

## Children's Messages

### Why have a children's message?

It's an opportunity to make children feel included, to talk to them on their level, to let them know they are loved by God and welcome in your congregation.

### What should we call it?

In our church the name was changed to "A Message for All Ages." Adults are listening and many of them get a lot out of it, so make sure that everyone in the congregation can see any objects you have, pictures you are showing the children, etc.

### What should it be about?

You should try to connect your children's message with the theme of the service. Find out ahead of time what scriptures will be read and the subject of the sermon. If that's not possible, find out what the children are studying in Sunday school and try to focus on that. Both the liturgical and the secular calendar can suggest message themes. Be sure to use age-appropriate words and concepts that the children can understand. Stick with one simple idea in your message.

### Who should give the children's message?

Some people expect the pastor to give the children's message. This can be a good way for the pastor to connect with the children, but there are other ways to do this, such as visiting the children in their Sunday school classes while laity lead the service. A pastor might not enjoy giving the children's message and having other people do it will free up time for the pastor who is preparing the rest of the service. There may be someone in the congregation gifted in this area. Rotating the person who gives the children's message is a way for the children to get to know some adults in the congregation a bit better.

### Should the children come up front for the children's message?

If you do this, make sure you are not putting them "on display." Invite them to come forward, but don't pressure them to do so. Have them face you instead of the congregation. Be respectful of their answers to questions; don't say "That's wrong," instead say something like: "That's a good guess." Try not to have them answer questions which might cause the congregation to laugh at them. Don't put a child on the spot by asking them for an answer.

### How can you connect concrete action with the theme of your message.

For instance, if you're talking about being kind to others, ask the children for ways they can do this or give some examples yourself.

### What about children who interrupt or won't stop talking?

Be loving and listen at first. If the child doesn't seem to be stopping, gently say that you appreciate what they're saying but you have some more things you want to share. If all else fails, you'll have to ignore the child and continue your message. If children are

shouting out or talking over each other, ask them to raise their hands or use a talking stick, when only the person who is holding the stick is allowed to talk.

### **What about object lessons? Aren't the youngest children unable to understand abstract concepts like symbolism?**

An object draws the children's attention and helps them remember your message. Jesus used the objects around him to teach: water, fishing nets, a mustard tree. Depending on their age and developmental level, children will understand object lessons in different ways. You might bring in a stuffed sheep or shepherd's crook and talk about Jesus being our shepherd and taking care of us like a shepherd takes care of his sheep. A very young child might think that Jesus is literally a shepherd but will still get the concept that Jesus takes care of us.

### **What are some tips on giving a children's message?**

- Be prepared so that you can deliver the message naturally, without reading from a paper. Be natural. Let your personality shine through. Don't be afraid to let the children know that you have made mistakes and that there are questions you don't know the answer to.
- Keep the message short so you can keep the children's interest.
- Tell stories. They can be from the Bible or relate to the message's theme. Everyone loves stories.
- You might want to have the children get up and move. For instance, you can have them go over to one of the stained-glass windows if it relates to your message. You might play a game like Follow the Leader to illustrate the idea of following Jesus.
- Involve as many senses as possible. Use objects and let the children pass them around if appropriate. Things to smell might be used, but make sure the children don't have allergies or sensitivities. If you have a food to share, make sure it is something healthy and, again, ask about allergies and sensitivities.
- Be sensitive to children's differences and living situations. Don't assume everyone lives with a mother and father. Use terms like "your family" instead of "your mother and father." If you use the imagery of God as a father, say God is like a "good father." Sadly, some children may have an abusive father. Be sensitive to children on holidays like Mother's Day and Father's Day. For instance, on Father's Day talk about honoring fathers and those who have been like fathers to someone.
- Have a Bible and share that your message comes from it or is related to something in it. If appropriate, read a verse or two which relates to the message.
- Close the message with a prayer related to the theme. If possible, have the children echo your words.