways to involve the children in the offering:

Even very young children can be taught how to help collect an offering. A supportive and helpful deacon can stand nearby if necessary. When we trust our children with an important and responsible task they feel very valuable.

1. A group of children could collect the offering under the supervision of a deacon or deaconess.
2. Collect the offering in attractive gift bags, to remind the congregation everything we have is a gift from God, and it's lovely to say thank you by giving something back.
3. Involve children in praying the simple prayer dedicating the offering to God. They can write a few sentences ahead of time and read the words aloud, or they could sing a song of thanks to God for the money.
4. Give each person a plain envelope. Ask them to write or draw something on their envelope that they want to say 'Thank You' to God for. Then they can put their offering in the envelope and place it in the offering plate.
5. Use an interesting offering container for the children's offerings, and collect their money in it when they come to the front for their children's story. Or let the children take it in turns to find or make interesting offering boxes for their special offering
6. Give each child a plastic or cardboard tube, such as an empty denture tablet container. Ask them to decorate the tube and bring it back in a month's time filled with coins.
7. Supply children with their own colourful offering and tithe envelopes, or give them blank ones to decorate to celebrate the money they are giving back to God.
8. Some churches have a special offering that the children collect each month, and that money goes towards a local church project that will bless the children, such as a Holiday/Vacation Bible School event, or a special item for their Sabbath School rooms.
9. Invite children to design and decorate offering containers that can be used for a special church event, such as gift boxes for Christmas, or pumpkin shapes for Thanksgiving. Or maybe they could hunt for special collection boxes to match the themes of the sermons?
10. Ask the musicians to play quiet background music when the offering is being collected. During this time you can interview some of the children about the things they want to thank God for.

Ten ways to involve children in your church's welcome and blessings:

1. Train children as part of your church's welcoming team. They are often very good at smiling and greeting people and they can easily give out bulletins and Bibles.
2. Children on the welcoming team can greet the other children who come to church. Children may prefer to be welcomed by other children, and they can be given their own children's bulletin or sermon-related worksheet to encourage them to listen to the morning's message. They can also be offered a children's Bible to use during the service. Perhaps your church could purchase a set of colourful and interesting Bibles that have been especially designed for children
3. Trained children can be a part of the welcoming team at the opening of the divine service, and invite the church to enter a spirit of worship. They can work with a mentor to write out their words and practise them so that their welcome message is appropriate and clear.
4. Children can welcome visitors by giving them a small gift such as bookmark or a flower.
5. Every child can be paired with a senior member of the church and be given the responsibility of welcoming their 'adopted' grandparent to church each week, in a personal way. This can be done informally in the time between the services, or the child and older person can meet briefly after the service. It is best practice when a parent or guardian looks out for their own children to make sure they are safe when relating to other church members.
6. Children can help your church deaconesses distribute the flowers from the Sabbath arrangements to those in your congregation who will be blessed by them.
7. If your church serves drinks and snacks after a service, two children a week could be involved in helping to pour drinks and collect cups or tidy away afterwards.
8. Station a trained older child by the church doors to say goodbye to the children leaving after the service, and to say something encouraging and appreciative to each child.
9. Think about how your church manages the benedictions and blessings at the end of the service. Try different ways of involving the children in these times. Adults can stand and hold hands in a circle around the children as they are blessed, or lay hands on them.
10. Children can receive a special short prayer of blessing during the communion service. As the adults are being served the children can wait in line to be blessed by a person who is good at communicating with children. Encourage the person to give each child a different and personal blessing.

Children and Sermons

If you ask many children in our churches today what they like and don't like about church, most of them will say that the worship services are boring and there is nothing for them, except perhaps a children's story. In many churches they are expected to sit perfectly still and listen to things they cannot understand for an hour or so. The experience of most of the children in our churches each week is one that is potentially *anti-evangelistic*. Here are some

ways to make the sermon time in a traditional church service more interesting for the children.

Ten ways to involve the children in the sermon:

1. As you write your sermon, think about how the children will hear what you say and which points will be most relevant to them. Pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire you to find fresh and creative ways to involve the children in your sermon. If you find it hard to be creative, ask your local children's ministries leaders to help you come up with different ideas, or contact your Mission, Conference or Union Children's Ministry leaders for help with ideas and resources. Please give at least two weeks' notice before your service if you are asking a busy person to help you.
2. Tell the children's story during the sermon. This can break up the long sermon time for the children and give them something to listen out for. Otherwise they can often find it very hard to listen to a long sermon as they have usually learned that nothing else happens for the children in a church service once their story has finished.
3. Be creative about involving the children in the theme of the service. If you are telling the story about Noah you could hide plastic animals in 7s and 2s around the church for the children to find. These could then be placed inside a large ark - a cardboard box would be fine! Gift-wrap objects that help to tell your sermon and invite the children to open them. One pastor places a surprise object in a special bag that he takes to church each week. The children can't wait to help him open the bag during the sermon! Each week the object is chosen to help the children learn how much God loves them.
4. Ask a teacher or scientist to involve the children in a science or nature experiment as an illustration during the sermon time.
5. Use attractive photographs to illustrate your sermon PowerPoint slides so that you keep the children's attention. Hide the picture of a small object in more than half the slides. You can choose an image that is relevant to the sermon theme, such as stone, lamp, coin, etc. Ask the children look carefully at the pictures and count how many hidden objects they can find.
6. Create a simple worksheet that is linked to the sermon theme and give it to the children for them to complete during the sermon. This helps them to think about the sermon, and many children actually listen better when they are doing something else at the same time. There are many books of Bible worksheets that you can photocopy for children. Your Children's Ministries Department may be able help you to find worksheets for specific ages and themes. Or search Google images to find Bible story worksheets that you are free to copy.
7. Just before the sermon hand out a small ball of play-dough to every child. Crayola's Model Magic is clean, non-messy and soothing on the skin. Invite the children to model something that relates to the sermon or to make a scene from the Bible story. Display the models after the service and encourage the adults to talk to the children about what they made. The models can be taken home to dry out and be kept, or the dough/clay can be returned to a sealed container to be used during another service.
8. Give each child in your church a special Spiritual Memory box. This is a place where they can collect items that are spiritually significant to them.

Each week choose a small and inexpensive object that has a link to your sermon, and give one to each child as they leave church. Make the connection between your message and the item very clear, and remember that under-sevens may find it hard to understand abstract meanings for objects. You could give out a large nail when talking about Jesus' death, a small piece of map or tiny compass when talking about how God gives us direction, a tiny smiley person when talking about joy, etc. Encourage the children to use the boxes during their own worships and family devotional times to remind them of God's loving care. A notebook can be added to the box so that they can write down what each item represents, and other ideas they may have.

9. Give older children a piece of squared paper and a pencil and ask them to create a simple cross word or word search puzzle using the key words in your sermon, plus other words that they hear you use. Or ask them to make a word search using as many words as possible from your key texts. This helps them to concentrate on what you are saying and helps them to remember the important parts of your message.
10. Dress a few children as the characters in your chosen Bible story and help them to create tableau scenes to illustrate the story. You could also give them cards with clearly written words for them to speak at the appropriate moment. Interview the children about how they would feel if they were the different characters, to add another dimension to the Bible story.

Ten ways to involve the children's artistic gifts in your church:

Whenever you involve the children in your church in an artistic project, supply them with good quality materials. Provide clip-boards if they'll be drawing in church so that they will have something to lean on. Use quality, pure white paper, not the back of recycled copy paper, or paper that is tatty and torn. Fresh marker pens, sharpened crayons, pencils and other good materials are more likely to inspire the children and show that their art-work is truly valued by the church.

1. Invite the children of your church to take it in turns to design the cover of your bulletin. If you photocopy in black and white ask them to do a simple pen and ink style design. If you have colour bulletin covers for special occasions, then the children can draw, paint and create collages that can be scanned into your computer. Encourage the children to work with a safe adult who can mentor them as they create their design. Or ask the children to create different designs to suit your different sermon topics. When visitors see that you welcome and value the children they will know that they are more likely to be welcomed and valued too.
2. Encourage your children's leaders, and any graphic designers or artists you have in your congregation, to work with the children to create seasonal collages and thought-provoking posters for your church's external notice-board.
3. Let the children design envelopes for special offerings, especially offerings that will be used to help children. They can draw their designs on ordinary white envelopes.
4. Ask the children to design welcome postcards for your church, or cards to be sent to people who haven't been able to come to church for a while, or those who are ill. Give them plain white postcards and ask them to draw

something on the blank side. You can ask them to write an appropriate Bible verse on the card, too.

5. If the Scripture reading has been chosen several weeks ahead of time, an artistic child or teenager can be asked to create a picture that illustrates the reading. This can be scanned into the computer and made into an illustrative PowerPoint slide, which can be shown when the scripture is read. Interview the child about how they chose to create their picture and what the scripture means to them. This has the added advantage of encouraging the child to think more deeply about the Bible passage.
6. Invite someone who is good at sewing and design to help the children create a banner to be used in your church on a weekly basis, or for special occasions. There are several books of banners you can use as inspiration, or surf the net for Christian banner designs or witness t-shirts with simple, thought-provoking slogans that can be adapted to create a banner.
7. Children can boost your church building fund by designing a calendar that can be sold. There are computer programmes and printing companies that can incorporate 12 of your children's scanned pictures into a calendar format. Encouraging Bible verses can be included in their designs to create a witnessing tool, as people will often buy these to give to friends, neighbours and family members.
8. Children often listen better to a sermon when they have something to do. Ask them to draw a picture that illustrates one of the messages in the sermon. At the end of the service let the children place their drawings on a bulletin board where others can see their work. Encourage the adults to look at what the children have drawn and to search for any new thoughts and inspiration in the children's drawings.
9. If your church has a website, include some of the children's drawings in a gallery on the site. This will encourage the children, their family members and friends to visit your site. If you keep your site interesting and up to date the visitors may also discover what else your church is doing, and be encouraged to come along.
10. Nominate a gifted adult to mentor the creative and artistic talents of the children and youth in your church. Encourage them to look for ways in which children can use art to deepen their spiritual understanding and experience, and to develop workshops where children can design Scripture bookmarks, witnessing T-shirts, greetings cards, banners, etc.

(Many of the ideas in this chapter first appeared in the BUC Messenger, 2007 - used with permission.)