

“The Remnant Philosophy and Children’s Ministry”

By Mrs. Rachael Crews | September 29, 2022

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There’s an old adage in the church an old parishioner once told me that you might also be familiar with: “If you don’t hear crying, the church is dying.” As humorous as this phrase is at first blush, a deeper reflection on its meaning reveals a vital truth about church growth and mission—it is not possible without families. This revelation ties in well with the parallel conversations happening within and hopefully beyond this retreat. Bishop Scarlett and Bishop Chad spoke yesterday on the Remnant approach to mission, emphasizing the needed shift from a focus on the liturgy to a focus on spiritual formation of those committed to the parish and mission—the Remnant. As Fr. Mark just discussed, the changing nature of what it means to be an adolescent in our society has drastically altered the ways in which we minister to children and youth. As Fr. Hayden will discuss after me, the world will seek to offer models to our children and youths in which to emulate, what the philosopher René Girard termed, mimetic desires, that both create the desire as well as promising the means with which to fulfill them. They will make an ask of our children and youth regardless of the formation we choose to instill within them. It is then our task to provide children, youth—and by extension their parents and the family as a whole unit—with rich, deep, and beautiful spiritual formation that will serve as a rock of foundation amidst the torrential batterings of the world. We must make the first ask, imparting to them understanding of their telos, the ends to which all human longing and desires are oriented towards and the Saviour in whom they are fulfilled. This is why I say that central to the message of the Remnant and mission is that of families.

Such a statement is modeled after Our Lord, who, in His gracious Incarnation chose to dwell in human form within a family. The Son of God condescended to be raised by St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary alongside his brothers and sisters, existing within a family, a human family becoming His family, as much His as the one He shared with God the Father and the Holy Ghost, until the beginning of His earthly ministry at the Wedding of Cana. In our Lord, we see an example of the centrality of the family to spiritual formation and a model for our parishes. We see that formation begins and ends within the family unit. This being the case, children, youth, and families must be of importance to us when we consider the topic of mission.

At St. Matthew’s, I’ve been the Director of Children’s Ministry since 2017 and oversee the spiritual formation of our children from the time they’re out of diapers until the time of their first Confession and reception of the Eucharist following Confirmation Class. I enjoy the immense blessing and responsibility of walking our children through their first exposures to the things of God, to the liturgy, and to the Eucharist. I sing “Away in a Manger” with them during the Christmas Mass, answer their ever-surprisingly thoughtful questions about the nature of God, and wrestle with them about questions of morality, divorce, a good God who allows suffering,

and other adult topics that impact their young adult lives. I seek to cultivate a space that allows all children, whether dedicated weekly members, or the occasional visitor, to receive rich, theological training that is ever and always seasoned with love and playfulness.

For my part, I weekly teach our Worship and Wonder class which we refer to as Godly Play and invites children ages 3 to 8 years old to participate. Some of you may be familiar with this model of Sunday School, which is based in the curriculum of Jerome Berryman, however at St. Matthew's we also pull from other Worship and Wonder resources such as those of Sonja Stewart, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and lessons I've made myself in order to provide a holistic and rich curriculum that is based within the readings for Mass and the liturgical calendar. Our curriculum owes deep thanks to the aforementioned thinkers, as well as to Trevecca Okholm, who first helped to guide us in this framework.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of Worship and Wonder, it is a rich children's liturgy that allows children the opportunity to pray and discover the riches of God's Word through a liturgically oriented curriculum. Modeled after the movements of liturgy of our Mass, Godly Play engages all of the senses for children through the use of beautifully simplistic illustrations and wood figures. We begin with prayer—personal intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed—adjusting our bodies with each prayer as we would in Mass. This is followed by a review of the liturgical calendar and focus of the season, a small hymn, a reading of Scripture, and then a reenactment of the Scripture lesson using the wooden figures. Within a liturgical year, we cover the story of God's people and Christ from Creation to Revelation. Amidst all this, our stories are always periodically paused to wonder together. I wonder how Zaccheaus felt when Jesus called his name? I wonder how it felt for Mary to see her son die? I wonder how you feel, knowing Christ died for you? Our reflections teach the children to think deeply about the Bible and the liturgy, even at three years old. Do I often get one word answers like happy or sad? Of course! But it is the act of inviting them to participate in the story or liturgy that is what matters the most. Maybe something about how the kids teach the parents?

And this is the topic I'd like to spend the remainder of my brief time discussing. I am a firm believer in the Worship and Wonder model, and have seen how it develops children spiritually while still meeting them at their own developmental levels. Yet, there are a myriad of very excellent children's curriculums, each of which have their own strengths and it is up to the pastoral team of each parish and mission to determine what will best minister to their families. Just as Thornton's model didn't only envision a more rural parish in England but was meant to be adapted to the needs of individual parishes, so too does any children's curriculum need to be adapted to the ages, family structures, and demographics of the families it will serve. However, the approach of the implementation matters greatly. We will not welcome new people into our parishes and missions if we do not first welcome the littlest people and their families. And I use

that word “people” very specifically in that statement: though young, children and youth are absolutely a part of the Remnant and deserve to be treated with the same dignity and care as the adults within the Remnant. They are the future of a parish and if we do not invite them into a welcoming life of prayer and fellowship within the Body of Christ, they will abandon the liturgy, or their faith for the pale comparison that the world offers. Our collective prayer life must be one that offers formation and true relational fellowship for everyone from the cradle Anglican, to the young mother, and to the smallest child. As Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Apart from this attitude, our efforts towards mission are short-sighted, hollow, and will not bear lasting fruit.

Our parishes and mission churches must be spaces that are hospitable to the family. We cannot simply wait for families to begin attending before beginning to consider how to minister to their formational needs. These things must be topics of conversation, implementation—as much as finances and resources allow—and most importantly, of prayer. I’ll turn the floor over to Fr. Hayden at this time to discuss Youth Ministry and Formation. Thank you.