

2009

# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Sonya C. Milam



## Transforming children's church into worship training

About 10 years ago, as a new church staff member, I was given the task to rejuvenate our children's church. I naively attempted to recruit volunteers, purchase curriculum and think of yet another craft and some "child-friendly" songs. Thankfully, I was soon introduced to Robbie Castleman's book *Parenting in the Pew* (InterVarsity Press), which changed my quest for separating and occupying children during the adult service.

Ultimately, our children's church was transformed into worship training for preschoolers. Today, these youngsters continue to learn and practice liturgical worship in a child-sized setting through "WOW: Working On Worship."

Using the worship hour for worship training — instead of trying to extend Sunday school or create a new program — involves transforming attitudes, parents, volunteers, curriculum and resources, spaces, and semantics.

Jana Kinnerly, a veteran of children's ministry, feels that "we have worship wars today because we have a generation who was never trained in or encouraged to participate in corporate worship." This lack of training, added to our society's need to be entertained consumers, creates a frightening attitude about worship. The skills for liturgical corporate worship must be taught and modeled. Worship training can help young children be prepared to join their families for corporate worship and feel like participants — not spectators.

Teaching children to worship is different from just "being still and quiet." The ultimate goal for all worshipers is to be moved by God's presence and to offer him praise. Learning treasured rituals of liturgy and worship takes practice and patience. Because the first seven years of life present

### Resources

*Children and Worship: What Is a Church to Do?*  
([www.janicehaywood.com](http://www.janicehaywood.com))

*Come Worship With Me: A Journey Through the Church Year* (Ruth Bolings, Mouse Books)

the best opportunity for learning and practicing skills, and also because children learn best by the repetitive observation of model behaviors, worship training is ideally suited for the preschool years.

Convincing parents that full participation in corporate worship for their children is an important Christian discipline worthy of the work required can be challenging. Therefore:

- Have early and frequent conversations with families about children's worship training.
- Create dialogues that invite their concerns. Acknowledge these while you reflect your experiences of worshipping with children.
- Provide resources throughout their children's milestones, of which *Parenting in the Pew* should be the first.
- Provide printed suggestions for preparing children for worship at home and church.

Anyone who is already participating in your children's ministry and who is committed to your worship practices are ideal workers. If someone can follow an order of worship, love preschoolers and commit to at least a month's service, this may be their niche. Ask parents to serve in your children's worship training so that they can experience the attempts you are making in training their children. If possible, provide volunteers with a recording of the worship service they miss on their service days.

Worship training requires minimal resources and expenditures. Simply condense your church's order of worship into a service

for preschoolers. "Play church" together. Teach songs from worship services. Show the colors of each church season. Teach common worship terms. Have visual reminders of your worship leaders and their roles.

We begin each of our WOW sessions by having an assigned preschooler serve as the worship leader. This coveted position gets to chime the hour, lead in the Doxology and Gloria Patri, pass an offering plate, and lead a prayer — all while being reminded of the meaning and importance of these rituals.

When worship training "graduates" are ready to enter the corporate worship experience, we supply them with tools needed for full participation. Our WOW bags include Bibles, bookmarks for finding pages in hymnals and Bibles, tissues, and pencils.

The worship training area is ideally located near the sanctuary and preschool areas. Our WOW meets in a foyer area — complete with child-sized pews — adjacent to the preschool Sunday school classes. Converted classrooms and chapel spaces are other options. Space should also be allowed for free play or center time.

We love for our children's programs to have names. For children's worship training, I've grown to dislike the traditional term "children's church" as it implies that children have a separate church. "Extended session" suggests a repeat of what has already taken place in Sunday school. Names such as "WOW: Working on Worship" or "PFW: Preparing for Worship" accurately reflect the purpose of a special educational experience.

I am happy to report that our first WOW graduates have now entered high school and seem to be engaged in our worship. I notice many sitting with their families and participating fully in the service. They have even become our best WOW volunteers. **BT**

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Sonya C. Milam, former coordinator of preschool and children's ministries at First Baptist Church of Christ at Macon, Ga., who currently is a "stay-on-the-road" mom and part-time student. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.