



# EQUIPPING FOR... WORSHIP

Produced by Canadian Ministries

## Let's Be Radical and Worship Together!

*“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” — Isaiah 11:6*

**W**hy do we segregate people by ages during our worship time? In the May 2016 *Sojourners* article “A Little Child Shall Lead Them”, author and theology professor David Csinos says, “Jesus shook up his followers with his radical inclusion of children. Perhaps our Sunday worship should do the same.” Sometimes church leaders provide forums for people to share their experiences and participate in discussions and visioning about the way their community worships. How often do such discussion forums address the inclusion of all ages? Canadian Ministries frequently receives questions about this such as:

- How can we effectively involve people of different ages in designing, participating in and leading worship?
- How can we create opportunities for young people to be involved, to use their gifts, in a significant way?
- What are some good resources for skits and dramatic readings that our young people can do as part of church (i.e. not in Sunday school)?
- What are your best insights on how to engage all generations in worship, while remaining true to our values as Presbyterians?

This *Equipping for Worship* will begin with a discussion about the meaning of worship in our churches. Then we will consider David Csinos article – reprinted and included with this resource – and the challenge of the “radical inclusion” of all ages in worship.



The children and youth at St. Andrew's PC in Fredericton, NB, participate in services throughout the year by reading scripture, greeting, receiving offering or singing in the Children's Choir. Each December, on the third Sunday in Advent (Joy Sunday) and each June on Youth and Graduate Sunday, children and youth take significant roles in leading the worship service. (From <http://sapc.ca/ministry/children-and-youth/>)

## What Is The Meaning of Worship in Our Presbyterian Tradition?

by Sarah Travis, ordained minister in the PCC, teacher and author

**W**orship is about praising God. Not only on a Sunday morning, or at other times of public worship, but with our whole lives. Public worship, however, has a special role in our life of faith. Worship helps us understand who we are as people of God. Worship prepares us to be servants of Jesus Christ every day. When we gather together for worship, we remember what God has done. We celebrate what God is doing. And we name what God has promised to do in the future. We learn the story of God with us. Preaching, baptism, communion, music, prayers, offering – all of these elements of worship tell part of the story of God’s love and God’s action in history. We worship in awareness that we are part of a living story that began a long time ago, and continues far into the future. In some ways, worship is acting out the different aspects of our faith story, reminding ourselves of how we have been blessed and continue to be blessed by the presence of Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship does not end with the benediction. Instead, we leave the church building and continue to worship God in our daily work and play.

**Discuss** the purposes of worship mentioned by Sarah Travis. Which of these resonate the most with you and your worship experiences? Think about recent worship experiences you have had. Which of these purposes have been best achieved in the worship experience you are remembering? Describe how this was accomplished.

**Read** “Worship” from *Living Faith*. How does your congregation – and its people – live to praise God?

When we worship, we are aware of components like hymns, prayers, scriptures, offering, the sermon and the benediction. Worship leaders have the responsibility to ensure that these pieces of worship fit together, but planning and leading a worship service goes beyond “filling in the blanks.” While there

### Worship

“The church lives to praise God. We have no higher calling than to offer the worship that belongs to God day by day, Sunday by Sunday. Through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, in praise, prayer, teaching and fellowship, God sustains the life of the church. We worship God as Lord offering ourselves in the service of Christ, rejoicing that we have been brought from darkness to light.

Worship draws us into the work of Christ. Even now he intercedes for the world to which he came and for which he died. In union with him, the church prays for the healing and the salvation of the world.”

*Living Faith* (7.3.1-7.3.3)

is no one way to worship, there are some ways that do a better job of teaching us, telling us the story of God, and helping us to have an encounter with God.

**Describe** the role of the worship leader or worship team in your church. Think about recent worship experiences. What are “some ways that do a better job” of engaging worshippers? What are some personal characteristics (e.g. age, ability to read or to sing, hearing, vision) that might affect a person’s experience of worship in your church?

### The Radical Inclusion of Children

In an article in the May 2016 *Presbyterian Record*, the Rev. Karen Horst, Moderator of the 141st General Assembly, posed this challenge: “Let’s plan to be radically countercultural in how we encourage faith development. Let’s cross the generations as we learn and grow together so that seniors, millennials, children and youth teach and learn from one another” (“Crossing Generations”, p. 40).

**Pray** Mother Father God, your embrace enfolds all your children, both young and old. You chose a child to lead; and through Jesus you showed us how to welcome children, including and valuing them. Help us remember and live in covenant relationship with one another no matter our ages. Stretch our minds; help us visualize inclusive, all-ages worship; may we relax and enjoy being in each other's presence as we worship you, with adults sometimes leading and sometimes following children and youth. Amen.

**Read** "Placing Age Groups Together."

**Discuss** your experiences of intergenerational worship. What did you like? What did you find were the major challenge(s)? Share a time (at church or elsewhere) when roles were reversed and a child was a teacher to you.

### Placing Age Groups Together

"Placing age groups together in worship, study and mission provides full sensory experiences, not just intellectual cognition. Mixing people intergenerationally means everyone can be both student and teacher."  
– Karen Horst, *Presbyterian Record*, May 2016, p. 40.

**Read** "The Deeper Question."

**Discuss** how you, your worship leaders, and your congregation would answer the question, "Do we care enough...?" Karen Horst wants to stir the readers' thinking about intergenerational experiences. In the questions she poses, she suggests what adults must be willing to do and how they will be affected. What are the attitudes in your congregation? What might convince people of the importance of intergenerational worship experiences?

### The Deeper Question

"The deeper question is, do we care enough to [create intergenerational experiences]? Are we prepared to do the hard work or are we more inclined to stick with the familiar patterns? Are we open to sensory activities, movement and play? Can we let go of long-held views and ways of doing things? Do we really believe in working for community or do we put more emphasis on our individual need?" – Karen Horst, *Presbyterian Record*, May 2016, p. 40.

If you, and your congregation, do care and want to consider new, less familiar and more sensory ways to worship so that the needs of your faith community are addressed, then refer to the reprinted article "A Little Child Shall Lead Them" by David M Csinos inserted with this *Equipping for Worship*. Invite worship leaders to study this article together, using the four-point study that follows. Csinos frames the all-ages worship challenge a little differently: "Jesus shook up his followers with his radical inclusion of children. Perhaps our Sunday worship should do the same... including children in corporate worship isn't a matter of choice or changing trends; it's a matter of justice."

### Study of David Csinos' Article "A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

1. Csinos writes about how a church's theological perspective on childhood influences a church's conversation about including children in worship. On the third page of Csinos article, he lists theologian Marcia Bunge's six perspectives of children and childhood. Read these and discuss which one best describes the views held in your church.
2. On the second and third pages, Csinos describes four positions on the spectrum of children and worship: no inclusion, nominal inclusion, moderate inclusion, radical inclusion. Which one best describes your church's position? Explain.
3. The Old Testament assists us in identifying a practice for including children in worship. Read Exodus 12:21-27 and Deuteronomy 6:17-25. The repeated phrase "When your children ask" reminds us that children can play a critical role by asking questions that elicit the retelling of stories about God at work in the world. Csinos reminds us that this is an important practice even today in observing the Passover Seder. It contrasts with adult-driven questions that put young people on the spot and can create anxiety for them to provide the "correct" answers. Talk about important days in the church calendar when young people could pose the questions – with preparation and rehearsal. The questions could promote and guide adults in sharing stories from the Bible and from their own lives.

4. Beginning on page two, Csinos discusses varieties of inclusion. In this discussion he names some specific practices – from children’s time or song to station-based worship – that congregations use. List these. How could you learn more about how these practices are incorporated into worship?
5. Both Karen Horst and David Csinos suggest that a church wanting to move towards more inclusive worship might begin with just one or two new experiences, and then gradually add on to that.

### The young adults said, “Please...do something with worship.”

“In 2002 a large survey was conducted of 240 young adults who grew up in mainline (mainly Presbyterian) churches. Most of these young adults were still active in their congregations at the time... Of particular interest in this survey is the impatience that young adults expressed around worship. They didn’t much care for their worship experiences as children and, even though some of them express comfort in currently participating in the familiar patterns of worship, they longed for variety and flexibility. In fact, they indicated that they would ‘vote with their feet,’ and simply go to other churches to have this need satisfied... If young adults (and probably children and youth) are crying out for more contemporary styles of worship, why is it not being provided? ...Is this something that the young people themselves can have a major role in designing and leading?” – Excerpt from *Equipping for Elders*, pp. 49 and 51, available at <http://presbyterian.ca/elders/>

### Consider planning the service so worshippers of all ages can

**Respond creatively:** Set up a well-supplied craft table in the worship space for people to visit during the service to respond to what they are experiencing. Incorporate the creations into the closing or into the next service.

**Move with the music:** Provide ribbons or streamers so people can sway and dance during hymns. Some churches add motions or learn to sign lyrics for favourite hymns.

**Dramatize the stories:** In advance gather a multi-age group to dramatize one or more of the scripture readings. Identify the images, senses and personal traits behind the words and use props to bring them to life.

**Share leadership:** Invite a number of people to participate in the lighting of candles, processing in the Bible and other objects, taking up offering and announcing hymns and prayer times.

Discuss what might be the one or two parts of your congregational worship that could begin to be more inclusive of children.

## Resources for Theological and Historical Understanding of Children and Childhood

*Forbid Them Not, Years A, B and C* by Carolyn Brown, Abingdon Press, 1991 & 1994. Brown uses lectionary passages to give an exegesis of the scriptures from the child’s point of view, suggests sermon resources and appropriate hymns, offers a children’s bulletin, and suggests simple movement appropriate for the day.

*The Child in the Bible* by Marcia J. Bunge (Ed.), William B. Eerdmans, 2008. Biblical scholars provide an informed and focused treatment of biblical perspectives on children and childhood. Looking at the Bible through the lens of the child exposes new aspects of biblical texts and themes. Some authors focus on selected biblical texts – Genesis, Proverbs, Mark, and more – while others examine such biblical themes as training and disciplining, children and the image of God, the metaphor of Israel as a child, and so on. In discussing a vast array of themes and questions, the chapters also invite readers to reconsider the roles that children can or should play in religious communities today.

*The Child in Christian Thought* by Marcia J. Bunge (Ed.) William B. Eerdmans, 2000. This volume offers the first major survey of the history of Christian thought on children. Each chapter, written by an expert in the field, discusses the particular perspectives on children held by influential theologians and Christian movements throughout church history, asking what resources they can contribute to a sound contemporary view of childhood and child-rearing. Intended for all readers, this needed book will be a valuable resource for laying the foundation for a new, more meaningful Christian view of childhood today.

### Canadian Ministries wants to hear from YOU!

What parts of this resource are most useful?  
Share your story of inclusive worship. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca)  
or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Ext. 271.  
Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pconnect](https://www.facebook.com/pconnect).



## A Little Child Shall Lead Them

**Jesus shook up his followers with his radical inclusion of children. Perhaps our Sunday worship should do the same.**

by David M. Csinos • illustration by Jon Krause



**DURING ALL THE** Sunday mornings I spent in church as a child, I only cried once. After months of encouragement from my parents, I decided to go to our Catholic parish’s children’s liturgy (their version of Sunday school). I remember nothing else about that morning except that I stood in the corner crying while kind volunteers tried to calm me down with a few cookies. I never went to children’s liturgy again, and I’m thankful the experience didn’t leave me scarred for life, unable to eat another cookie.

**Including children isn't just the trendy thing to do—it's a matter of justice.**

My dislike of children’s liturgy wasn’t about what it was; it had to do with what it *wasn’t*. I grew up watching Mass unfold from the front pew, where I could be as close to the action as possible. Going to the basement meant that I had to give up the beauty, wonder, and fascination I experienced during church services.

It’s been more than 25 years since I lost my composure on that fateful Sunday, and my dissatisfaction with children’s liturgy is now echoed by ministers, Christian educators, and parents who realize the importance of including children in corporate worship. But as I see it, including children in corporate worship isn’t a matter of choice or changing trends; it’s a matter of justice.

**“When your children ask you ...”**

Practices for including children in worship are far from new. Children’s ministry leaders refer to Deuteronomy 6 so often that memorizing this passage might as well be a prerequisite for working with

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kids in churches! Many interpretations of this chapter focus on the first few verses—“Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children ...”—and emphasize the importance of teaching God’s commandments to children in all times and places. Yet a crucial point in this text appears in verse 20, which begins, “When your children ask you ...”

By using “when” instead of “if,” the author of Deuteronomy assumes that children will be curious about “the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded” because they are present to witness and participate in those decrees and statutes in the first place. After all, how can children be curious about something they haven’t experienced?

Scripture is filled with examples of children being present—and even having primary roles—in liturgies and everyday practices of faith. Take the institution of Passover in Exodus 12. God instructs the people of Israel to practice a rite of remembrance with their children, saying again, “When your children ask ...” Even today, young children do not simply observe the Passover Seder; they have one of the most important roles. By asking questions about why this ritual is practiced in a particular way, the story of God’s liberating work is told anew for all who are present. Similarly, after Israel crosses the Jordan, God instructs Joshua to build a stone memorial, and once again God paints a picture of children asking about the meaning of those stones for generations to come (Joshua 4).

In the New Testament, we see Jesus continuing to place importance on the presence and participation of children. In a context where children were often perceived to be at the same level as animals, the hugs that Jesus gives children are incredibly radical actions. Unlike the pastel-infused scenes of smiling (white) children sitting on and around a gentle (white) Jesus that adorn many Sunday school classrooms, Jesus’ attitudes toward children subverted and undermined the social order of the day.

In Mark 9, for example, Jesus responds to a dispute among his disciples about who is the greatest by lifting up a child into his arms and saying that the greatest is the one who welcomes these little children. Only verses later, he goes so far as to say that children are exemplary members of the reign of God. It’s easy to overlook the sheer importance of the fact that children were among Jesus’ closest followers, so much so that all Jesus had to do was sit down and pick one up.

### **The varieties of inclusion**

As a speaker and writer about the faith formation of children and youth, I’ve had the privilege of learning about all sorts of ways that churches are taking steps to include children in worship. There’s no one right way to do it, and congregational practices are all over the map, but I find it helpful to think of the various practices for including children as a spectrum.

On one side of the spectrum is *no inclusion*. These congregations organize activities for children that remove them from the broader worshipping community. Churches might have Sunday school or children’s church that lasts for the entirety of services, with parents dropping their kids off in a separate space when they arrive and gathering them again after the service is over.

The next point along the spectrum is *nominal inclusion*. These churches might have children join the whole congregation for part or all of services, often having a children’s time or song early in the liturgy. They may even provide activity kits that include items such as quiet games, books, and coloring pages that children can use in their pews. Some churches might even set up an activity station in the sanctuary where children and families can go to create artwork or play with quiet toys during the service. From my experience, the majority of congregations that are working to include children within their communal worship operate around this point on the spectrum, which makes room for the presence of children, but not their active participation.

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Moving along the spectrum we next come to the marker of *moderate inclusion*. In these congregations, children begin to participate and even contribute in the service by offering a reading, making announcements, leading special music, taking up the offering, or even processing in with the minister or priest. Mainline and liturgical congregations tend to have the edge here because their preplanned and varied orders of worship readily offer multiple ways for children to contribute to the service.

**Jesus' example subverts the age-segregated, exclusive, and adult-centric norms that underpin worship.**

Churches with moderate inclusion also open up activities and initiatives for people of any and all ages. One way this can happen is when congregations invite all people to participate in activity stations or more interactive and experiential approaches to worship. Another approach is to leave Sunday morning services as they are, and set up alternative services that more actively involve children. Some congregations might host a monthly Messy Church program on Sunday evenings, while others create their own worship experiences that might happen once a year or once a week. Unlike Sunday school programs, which separate children from the rest of the church, alternative services do not operate at the same time as corporate worship, providing different times and spaces in which people of all ages can gather together for worship.

The final point on the spectrum is *radical inclusion*. Congregations at this mark are rare, for to be radically inclusive is not only to allow children to participate in worship but to be open to having congregational worship be changed by their full presence and participation. This is much easier said than done, for it takes Jesus' example so seriously that it subverts the age-segregated, exclusive, and adult-centric norms that underpin worship. It is so radical, in fact, that even the word *inclusive* is subverted. No longer can there be active adults who *include* and passive children who *are included*. All must be invited to welcome and include one another. Adults include children. But children also include adults. Living fully into Jesus' command to welcome children—and be welcomed by them—means we need to be open to being changed.

### Sharing the reins

A decade ago, theologian Marcia Bunge offered a major contribution to the intersection of children and theology by deciphering six perspectives of children and childhood that have existed within Christian tradition. In her words, they are:

- gifts of God and sources of joy,
- sinful creatures and moral agents,
- developing beings who need instruction and guidance,
- fully human and made in the image of God,
- models of faith and sources of revelation, and
- orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of justice and compassion.

How a congregation works to include children often depends on the theological perspective that dominates its vision of children. For example, a church that sees children through the second and third perspectives may not include children because it sees Sunday school as a means for guiding children along the right path. Similarly, a congregation that views children as made in God's image might engage in practices that lead to moderate inclusion.

Of Bunge's six views, the one that often seems to be least applicable to debates about including children is "orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of justice and compassion." In the church, we

often picture “orphans and strangers” as children *outside* of our congregation, perhaps the recipients of our outreach ministries, such as the thousands of children in Flint, Mich., who will forever carry the marks of lead poisoning. But what happens when we look at our own children through this lens, our sons and daughters, our nieces and nephews, our grandchildren who come to church with us?

When we see *all* children through this perspective, the conversation about including children in congregational worship begins to change. Suddenly, including children isn’t an optional choice; it rests firmly in God’s command to seek justice in our world. Much like multicultural worship, radical inclusion of children demands that we put our own values, assumptions, and preferences on hold so that we can more fully embrace the other. It means at some point all people will be uncomfortable as congregations radically rethink what “counts” as worship, dismantle exclusive practices, and imagine new ways of worshipping together that hear the voices of all ages. And it also means that adults should empower children to take the reins, not knowing where they will lead us but having faith that God’s reign belongs to them.

### **Getting there**

So how can congregations move toward greater levels of inclusion with children? The first step is to assess your church’s current position: Are children present in congregational worship? Are there ways for children to participate? Is the worship changed by children’s participation? After assessing where your church falls on the spectrum of inclusion, identify practices that reach toward including children more fully—and implement them!

For example, if your congregation encourages children to remain in the full service by providing them with quiet activities, perhaps you can set up an experiential worship station where children and adults alike can experience prayer and worship during the service through coloring mandalas, painting images evoked by the hymns and sermon, and engaging in other activities that allow them to experiment as they participate in the service.

If your church already has such moderately inclusive practices, you could move toward radical inclusion by changing your liturgy (gasp!). Instead of a sermon, people of all ages could act out the day’s reading in a reader’s theater style and then chat with one another about the experience. Some congregations I know have station-based worship for a portion of Sunday services, where people can move about the sanctuary to experience God by lighting candles and praying, serving one another communion around small standing tables, and writing (or drawing) their prayers on a prayer wall. Rather than billing these activities as optional add-ons (like moderately inclusive activity stations), practices such as these move toward radical inclusion by altering and adapting worship styles in light of children.

Whatever you do to work toward inclusion, remember: You don’t have to change everything at once. But to work toward the justice and love that Jesus demonstrated when he said that the kingdom of God belongs to little children (Mark 10:14), change is needed.

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