



Article by Ruth Mitchell

“Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you; toddlers shout the songs that drown out enemy talk and silence atheist babble” (Psalm 8:2, The Message)

I want to describe three snapshot memories to you:

I was sitting in church last night at an informal service with a friend and her seven-month-old baby. Amy sat and gurgled and played throughout the thirty-minute service and when the singing was going on she gurgled all the louder and squealed with delight. It made me think about this verse in Psalm 8. I have heard of, and in fact been in, churches where parents are asked to take their kids out if they are making noise during the service, I assume because it is distracting and takes away from the reverence of the situation, but I believe that kids have the right to be in church and a part of worship as much as we are as adults. I love the idea that a baby's gurgles and squeals are worship that God hears from heaven and delights in; that they are sweet like incense to Him as He watches them be a part of church. **“Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you...”**

Last summer I went to visit my brother and his family in Vancouver for a holiday and I got to spend time with my nephews aged six, four and two years old. As we drove through the streets around where they live during the daily routine, they constantly asked for and sang along to a particular CD in the car. It was not Disney or some sort of pop CD, but instead “Greater Things” by Bluetree. The boys all sang along and praised God as we drove through the streets of Lynn Valley going to school, shopping or to church, and even when in the house. It was their constant request when it came to music. **“From the lips of children...you have ordained praise”.**

Last May, I stood in Carnmoney Presbyterian church and watched 500 kids of primary school

age sing and learn about God at the Kid's Praise Party. The sound was at times deafening as they sang and shouted their praises to God, danced and did actions. This was not just kids singing quietly their praises; this was the excitement of kids declaring who God was and gave me goose bumps listening to them. They learned about “Shining for God” and sang their praises to God with the enthusiasm that comes so naturally to children and that also is often created with a gathering of people together. **“... that drown out enemy talk and silence atheist babble”.**

Worship experiences should be for the spiritual growth and formation of the whole faith community of a church, and yet there should still be the inclusion of age-appropriate worship for children and adults to participate in. There are many reasons why we remove children from the main worship experience in church - noise, restlessness, a belief that children do not understand, to give parents a break - but by prohibiting children from the corporate worship experience we also remove them from an important piece of spiritual development and the opportunity to worship God in the tradition of their community. Now I am not suggesting that children should be in the worship community all the time and never have their own programme; I am just suggesting that we may want to think first, before we exclude them, about what they may be missing out on. Children need to learn that worshipping God in community is not always convenient. By this I mean that church is normally held in the middle of the morning on a weekend, a time that they may prefer to be at the park or somewhere else, but as part of our faith and commitment to the church, we choose to be together worshipping God in community instead. Children need to learn about spiritual

formation through learning rites and ritual; they need to learn to worship by watching parents and other adults in their church worshipping God and being role models for their spiritual formation. But also children can teach us as adults about worship and the wonder of the God that we serve.

Finding Neverland was a movie that was released in 2004 but that I only watched for the first time last Christmas. There was a scene in the movie that particularly struck me and it can help us see how children can influence us as adults when it comes to worship. The movie is the story of J.M. Barrie who wrote the story of Peter Pan and this particular scene is the staging of the play for the very first time. Barrie held back 25 of the best tickets for the show and his producer berated him for it, wanting to know who they were for since they were not being given to paying customers. The scene then changes to a group of orphan children walking down the street who come into the theatre and take their seats among the adults dressed up for the show who look at them disdainfully, worried about spending the evening with a group of urchins. As the curtain rises, the children are immediately captured by the fantasy of the story and what is happening on the stage, laughing and pointing. The camera shows the adults watching the children in a confused and put-off manner, but as they watch the children and their joy at the story, they begin to lighten up and laugh along with them. They see the joy of the children, and their conceptions of how they should act in the theatre are changed by a group of children who do not understand the “rules”.

This is a little like how worship experiences can be when adults and children are in the faith community worshipping together. We may at

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times feel that the children get in the way or we are bothered by how the children may act – I know that I have been guilty of that – but they can in fact show us deeper ways to worship God and challenge our traditional ways of worshipping. Involving children in worship in the faith community as a whole does not mean we have to dumb down worship. Children understand far more than we often give them credit for. Their presence and experience in worship is often more important than whether they understand absolutely everything that is said or done.

It is also important that children have age-appropriate worship or that we have appropriate means and enhancements for worship when children are present within the community worshipping. Firstly, we need to

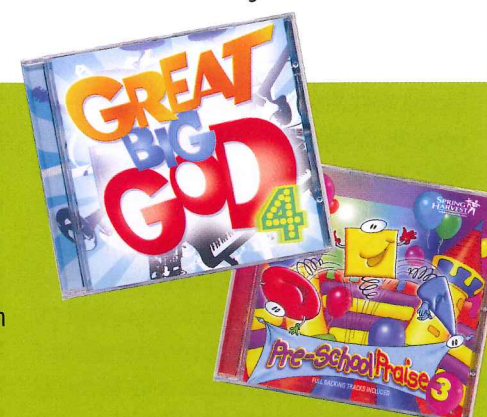
make the worship experience as visual as possible. Children are taught to read and write in the same way that adults did when they were at school but children today are part of the “post-literate” culture, meaning that they often prefer to take information in visually; that is how their world works. We need to make sure that we have appropriate visuals to use as part of the worship experience. Secondly, we should find ways of using spiritual practices in the lives of our children, like praying, meditating, liturgy and other forms of practice for worship. Thirdly, we should use worship experience that helps them to understand better the stories of the Bible and who God is. We should have worship experiences that help them to use their imagination to better understand what God wants to teach us through His Word.

“In our churches, we need to expand our view of worship for both children and adults in order to create experiences that are meaningful and worshipful for this generation and the ones to follow. The experience of worship can be a powerful vehicle for spiritual formation as we come to experience God and each other in new and profound ways.”

*Ivy Beckwith,
Formational Children's Ministry*

Resources

These are some worship resources that we know are good to help children engage in worship. Even if you do not have a host of great musicians within your children's ministry team you can still help your children to engage in worship and connect with the God that we all worship and follow.



Watch out for Kids Praise Party 2011

Contact PCI Youth and Children: www.pciyac.org or telephone +44(0)28 9032 2284

