

Family Friendly Larger Church Gatherings

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We believe in the life-long journey of faith. We love the fact that we belong to God's family at all ages and stages of life. We want to involve younger families in the life of the wider church so that children develop a sense of belonging to a large family of faith. It's important to the health of the wider family of faith. But, like the disciples who thought Jesus was too busy to bless the children, we get distracted by full agendas and can't always imagine how this could work. Here are some suggestions that could bless the children and even the adults as they gather to discern the work and direction of the wider church:

- Keep the schedule relaxed so parents have time and energy for relating with their children.
 - Build informal times into the program, like tours that acquaint participants with the life and witness of the hosting community.
 - Offer discernment times simultaneously by topic stream to create space for leisure and intergenerational connections.
- Encourage parents to join in on some of their child's activities as a sign of valuing that experience as part of the larger gathering.
- Welcome and include children and other unbaptized participants in the communion services.
 - Offer a blessing ritual
 - Provide alternative communion elements like a grape and a pretzel to align with the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.
 - Use an appropriate prayer of inclusion. For example, see *Invitation to the Communion Table* - www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2023.

- Provide transition times when children are signed into age appropriate activities.
- Plan worship with an intergenerational focus whenever children are present.
 - Use language in worship that is understood by all who are present.
 - Use symbols that reinforce the spoken message. Stimulate the senses in other ways.
 - Give active bodies a chance to move in non-disruptive ways.
 - Pray for issues that concern people in different life stages, including children.
 - Provide worship bags or children's bulletins to pick-up as they enter.
 - Include songs and music that is accessible to children and other untrained voices.
 - Model how worship is led with an understanding of what can be expected of children at different ages. Tolerate, with grace, minor disruptions caused by children as they grow into worshipful behaviour.



Children's Story, Assembly 2009