

Small children at Mass? We need more of them.

Editorial for The Visitor, By Joe Towalski, July 30, 2010

A toddler to my left. A toddler and baby to my right. And a toddler and baby in the pew in front of me. That was the seating arrangement last Sunday as I sat in the back pew during the late-morning Mass at the parish I attend. The parents came armed and ready for the 60-plus-minute Mass with diaper bags, picture books and baggies of cereal.

I don't think we reached the first reading, however, before one of the toddlers began to fuss a little. Not long afterward, he and his parents were headed for the church's gathering space, where the little guy presumably had a little more room to roam without the threat of disturbing anyone.

Not much later, another of the families headed in the same direction. The third family stuck it out until the end, although the young mom left her seat for a while to entertain her baby in the walkway area behind me.



Been there

I sympathized with these parents because I remember what it was like to bring my children to church when they were small: They fidget, they talk, they drop things and, worst of all, they sometimes get upset and start to cry. If the children have special needs, there are additional challenges. As a parent, you worry that every sound and move your kids make is annoying the people around you — and maybe even your pastor at the altar.



Now that my children are older, I've become one of those people that parents with babies and toddlers worry about disturbing. If you're one of those parents, here's my message to you: "Don't worry so much. Short of having a full-fledged meltdown, your children aren't causing as much of a ruckus as you think. I'm happy, like most of the other worshippers around you, to see you in church and making the effort — not always an easy one — to raise your children in the faith. We made that commitment with our kids, too, and we're here to support you as well. Our church needs you."

I'm lucky to be in a parish with a healthy population of young parents and young adults in general, but that isn't the case in many other places. Many young adults, formed in a culture that's rooted in individualism and relativism, aren't interested in coming to church regularly or getting involved in parish life. They may come to the church for sacraments like weddings and baptisms, but they don't come back. They aren't connected to a parish home.

That's why outreach and hospitality are so important when it comes to young adults. Young parents with small children are making the decision to stay involved and pass on the gift of their faith. We should be doing everything we can to encourage them to keep coming back. That starts with creating a welcoming atmosphere.

An important invitation

The pastor at my church has on more than one occasion, after hearing a young child pipe up, thanked parents at the end of Mass for bringing their kids.

A colleague of mine — a father of a young parent — recently told me about an older couple who reassured his daughter and son-in-law, who have young children themselves, that the whole crew is always welcome at church. In fact, the couple invited the family to sit in the pew directly in front of them if they were worried the children might bother other worshippers.

If I have the opportunity again, I will offer some reassurance to the parents around me. I'll thank them for bringing their children to church. And, maybe I'll invite them to sit by me the next Sunday if they are worried their kids might bother other folks in the pews.

These parents — and their small children — are just as much an integral part of the church as we are. Let's make them feel like the important members of our congregations that they are.



Liturgical Opportunities for Children

St. Peter and St. Paul Faith Formation

October 2010 - April 2010 at the 9AM and 10:30AM Masses

*When the Children's Choir sings we will not have LOWC

Liturgy Of the Word with Children (LOWC): All children from age 3 through grade 4 are invited to join the dismissal for learning more about our scripture stories. Using the Sunday readings, children become involved in discussions of God's message to us and join together to pray the Creed and Petitions. Children rejoin the community during the Preparation of the Gifts for the celebration of Eucharist. Leaders are adults and youth from our community. We offer this educational ministry at the 9 AM and 10:30 AM Masses as listed below. Please call GERALYN to volunteer at 251-4831 extension 212 or email at gnahe-evans@stpetestpaul.org

Praise through music: There are children's choirs open to grades 2 through 8 at both St. Peter's and St. Paul's parish. Both choirs meet on various Tuesdays from 6:00-7:00 and sing about 6-7 Sundays annually. St. Peter's choir meets in the music room just inside Door #7 and sings at various 10:30 liturgies. St. Paul's choir meets in St. Paul's church in the choir area and sings at various 9:00 liturgies. Children may join either choir. Choose the choir that best corresponds with your family's chosen Mass time.

St. Peter's Children's Choir begins September 14 Contact Erin at 252-2113 extension 208

St. Paul's Children's Choir begins September 21 Contact Mary at 251-4831 extension 208

<u>Date</u>	<u>St. Peter's</u>	<u>St. Paul's</u>
August 29	LOWC	LOWC
September 26	Children's Choir	LOWC
October 3	LOWC	Children's Choir
October 10	LOWC	LOWC
October 17	LOWC	LOWC
October 24-MEA		
October 31	Children's Choir	LOWC
November 7	LOWC	Children's Choir
November 14	LOWC	LOWC
November 21	Children's Choir	LOWC
November 28-Thanksgiving		
December 5	LOWC	LOWC
December 12	LOWC	LOWC
December 19	LOWC	LOWC
December 25(Saturday)	Children's Choir 10:30 AM	Children's Choir 9:30 AM
January 2	LOWC	LOWC
January 9	LOWC	Children's Choir
January 16	LOWC	LOWC
January 23	LOWC	LOWC
January 30(*CSW)		Combined Children's Choir at St Paul's
February 6	LOWC	LOWC
February 13	LOWC	LOWC
February 20	LOWC	LOWC
February 27	Children's Choir	LOWC
March 6	LOWC	LOWC
March 13	LOWC	LOWC
March 20	LOWC	LOWC
March 27	Combined Children's Choir at St Peter's	
April 3	LOWC	LOWC
April 10	LOWC	LOWC
April 17	LOWC	LOWC
April 24-Easter		
May 1		Children's Choir
May 15	Children's Choir	