



FAMILY WORSHIP AT MOUNT CALVARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

We're committed to supporting families in worship at Mount Calvary. We've consistently encouraged all parishioners to support families in what I describe as a heroic effort to worship with their children in Mass.

Honoring the worship of all begins with being gracious as families grow in their ability to worship together. Children have different temperaments and mature at different rates. Our spirit is to extend mercy, not judgment; we're patient and longsuffering as Christ is to each of us. It's beautiful to see parishioners support families by offering a helping hand, and a word of encouragement goes a long way.

We support families primarily through Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, where children learn about Christ and his worship at their unique place of appreciation and understanding. We've also curated books for use in the pews and provide coloring bulletins for the young.

Having families in church *will* result in some noise: books falling, some baby babble, an unexpected cry. This is normal for a healthy church, so we naturally extend plenty of grace.

Guidelines for honoring sacred worship and sacred space.

In order to fully welcome and encourage families with young children, we will fully honor sacred worship and sacred space. Good etiquette at Mass begins as we extend charity and encouragement towards young families who are doing their best. Young families also maintain good etiquette for their own sake and for that of others by helping everyone—both with and without children—to focus on the Mass. The parish is truly a family. The guidelines offered below are common sense and common courtesy. Let's not receive these solely for accommodating others—these guidelines take the guesswork out of our worship. And, of course, we can expect courtesy from everyone else.

First, families set expectations for children at home. This takes a lot of time and can't adequately be done just before Mass or in the pew. This happens when you *practice at home*. Abby and I used the couch as a pew and had a prayer time. Then we could speak in full voice and say, "Remember, it's prayer time, and that isn't how we act ...". We present respectful and appropriate ways to worship rather than 'rules' from the Church. Our children meet expectations like brushing teeth before bed, so they can rise to these as well.

What expectations do we set? Here are some basics:

Children sit quietly. That allows for occasional whispers, of course, especially if that involves direction between the parent and child about what is happening at Mass.

If a child cannot sit quietly, then that child isn't ready to stay in Mass. This isn't a permanent condition, and it may vary from day to day—that's why we're developing more options at the back of the church and downstairs for those more difficult days.

Children are reasonably still. That means a reverent posture according to age and maturity. As soon as a child is able to take direction, he or she can be taught to stay in a pew without

major muscle movements (waving arms, rocking from side to side as if on a playground ride, etc.). Children under three, if kept in the Mass, will usually need to be held. If you stand in the back of the church with your children, then hold them or have them stand still at your feet; this is not the place for them to move about. We understand that sometimes even older children have difficulty being still—that's why we're developing other options to help for those days.

A word about snacks. There is no universal rule in the Church to govern this, but be aware that there's a longstanding pious tradition to not bring food into the church where God's sacramental Presence abides. If you consider giving snacks to your children, then charity requires that you take care not to tempt children whose parents do not allow the same.

For babies and toddlers who are apt to cry:

- Parents know when a child is getting fussy. The time to head out is *before* they cry.
- When we're taken off guard—as happens to all of us on occasion—then we calmly yet expeditiously head to the nearest exit *as soon as* our child begins to cry.
- It may hypothetically seem reasonable to stay in the pew a moment to see if your child settles down, but that minute of delay takes the attention of everyone within earshot during that entire time. You can always return to your pew if she stops.

We followed these standards as a young family, and while there were some difficult years, we look back at them fondly as a time when we fought for the Mass we loved.

A common commitment in charity will enable us to enter more deeply into worship as we become an example for others and enable many more people to experience our beautiful liturgy.