

Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

Produced by the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church to communicate effective principles and practices demonstrated by congregations that are actively making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

These congregations are marked by:

- Clarity around the mission and vision of the congregation.
- Practice of spiritual disciplines, both corporately and individually.
- Nurture of growth in discipleship through mutual support and accountability.
- Cultivation of intentional and mutual relationships with the most vulnerable—the poor, children, the imprisoned, the powerless.
- Consistent concern for inviting people into relationship with Jesus Christ, combined with wise practices for initiating them into the Body of Christ.
- Connectional relationships that facilitate participation in God's mission of global transformation.
- Shared clergy and lay leadership.

A Family Friendly Church

The question of children's presence in worship continues to challenge church leaders, worship committees, and parents. At Sierra Vista United Methodist Church in San Angelo, Texas, it is apparent that children are welcome in every area of the church.

There are children's pictures and artwork on the walls, accessible water fountains, and in the narthex there is a cart stocked with children's books and Bibles, paper, crayons, and chenille sticks. There are rockers in the sanctuary where parents may soothe small children. In the pew pockets there are words of assurance for visiting families, telling them not to worry about wiggly and giggly children and that the congregation is pleased to see families gathered together as they journey in faith.

The congregation believes that it is important for children to be actively involved in worship. Senior pastor Steven Sweet says, "the presence of children brings hope, enthusiasm, and passion into the worship context. The worshipping community has a responsibility to pass on the teachings, traditions, and practices of the faithful assembly to the next generation."

Children's presence goes beyond sitting in the pews. Children serve as greeters, ushers, liturgists, and acolytes. During particular seasons of the year, children at Sierra Vista UMC offer the message of the day through pre-recorded video vignettes, provide special music, and lead worship as they are gifted.

Questions for Discussion

- When a new family visits your congregation what are the messages they receive (both verbal and nonverbal) that tell them children are welcomed and valued members of the faith community?
- What challenges does your congregation face in making your worship service a place where generations can worship together? How might you begin to address these challenges?
- What opportunities do children in your congregation have to provide worship leadership?

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