

Children's Prayspace at Diocesan Convention

This year, the diocese has discerned to move to a model of welcoming children into our gathering, worship, and governing spaces during convention. This reflects the belief that children are an active part of our community, are welcome exactly as they are in these spaces, and that their presence impacts our gathered body for the better.

A few things to keep in mind as we move to the realities of living out this belief:

- Their presence may bring more noise, interaction, “distraction”, and less “efficiency”; All of this often means they are participating in the gathering. You’re invited to view this as new life, the church working through young people right now and not in the future, and a clear and present reminder that we are all called to God with the curiosity and openness of little children
- Parents/caregivers are expected to be present with children in the Prayspace areas—this is not a childcare drop off situation. That said, if other adults find they would like to support the presence of children in these areas, they are welcome to come alongside parents and children in these areas and do so.
- Remember that parents/caregivers have made the choice to have their child in this space, often at the expense of their own ability to participate. Have grace, and be curious about how you can support parents. Additionally, parents and children are welcome to take breaks from the space as needed; Jesus took breaks when he needed to!
- In our baptismal vows, we promise to “do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ”—nurturing them and welcoming in this shared environment is a part of that!
- This shared space is an opportunity to encounter the beauty and peace of shared worship alongside them—be changed by them as much as they change us—and to foster children’s discovery of the love and support a faith community can provide.

A few tips for engaging with children in this setting:

- **Please do not touch or pick up children without their or their parents’ explicit permission.** We sometimes forget personal boundaries with children, but transgressions are just as injurious. Being respectful of their personal boundaries and physical space helps to teach children to be respectful of others’ boundaries.
- Make eye contact with children of all ages and talk to them directly. Modeling language (no baby talk!) and culture is how children learn to communicate and how they learn how to conduct themselves in any given space—like our gathered faith body!
- Asking children about things that matter is more authentic than compliments. For example, great conversation starters are: What is your favorite book? I wonder what is your favorite part of church? What part of the music do you like best?
- If a child is crying, it may be helpful to the parent to distract the child with something new: a new conversation, a new item, even pointing out a color or a picture in a stained glass window might be new to them. **Honest communication with parents is important, though, so allow them to tell you what would be helpful.**