



# Welcoming Wonder: A Congregational Inventory

## Getting Started

This inventory is designed to help you, as congregational leaders, systematically consider a child's experience of worship; celebrating areas of strength, discerning possibilities for a more inclusive worship environment, and identifying simple and easily implemented changes. This is an exercise, not a test. Every congregation is unique and has important resources for creating a more beloved community. With curiosity and grace, consider where God is and has been at work and where God is guiding you in the process.

### Here are a Few Ways to Use the Inventory:

- Invite several different people to complete the inventory separately and then compare results.
- Invite different church groups (committees, councils, or boards) to complete the inventory and compile results.
- Create a small team representing different groups within the church (i.e. families with children, worship leaders, property committee members, etc.) to complete the inventory together.
- You may invite friends or family members with young children to visit your congregation and ask about their experiences.

### Principles: Before starting the inventory-- spend time together to define the values and reasons behind building a worship service that welcomes children

- Name the Bible stories or passages that explain the importance of worship or shape your understanding of children in the church.
- What are key teachings in your tradition about children?
- When do you experience belonging in worship?
- Describe moments when you have experienced children fully engaged in worship? What did you notice?
- Name the children you hope to worship with as a result of this process.

### Next Steps: Once the inventory is completed, regroup and discern together where your church is being called to better welcome children.

1. In which section do you see your congregation's greatest strengths?
2. Which area do you see the most potential for growth?
3. What changes would make the most difference for a family with young children?
4. What changes would be most significant to a 1st grader?
5. Identify 3-5 simple changes that would make worship more accessible to children.
6. Identify 1-2 areas for more significant change.
7. Working together, imagine that you have made these changes. Describe a worship service in a year's time. What would these changes mean? What would the congregation look like? What would you hope a family would notice?



## **Practicalities:** How do families find out about worship with children?

1. Where and how are children referenced or shown in your church's communication (i.e. website, bulletin, opening slides, welcome materials, etc.). What does this communicate about your congregation's understanding of children in worship?
2. What key information are ushers/ greeters instructed to share with families arriving for worship?
3. Where would a family find the Sunday morning schedule and instructions related to children?
4. What are the first things children see walking into your church? (consider crouching down and looking at 3 foot and 4 foot height).

## **Place:** How do families and children experience your space?

1. Walk through the sanctuary, observing the space from a child's perspective:
  - What is difficult to see?
  - What areas are difficult to access?
  - Are there spaces that are dangerous for a young child?
  - Are there areas where children are not allowed?
2. What images of children or by children can be found in the sanctuary?
3. Where is the closest restroom with a changing table? Is it marked or identified?
4. Where would a family member comfort a crying child?
5. What space in the sanctuary allows for the movement of a young child?
6. Do you have any space specifically designated for children and/or their families? How is that space identified?
7. What elements in your sanctuary are especially engaging to children?

# Practices: How do children experience and participate in worship?

1. At what age do children typically begin attending worship?
2. At what age would you expect a child to stay for an entire worship service?
3. Are there parts of worship that a child cannot participate in? (i.e. communion)
4. Are there parts of worship where children are specially addressed?
5. What are the special milestones or moments when children are included or recognized in the worshipping life of the congregation?  
 Baptism    Communion    Bible Presentation    Award / Recognition  
 "Step-up" / Graduation (from age groups)    Other:
6. When do you hear children's voices in worship?
7. How do children share their gifts in worship?  
 Read scripture    Prepare prayers or other parts of the liturgy    Be an usher or greeter  
 Singing or musical leadership    Proclamation of the word    Special announcements  
 As an acolyte or worship assistant    Provide art work  
Other:

## Language in Worship: Read through your Church's Worship Materials

1. Choose several examples of unison prayers, hymns, etc. from worship. Determine the readability (grade level) of your liturgy. You can ask an elementary teacher to help you or use a program online. Is the reading level consistent week to week? [https://www.wordcalc.com/readability/#google\\_vignette](https://www.wordcalc.com/readability/#google_vignette)
2. What words in the worship service stay the same week-to-week:  
 Lord's Prayer    Confession/ Creedal Statement    Sung responses  
 Greetings (i.e. passing the peace)    Memory verses    Blessings  
 Call and responses  
Other:  
*Are these elements printed in the bulletin or provided in written form anywhere in the sanctuary?*
3. Do you have any seasonal practices (i.e. lighting the advent candle) that are especially meaningful to your congregation? How do children participate in these practices?
4. How are worship instructions given?
  - Written (printed in a bulletin or projected on a slide)
  - Visual cues (either physical gestures or printed images)
  - Verbal (the worship leader says what is expected)
  - Implicit (people know the rhythm well enough extra instruction is not needed)
5. How often do you introduce new elements to worship (i.e. a new hymn, new style of prayer, etc.). Who explains, instructs, or teaches the congregation in this new element?

# Programs & Resources: How do you equip families to participate in worship?

Looking around your sanctuary, which of the following materials are readily available for children?

- Children's Worship Bulletins       Worship Bags       Art Response Materials  
 Children's Bibles       Children's Books       Fidgets       Instruments  
 Ribbons/ flags or other praise items

Other:

- Where are these materials stored?
- Who stocks or tends to these materials?
- How often are materials refreshed or changed?
- Which items are used the most?
- Are there materials for young children (2-3 years), preschool children, or elementary age students?

1. Do you offer special classes about communion or worship.
2. What printed resources are available in the worship space with best practices to help families and church members welcome children?
3. Where would a family find children's bibles and children's books about worship or elements of worship?
4. What resources are given to families to use at home to practice or engage in elements of worship?

# People: Identify potential leaders, designers, allies, and advocates

1. **Worship planning:** who are the people in charge of weekly worship planning?
2. **Pastoral and staff leadership:** who are the staff members involved with weekly worship and/or children's ministry?
3. **Music leaders:** Professional and lay leaders. Who organizes and leads the musical elements of worship each week? Are there other musicians in the church who work with children but may not be directly involved with weekly worship?
4. **Councils or Committees with worship or child related oversight or responsibilities:** Who are key leaders on those councils or committees?
5. **Worship Volunteers** (ushers, hospitality, sound techs, etc.): who helps manage people and practicalities around worship?
6. Laypeople and congregation members who **model outstanding welcome** with children.
7. Key leaders who **work directly with children in your congregation.**
8. Key leaders who work with children in your **community.**