

## PART I: PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN WORSHIP

This portion of the book does not present teaching ideas or descriptions of basic terms. However it may be the most important section. You will find here the basic philosophy of everything you will find in this book. A good first step in teaching children about worship is thinking about why and in what ways children can and should function in the life of any worshiping community. These articles contend that children should be viewed as integral to the worshiping community and that children should participate fully in public worship.

### 1. A NEW VISION FOR CHILDREN IN THE WORSHIPING COMMUNITY

BY JOHN D. WITVLIT

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. . . . Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

I Corinthians 12

In I Corinthians 12, Paul makes a stunning comparison between the church and the human body. In the human body, arms and legs and a heart and a mind work together as a unified whole, each performing their own unique task. In the church, women and men, children and adults, the disabled and those society considers "abled," are challenged to work together in community, with each person contributing unique gifts.

If we are looking for a group within the church that is often cut off and separated from the rest, we need look no further than our children. Consider what happens on Sunday morning in churches that you know. In some churches, children attend Sunday school or church school while their parents go to worship. In some churches, children and parents

have separate worship services. In churches where children and adults worship together, the children's part of the service is often set apart from the rest—as a children's sermon or children's choir anthem.

The implication in each case is that the real church is comprised of the adults who gather for worship. Children are treated as future worshipers, people who will be able to worship when they grow up.

How ironic that children, of all people, should be treated like second-class citizens in the church. Jesus not only welcomed children, but told us all that children are our teachers. Children model what true faith is like. When children are cut off or set apart from the worshiping community, both children and adults lose the opportunity to learn from each other.

Worshiping communities should look for ways of making public worship something that is done by the whole community, adults and children together. This book, then, protests worshiping communities that ignore children. On the other hand, it does not advocate a child-centered service that ignores adult concerns and issues. Instead, it calls for worship services that seek to enable the participation of adults and children alike.

#### FULL, CONSCIOUS, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

One of the greatest influences on Christian worship in both Roman Catholic and Protestant worship over the past 30 years has been the work of Vatican II, a council of Roman Catholic bishops that met in the early 1960s. One of the documents from Vatican II provides perhaps the most-cited