

Calling Conversation: Ministry to Children and Families

*Excerpt from Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children
by James H. Ritchie, Jr.*

She pranced and she danced with hardly a pause, responding softly to my interview questions. "Have you heard the word worship before?"

"I have, but I haven't heard it until a lot of times."

"Can you tell me what you think of when you hear the word *worship*?" Pirouetting AS she pondered, four-year-old Trista eventually volunteered, "Yeah. I think of God."

"You think of God. Anything else?" I probed.

Jesus and, um, Mary who had Jesus."

"Mary who had Jesus, "I repeated, inviting her to plumb even deeper.

"And Jophus."

"Jophus?"

"Uh huh. That's about all I think."

Had this exchange taken place during the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany sequence of the Church Year, one might give short-term memory the glory for Trista's ability to name the primary characters of the Nativity. But the interview, scheduled in early July, drew from a little girl evidence that she had drawn connections between her worship experience and figures central to one of the foundational stories of the Christian faith. Though her tender years had denied her decades of access to this ancient tale, it had already taken up residence in her memory, and the satisfaction accompanying her act of remembering was obvious.

...Children are concrete learners, depending upon what they experience to receive and process information and to construct their personal reality. Therefore, we cannot simply describe for them the community of faith or the body of Christ or a love for God that transcends all barriers to embrace neighbors of all kinds and expect that this will become a part of their reality. We must give them the opportunity to experience such a community for themselves – an inclusive community of memory bound together by the Holy Spirit. They need to see and hear and feel such a community in operation before they will be able to embrace this alternative vision of reality.

... Children need to have access to the Story, and congregational worship seems to be the setting offering them access to the Story told and the Story lived out. The time of remembering, the time of rehearsing is our prime time. Children need to find a place there, and they need an invitation to join in the memories.

Questions for Conversation:

Why is ministry for children, youth, and families important?

What gifts do our children bring to our congregation? How can we continue to include children and youth in leadership?

In what ways are we already doing good ministry with children, youth, and families?

What could we do better?

Where do you see potential for growth in our ministry for families?

What staffing arrangements are needed to best support our ministries for young families?

What are some “next steps” we might take to continue exploring this calling?