

Worship and Wonder



Do you find it fun to watch the excited youngsters exiting the sanctuary after their children's sermon? They are heading to Worship and Wonder in the Children's Wing. I've often heard it mentioned, but didn't have a clue how it worked. So, I followed them out to visit recently.

Worship and Wonder is a crucial part of the children's Sunday morning ministry. At 9:30 AM they join for a half-hour of music, then a half-hour of traditional Sunday School. The parents pick them back up and head to the sanctuary for the opening of the adult service. Before long, the youngsters go to the front, sitting on the steps while they enjoy the children's sermon with several of the ministerial staff. Then they return to the Children's Wing for their own version of the adult service, which is Worship and Wonder.

There were 24 children the week I joined them. They were pre-school through the second grade. The Bridge Group (3rd through 5th grade) also joined them but usually separates to their own program. Exiting the service, the youngsters chatted and bounced until they got to the doorway of the larger room in the Children's Wing. As they approached, without reminding, they quieted and stood waiting. No adult told them to be quiet, but as they lined up without direction, they started filling in, happy but serious expectations on their faces. I was amazed.

"Talk to God softly. Take your time," a gentle adult's voice was heard. In no time, with no confusion, the youngsters filed to a classroom, found mats, and were sitting in a group surrounding our Children's Minister, Missy Wallace. They were told to "get your wiggles out," and arms and bodies went into a spasm of exaggerated wiggles. "Now find a story spot to plant yourself," they were instructed. The sign on the wall was noted, "Be Still and Know that I am God."

The lesson began with involvement. "Can you point to a clock?" Fingers pointed several directions and I learned there are two clocks in the room – a regular one and a church one (apparently handmade) and my lesson in humility began. These young children were able to identify by word and color, different church periods. "Pentecost, Advent, Epiphany", they responded in answer to questions.

Then the attention shifted to the wooden figures, candles, and wooden and cloth structures in front of Missy. "Baby Jesus is our guiding light," she told the attentive group. And as her story moved through each period of Advent, a new candle was lit.

The wooden figures from the curriculum are central to the Bible stories, and there are similar packets of figures and backdrops for any number of lessons. Missy said she loves the wooden nature of the figures – all different shades of wood. In the picture above, notice the three wisemen in particular for an example.

I had come to the class just to learn about the use of wooden figures in childhood Christian education. But my focus changed as I was there. I was amazed at the attentive nature of all the children and their mental involvement. "Is God's love big enough for baby Jesus? Is it big enough for the donkeys?" The children responded and added their own thoughts. And then they contributed on how to shine or share the life of Jesus. "By saying please and thank you," "holding the door for someone," "by drawing someone a picture," they said.

Then it was Response Time and time for my true amazement. Each child quietly chose what they wanted to do in their solitary response time – books, puzzles, blocks, art. Most, not all, chose art and they went to get a towel off a stack and, without instruction, laid it down somewhere by themselves and gathered the supplies they needed. Young teenage helpers were on hand to help them locate their needs. The room was quiet as they set to work. There had been no guidance at all to tell them what to draw or think about. They just knew it was their private time.

I expected pictures of trips, families, and trees. But the first picture proudly shown to Missy was a sweet drawing of the manger scene. She praised another one brought to her which she innocently held upside down. But she quickly recovered in a very affirming way as she was told it was the manger with rain. Another little boy said his painting was for her (part of how to show God's love) and wanted it hung up. Each picture really showed the artist had been carefully listening. I accused her of bribing the kids to draw related items, but it was clear she didn't, and the colorful drawings came from the internalized message.

Then a bell was rung – “time to clean up and sanitize your paws.” Water and graham crackers were prayed over, mirroring communion served at the adult service. The teenagers helped with it all and quietly assisted with bathroom needs as they arose.

My visit to the Children’s service impressed me enough to change the main topic for the Spotlight. I found that what is happening with the children’s Christian education today at Crestwood is extraordinary.

Let’s explore Crestwood together. If you have an idea or suggestion for a Spotlight, contact Gaye Holman at gdholman@bellsouth.net.



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