

# Creating *Children First* Family Worship!

Meaningful for adults, accessible for children



## Why?

- Prepares children for regular worship
- Allows crucial leadership opportunities- in front, or in “background”
- Immediately useful skills
- Multi-age
- Inclusive and accessible
- Concrete ideas
- Lifelong activity
- Brings children into the life of the church rather than separating into “adult” things and “kid” things (blah- don’t get me started)

## When?

- Once a month: give time to practice, learn, process
- CONSISTENCY IS KEY: hell or high water, y’all- be there. They learn to count on you, and it builds trust. Labor Day, Fourth of July, New Year’s Day, whatever
- Aim for a 30-40 minute service
- During Sunday School?
- Sunday or Wednesday evenings?
- During another regular worship time (remember- just once a month!)
- For “children’s church” during service (**only if you already pull students out** and **cannot** change this- do NOT start this way if you are **not** already removing students from worship!)

## Where?

- Any large, fairly open space
- An elevated “stage” is preferable
- Chairs aren’t necessary- they are kids! If parents attend, have rows of chairs behind children
- In worship space during a regular worship time- or in the worship space NOT during a regular worship time

## How?

- Plan around a monthly theme: pastor’s worship theme, liturgical season, Sunday School unit, or seasonal/current events (if it lands on a holiday, THAT sets your theme!)
- *Your* congregation’s worship “DNA”: contemporary, blended, traditional? Grab recent worship orders from your worship leaders, and use that format
- Team: worship leaders, congregants with music expertise, parent council
- Have kids work with the theme in the 3 weeks leading up to the worship service in your SS classes or evening classes; when you plan your worship, plan your lessons to prepare hearts and minds
- Common English Bible translation
- Biblegateway.com for theme word searches
- *Children of God Storybook Bible* by Desmond Tutu for scripture stories
- Liturgy (what we say and sing) on a screen, or in a child-friendly bulletin with symbols for worship pieces- easily done in Publisher

## Who?

- Kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Perfect fit for 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>
- Can have preschool choir join for an anthem, or do their own anthem
- Middle school can be great leaders, but it is slightly trickier (they are just SO cool)

## Some notes on the worship order:

### Hymn of Praise

A fairly familiar, generally upbeat song which choir leads but everyone sings

Have acolytes bring in light during this song

### Call to Worship

Written around the theme

Can use one from another worship service that day, if it fits

From a prayer you like

Practice in SS beforehand as a “centering practice” to begin the lesson

## **Welcome and Announcements**

Keep announcements to 3 max; pick your most important

Keep engagement: "Everyone say 'number one'!" etc.

## **Prayer**

Student or pastor

Echo prayer, call and response, or solo

## **Affirmation**

The one your other worship services use?

The children's affirmation in my worship order?

Another affirmation in the UM Hymnal?

Keep it consistent- they do learn it!

\*Congregation stands

## **Gloria Patri**

Traditional element after an affirmation (we do this because we are blended)

Useful for if they ever go to another UMC church

\*Congregation remains standing

*UMH page 70*

## **Passing of the Peace**

Bring them back together with a refrain from the hymn of praise, or with a well-known refrain

## **Offertory prayer**

Have kids pass and give offering, even if it is just them in a SS room! This is an act of worship.

Pray over the gifts before collecting: use our prayer, or another that you like.

## **Offertory song**

Led by the band or adult worship leader

\*We chose contemporary or "secular" songs to balance out traditional hymns

## **Doxology**

Traditional element after offertory

*UMH page 94 or 95: We changed "Him" to "God" in second and third lines for inclusivity*

## **Theme/sign of the day**

One or two words

*“What have we been learning about this month? What are we praying about and singing about and talking about and thinking about this morning?”*

Kids can decorate a poster which is revealed after a “drumroll”- everyone reads, then do a second drumroll: *“Now that you what it is, let’s say it all together when you see it- drumroll please!”*

Sign language: [handspeak.com](http://handspeak.com)

## **Scripture Story**

Usually one longer one, or a couple shorter ones to explore the theme

Think about ways to interact: sign the word when you hear it, etc.

## **Bible Memory Verse**

*“You may want to write this down somewhere at home, to help you learn it.”*

The essence of the worship: to the point, short, fairly concrete

Interactive: use sign language, say it many times in different voices, tell your neighbor near you, etc.

## **Good News**

The family worship version of the “sermon”

Videos recorded ahead of time- interviews with children or children reading and responding to a picture book around the theme (see notes for book list)

Live interviews with children IN worship- risky, but big payoff!

A “children’s moment” which fits the theme- especially good with smaller groups; see Mark Burrows’s “Moments of Wonder” and “Wow Time” for quality children’s moments

A litany, such as the one in our worship today: “We Can, With God’s Help”- especially good if you are tight on time

## **Communion**

Must have pastor celebrate live, or pre-bless elements

Let the pastor know the theme well in advance: “Thank you for offering a few words during communion, around the theme of \_\_\_\_\_”

Children serve

\*Worshipful moment for adults: we chose contemporary or “secular” songs

## **Benediction**

Choral benediction written by Dr. Wheeler (our traditional worship director)

Benediction from Numbers: May the Lord bless and keep you....

Another benediction you like

One that changes with the theme: "Go now and.... "

Some of my favorite storybooks for Good News/lessons:

### **Parables:**

Who Counts?

The Marvelous Mustard Seed

Who is My Neighbor?

(Levine, Sasso)

### **All Saints' Day/change/loss:**

Big Cat, Little Cat (Cooper)

Little Tree (Long)

### **Peace:**

What Does Peace Feel Like? (Radunsky)

I Am Peace (Verde)

The Peace Book (Parr)

The Laughing River (Vega)

### **Family/love:**

I Am Love (Verde)

Love Makes A Family (Beer)

A Family Is A Family Is A Family (O'Leary)

### **Fruits of the spirit/holy spirit:**

Maybe God Is Like That Too (Grant)

**Compassion/justice:**

Four Feet, Two Sandals (Williams, Mohammed)

I Walk With Vanessa (Kerascoet)

Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too (Grant)

**Easter:**

This Is the Mystery of Easter (Dress)

**Themes we've loved:**

All

Remember (World Communion Sunday)

Different

Peace

Rest (Lent)

Transformation

Jesus's Stories

Share

Serve

Learn (Third Grade Bible Sunday)

Hope

Joy

Wise (Epiphany)

Light

Prayer

Alleluia/Hallelujah

Justice

Compassion

Neighbor