

CHILDREN IN WORSHIP: THE BODY  
OF CHRIST; LIVING OUR  
THEOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT**  
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by

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United Theological Seminary, 2007

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The focus of this ministry project was reclaiming worship as a multigenerational experience with children actively involved in the rituals and rites of the church. After four child-friendly worship services, qualitative research using phenomenological interviewing of ten children and ten adults helped assess not only remembered worship but what worship meant. Foundational research supported the importance of using Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with children in preparation for worship and in worship if they are to value it for themselves. This project challenged whether Greene Street United Methodist Church Piqua, Ohio was the body of Christ without children in worship.

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The mentors, Dr. Donald Rogers, Rev. Leanne Hadley and Elder Jacqueline Nowak, who had a vision for Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, convinced the seminary of its value and then read and critiqued all the papers leading up to this final manuscript;

The Doctor of Ministry cohort group that journeyed with me as we together were learning and developing the theory, practices and power of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture: Valerie Bell, Valerie Conzett, Cindy Feltz, Leanne Hadley, Cara Koch, Jacqueline Nowak, Charlotte Teel and Barbara Van Doren;

My professional associates: The Reverend Doctor Judy Mitchell Rich, Dr. James H. Ritchie, Jr., and Dr. David A. Rusk, who graciously agreed to add their expertise and critique me on this journey;

Greene Street United Methodist Church in Piqua, Ohio and their senior pastor The Reverend James Christy for allowing me to research my hypothesis;

And the children of Greene Street for being such willing participants in this act of ministry—you truly blessed me as you are blessed by God.

## DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated my own children given as a blessing from God, Jerry Leon and Holly; the children given to me through their marriages, Sharon and Jason; the grandchildren given to our family a sign of God's continual blessing, Maddison, Natalie and Jacob; and finally all the children God gives me in ministry each and every day.

## **INTRODUCTION**

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Mark 10:13-16 (NRSV)

This scripture passage involving Jesus, his disciples and children will form the foundation for this document and for the researcher’s act of ministry. Readers will realize that the church does not welcome children as Jesus did because they are not welcomed into the center of congregational life—their time together in worship.

### **The Problem**

While the United Methodist Church does not by legislation or policy exclude children from worship on Sunday morning, their absence will be noted in many congregations, including the context site for this act of ministry. The researcher will show that congregational worship as a multigenerational experience of the whole community has been replaced by an hour in which adults participate in worship while children engage in separate and presumably more entertaining, age-appropriate activities—not always religious or spiritual in nature. The researcher found that children may never even participate in a full-length worship service until Junior High or on completion of

confirmation classes—if at this time they can think of any reason to do so, having little or no previous experience with worship.

### **The Act of Ministry**

This document will chronicle Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture (BBSN) as provided to children at Greene Street United Methodist Church in Piqua, Ohio. It will follow the researcher's call to pastor children and her desire to find ways to intentionally nurture the spirituality of the children in this congregation.

The document will show how the theories behind BBSN helped the researcher and her context associates transform children's church by employing sacred space, scriptures read, joys/concerns shared and blessings given. When the researcher felt the children were comfortable with this worship setting, she and her context associates began the act of ministry (TAOM) that involved children as "active" participants in four congregational worship services. Hence, this document will show how worshiping with children helps the body of Christ—Greene Street United Methodist Church—live its theology.

Chapter One will tell the researcher's story, especially how her experiences of knowing God as a child gave her the desire to help children in her own context "know" God too. Through looking at the struggles to find a better way to teach children, the reader should be able to grasp the researcher's excitement and then passion for BBSN, when she was invited to explore with other adults its possibilities with children.

Chapter Two will review recently published material specific to a new academic interest in the spirituality of children. Since the researcher's act of ministry involved returning children to corporate worship, authors with the same inclination will be cited.

Throughout this chapter, books will be cited that helped the researcher not only support her hypothesis, but also provided the core foundational support for TAOM.

The historical, biblical and theological foundations that support TAOM will be found in Chapter Three. TAOM will have four pillars that are the foci upon which the foundations supporting it were based. The first pillar will be Jesus and children; the second pillar will be the metaphor the body of Christ; the third pillar will be worship; the fourth and last pillar will be blessing.

Chapter Four will not only explain in brief TAOM designed by the researcher, but also the research methodology used by the researcher to test her hypothesis. The chapter will give supporting data for the researcher's use of phenomenological interviewing in qualitative research. Support for this research will be found in Irving Seidman's book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Studies*. The three interview questions will be highlighted to show how they tested the researcher's hypothesis: Authentic Christian worship happens when the church gathers in all of its diversity, complete with the presence of children, and children value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community—the church, the body of Christ.

Chapter Five will explain to the reader the researcher's design and implementation of the four worship services with children for TAOM and the follow-up questions answered by ten randomly selected children and ten randomly selected adults. It will become clear why qualitative research was chosen over quantitative research since the goal was to find out not what individuals knew about worship, but rather what they remembered about worship.

Chapter Six will be a clear summation of the researcher's act of ministry. The summation will include the hypothesis, its proof, results and conclusions. Discoveries of future possibilities, compromises and difficulties sustaining TAOM will be highlighted by the researcher. It will be here that the reader will find the researcher's own reflections and summary statements concerning her ministry model.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

As this researcher once again remembered her “story,” she realized the significant part the Church had in re-presenting God and His Son Jesus to her as a young child and the effect of this on her family’s life and, inevitably, her own life. Events, even the painful ones, have become sacred, because they were a vital part of who she has become on her spiritual journey to this particular place in time. Her history has borne fruit in many ways; particularly in The Act of Ministry (TAOM)—extending to children with intentionality invitations to worship, discipleship and affirmation of blessedness.

Her childhood memories of “going to church,” at the Evangelical United Brethren Church in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Ohio were all positive. She loved all the programs that focused on children and the persons who taught and directed those programs were re-presenting Jesus to her. There were also wonderful adult Christians who reminded her that God loved her even when she felt others did not. They were carriers of God’s blessing to a hurting child who badly needed this affirmation.

When God was able to slow this researcher down enough to listen, she heard God’s call to change directions in the middle of her life to help children know God as she did in her childhood. She cannot tell you why this call came to her later in life except that in her mid-life years, with her own child-rearing behind her, God had given her time and patience to work and love children as Jesus did. During her discerning time, Psalm 71:18

(NIV) reaffirmed this call to work with children. *Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.*

The discerning application question when she entered seminary was “How did you experience your burning bush?” Through this question, God convicted her that no effort in Christian ministry was more important than its outreach to children. Was this not what she had experienced as a child? Many homes in our society were neither equipped for, nor concerned about, obedience to the Lord’s command that children be reared in the training and instruction of the Lord. Many churches saw children only as future adults with babysitting and teaching as their immediate concern. The needs of children directed her to her “burning bush,” and God called her to be a servant minister to children.

Since the United Methodist Church did not emphasize children’s ministries nor did its seminaries, the researcher looked to other sources to help clarify how she could live out her call as a children’s pastor. One source she stumbled upon was The Children’s Pastor’s Conference—it was wonderful. She finally found others who were as passionate about children and their relationship with God and their place as disciples within the church body. But their over-riding concern was saving the child because their basic assumption was that children were born sinners with a predisposition toward evil. One particular guest speaker at these conferences initiated an epiphany in the researcher. His presentation was about a powerful gift—a gift so powerful that people fought for it—it was a gift some persons may never have received as a child. He went on to say that he never received it from his father even though he now gives it to his children as well as others. The powerful gift was called “the blessing” in the Old Testament and Jacob received it—the blessing of God passed down through Abraham’s offspring. The

significance of this talk was not the biblical interpretation as much as the researcher's personal interpretation. Like the speaker, she felt she never received a blessing from her parents, but realized that she received blessings through other persons in her life. Her life was permanently changed because, at different times in her childhood, committed Christians practiced what Jesus said, "He who receives you, receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."<sup>1</sup>

Invited by Dr. Don Rogers, her faculty advisor while at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, to a seminar presented by Rev. Leanne Hadley founder of First Steps Spirituality Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, this researcher started seeing a new model of ministry to children. At that seminar, she also met Jacqueline Nowak and was introduced to the Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture Certification course being taught by Rogers and Nowak at Memorial Presbyterian Church, Xenia. Up to this point, the researcher did not have a clear direction much less goals for the children's ministry in her church. She was simply continuing what had always been done, though interjecting better ways or her way of doing these programs. While taking the certification class, she started seeing the potential for a new direction and a different model for children's ministry. The BBSN model saw "children as being born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing. . . . [we walk] along side them as they develop into all God has in store for them; delighting in learning from them as well as teaching them."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:40 (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup> "Holiness of Children," The Blessing Center, [http://www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness\\_of\\_Children.bsn.htm](http://www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness_of_Children.bsn.htm), (accessed March 2006).

The researcher began to reexamine what she had been taught about the religious formation of young children and in turn what she was practicing in the educational settings of the church and her own spiritual interaction with children. She found that she was applying in the church what she had learned from public school education and practiced without ever questioning the difference between school/secular and church/holy. However, if churches merely adhere to secular teachings, children cannot really know God. The researcher knew that she was aware of God as a child! She was teaching as if children could only learn about God, not really know God. This became transformative for her and she stopped being a social studies teacher and instead grew toward being a “holy” listener, worship inviter, disciple maker and intercessory blessing bestower. The classroom setting of children’s church was replaced with an altar—the sacred space for holy listening, worship, and blessing.

Greene Street United Methodist Church hired the researcher knowing her call and passion was within the area of children’s ministries. Since this church did not have the budget to employ a full-time Christian Education Minister, much less a part-time children’s minister, she was hired as a part-time program minister. Everything to do with Christian education became part of her job description, but with permission to concentrate more of her efforts with the children.

Children’s church became her responsibility. Before her employment, mothers had been taking turns showing Bible story videos each week and, for the worship time, candle lighting and offering services were conducted. When she broached the subject of children staying in worship with their families, some parents informed her they wanted children’s church to continue—many had chosen this church because it had one. She was uncomfortable that they were replicating a poor version of Sunday school. The children

were not learning, observing, or practicing worship; and discipleship was not even considered a possibility for children.

While going through the certification in BBSN, she started applying what she learned not only in children's church, but also during the worship hour. Children's church was revamped so it became a holy space where children hear the Word of God, share their happy/sad moments with prayer and depart the holy space with God's blessing each week. Children began joining the community for worship and leaving for children's church prior to the scripture reading and sermon. They stayed for the entire service when communion was offered and/or when a special children's service was offered. August represented a big month in the lives of children. They started back to school with a chance for new beginnings and fresh starts. The church community began celebrating this with "Blessing of the Backpack Sunday" during the worship hour. The sermons were directed toward children, but also with meaning for adults. Children were given mementos to remind them that their church family, Greene Street Church, will be praying for them throughout this school year. At the end of the worship hour, each child was called by name and given God's blessing for this school year. Even college students came forward for the blessing. On the Sunday they celebrated Jesus' baptism, the congregation joined in a "remember your baptism" service. The font was placed in the center of the altar area, persons picked up a stone from the water and as they left the area, they received God's blessing—each by name. The first time we did this, grown men were crying and it was the words of blessing that brought the tears, not the act of remembering their baptism. At confirmation, each confirmand was blessed in front of the congregation as they had been blest throughout their children's church attendance. The congregation sang a new verse Dr. Rogers wrote for "The Spirit Song"—"come be blessed by One who

loves you.” When children helped serve communion, at each of the intinction stations there was also a child to bless the person receiving the bread and juice. Every program, event or worship service became a possible opportunity for telling everyone they are blest by God and He was with them always. Parents were very receptive to BBSN and no problem developed in its theory and practice in children’s church. BBSN inclusion in the community’s worship service was graciously accepted and anticipated as a new paradigm of the Gospel’s message.

TAOM focus was to welcome children in their church family by including them in the center of the life of the church—its time in corporate worship. The researcher believed many churches had lost a sense of what the corporate worship of God was all about. For many churches, it is no longer the centerpiece of community life—it is a variety show to be produced and enjoyed. Anything that made the performance less than perfect was banned. Therefore, only the best musicians were used, only the best voices read scripture, and there was certainly no room for a child who moved around the worship space or stood on the pew looking for a better view of the proceedings. Negative responses to having children in worship service usually followed this trend: “Having children in the worship service disturbs my worship of God.” Like Ivy Beckwith in her book, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*, the researcher felt it pleases God not only when children worship but also when adults welcome children into the worshiping community even though they may be noisy, disruptive and uninhibited.<sup>3</sup>

The researcher’s spiritual journey has centered on many hymns of faith. When ordained a deacon in the West Ohio conference of the United Methodist Church, she

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<sup>3</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Books/Zondervan, 2004), 144.

made a banner to be carried in front of her as she processed for ordination (a tradition of this conference). Her banner was a gigantic quilted hand with figures representing a man, a woman, a child and an infant or representing four stages of childhood pieced into its palm. Each figure represented a different race of people. The banner's words were "I WILL HOLD YOUR PEOPLE IN MY HEART." That was what TAOM was about—letting others know God created them, God loved/loves them and God was/is always with them.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT**

Over the last two decades, the role of the Children’s Ministry professional had gained credibility in North American churches—like youth ministry before it, it had become a specialization in the call to ministry. The minister to children was often the third staff person a church hired. But was their employment based on the spiritual nurture and faith development of children and families or was it based on a very defined marketing tool—that the bigger, glitzier programs sucked the children in and with them the parents?

As stated earlier, the United Methodist Church did not by legislation or policy exclude children from worship on Sunday morning, but their absence was noted in many congregations, especially large ones. Children were removed from the rest of the body of Christ for well-meaning, but poorly reasoned programs such as Children’s Church and Sunday school classes that are held concurrent with the worship hour. Congregational worship as a multigenerational experience of the whole community had been replaced by an hour in which adults participated in worship while children engaged in separate activities or were merely babysat.

In church growth circles, children became part of the marketing tool to get parents to come to worship. The churches with the most outwardly entertaining and attractive programs won the children and then the parents. However, church programs could not

spiritually form a child; a family living and worshipping in an intergenerational community of faith could. As stated by Ivy Beckwith in *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, "For the young child, spiritual understandings and practices are more caught than taught."<sup>1</sup> The church's removal of children from corporate worship had also removed its value from their lives and removed them from the body of Christ.

Ivy Beckwith used these words to clarify a creative and thoughtful paradigm shift in how we love and nurture our children's souls.

The church's ministry to children is broken. A cursory look doesn't reveal its brokenness. From the outside children's ministry looks healthier than ever. But it is broken. It's broken when church leaders and senior pastors see children's ministry primarily as a marketing tool. The church with the most outwardly attractive program wins the children and then the parents . . . It's broken when we exclude children from perhaps the most important of community activities: worship. It's broken because we've become dependent on an 18th—century schooling model, forgetting that much of a child's spiritual formation is affective, active, and intuitive . . . It's broken when we've come to believe that church has to be something other than church to be attractive to children . . . And perhaps most importantly it's broken when the church tells parents that its programs can spiritually nurture their children better than they can.<sup>2</sup>

This new path was uncharted, but concerned children's ministry professionals have started clearing the way. It is a path of bringing the discussion of faith, spiritual nurture and the Gospel Story to our children. It is the path of helping our children experience the Story not only with their families, but also with the church community so they could claim it as their own.

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<sup>1</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Books/Zondervan, 2004), 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

According to Wheaton University professor, Dr. Donald Ratcliff, it was only with the 1998 publication of the seminal work, *The Spirit of the Child*, authored by Drs. David Hay and Rebecca Nye in Great Britain, that scholarly attention began being paid in the United States to the crucial importance of identifying and attending to the spiritual nature of the child. “Many, perhaps most, subsequent research studies made use of their definitions of ‘spirituality’ and the broad perspective of spirituality that encompasses all children everywhere.”<sup>3</sup>

So it is corresponding to this new academic interest in the spirituality of children and teens and the declining attendance of children, teens and families in mainline churches that this researcher began to identify and understand what constitutes spiritual nurture of children and with that knowledge encourage the church to include children in worship.

Joining the researcher are many authors with recently published books that provide a framework for studying and supporting the spiritual nurture of children. In their 2005 book, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* writers Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, made a strong case for the meaningful participation of children in the church and not in just children-designated programs. They challenged leaders in the church to make an informed and personal commitment to nurture a vibrant faith in the children of the church.<sup>4</sup> Ivy Beckwith drew from years of curriculum development and working with children in her 2004 book, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry: Ministry to Children in*

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<sup>3</sup> Don Ratcliff, “Children’s Spirituality Books,” *Child Spirituality*, <http://www.childspirituality.org/don/books.htm>, (accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

*the 21<sup>st</sup>*, when she offered a vision with tools to help sustain children's faith into adulthood.<sup>5</sup> The 2005 book, *Welcoming Children* by Joyce Ann Mercer, used feminist theology to argue how the marginalization of children in churches affected their spiritual nurture.<sup>6</sup> *Graced Vulnerability*, the 2005 book by David H. Jensen, addressed childhood as an explicitly theological topic and valued children in his book just because they were created in God's image and given to us as full persons. And that gift demanded a response.<sup>7</sup> These authors and others in some way addressed the importance of spiritual nurture in children and are referenced throughout the foundation section, both to connect BBSN to other sources and to help appreciate where there may be variances.

When talking about facilitating the spiritual formation of children, the researcher needed to remember that through the various stages of childhood, children related to God and understood God in ways that were different from those of adults. The work of two social scientists Erik Erikson and James Fowler, in their respective fields of psychosocial development and faith development, were helpful in understanding spiritual formation.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development stated that all human beings pass through eight stages of crisis during their life spans. How a person navigates each stage, either positively or negatively, affects how the next stage is negotiated. While the stages may be revisited, most people move through all eight stages in their life without getting

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<sup>5</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Books/Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

stuck on one. Erikson's work helped the researcher understand the importance of early moments in a child's life as they related to spiritual development.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Erik H. Erikson, "Eight Ages of Man," in *A Reader in Christian Education: Foundations and Basic Perspectives*, Eugene S. Gibbs, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

Through extensive interviews about personal faith experience with many different individuals, Fowler developed six stages of faith formation beginning with infancy and proceeding through adulthood. Although the process is dependent on the type of faith community and the inner desire of a person to move to the next stage of faith development, a person in Fowler's model can be stuck in any stage of the faith development process.<sup>9</sup>

It used to be prevalent for some churches and para-church organizations to advocate the aggressive evangelization of children. Most main-line churches were opposed to this spiritual abuse. An early Christian educator/clergy person, Horace Bushnell, was often quoted by other writers because of his stance against child evangelism.<sup>10</sup> He believed God gives children an innate ability to know and love God. The basic premise undergirding Sofia Cavalletti's work with children is that belief that children are spiritual beings. "With ease they grasp the reality of the transcendent and are even more open to God than many adults."<sup>11</sup> This is the quality that needed to be nurtured from birth onward by the faith community. Children need to be told they are Christians and invited into the rituals and rites of the church.

Children are central to the researcher's call to ministry and TAOM, Hans-Ruedi Weber's book, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching*,

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<sup>9</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: A Bridge Point Book, 1998), 181.

initiated the foundational pillar of Jesus and children and was used as supportive material in the historical, biblical and theological foundation sections of the research.<sup>12</sup>

Because the researcher's act of ministry involved returning children to corporate worship, authors with the same inclination were sought. The earliest authors advocating children in worship were David Ng and Virginia Thomas in their 1981 book, *Children in the Worshiping Community*.<sup>13</sup> W. Alan Smith, in his book *Children Belong in Worship*, addressed that the actual tools of worship communicated to a child that worship is for adults only.<sup>14</sup> In his 2005 book, *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children*, James H. Ritchie argued that authentic Christian worship happens only when the community gathers in all its diversity—complete with children.<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Foster, in his book *Teaching In the Community of Faith*, argued convincingly that all are children in relation to God and in what he called the “community of faith.”<sup>16</sup> Religious educator John Westerhoff wrote, “If our children are to have faith, we need to make sure that the church becomes a significant community of faith.”<sup>17</sup> He added that we stunt the spiritual formation of the entire community when children are excluded.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (Loveland: Treehaus Communications, Inc., 1979).

<sup>13</sup> David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> W. Alan Smith, *Children Belong in Worship* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Charles R. Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Many churches have lost a sense of what the corporate worship of God is all about. For many churches it is no longer the centerpiece of community life—it is a variety show to be produced and enjoyed. To help understand worship, the researcher turned to Don Saliers’ book, *Worship as Theology*, which discussed how worship was God-centered.<sup>19</sup> Ritchie was again helpful in his book, *Always in Rehearsal*, visualizing children in worship when it was rehearsal rather than a performance.<sup>20</sup> Mercer in her book, *Welcoming Children*, equated the paternalistic perspective on worship to the disciples attempting to turn children away from Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

The authors of *Children Matter* gave foundational support to the metaphoric term “body of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> In their book, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Herbert Anderson and Susan Johnson explained this term in the acts of baptism and dedication.<sup>23</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship* used the terms “Christ’s body, the Church” in its service of baptism for children.<sup>24</sup> Most of the authors supporting children in worship pointed out that children’s exclusion from the community of worshipers did not support this biblical vision of the body of Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 180.

<sup>22</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, *Regarding Children: A New Respect For Childhood and Families* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 96.

Claus Westermann's book, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, was especially helpful in giving historical, biblical and theological foundational support to BBSN since one key emphasis in TAOM is blessing. His book also used the writings of Johannes Pedersen to help tie blessing into the soul.<sup>25</sup> His book helped explain how blessing should properly be bestowed. Walter Brueggemann's commentary on Genesis was particularly helpful for its insight into God's decisive dealing with creation and God's blessing on God's creation.<sup>26</sup>

At first, the researcher felt she was alone in seeing the need for children to be in worship, but while searching for foundational support for TAOM, she discovered more material than expected. Surprising were the many books recently published that supported her hypothesis. Many of these newer books and articles cited during this literature review provided the core foundational support for the researcher's act of ministry.

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<sup>25</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

<sup>26</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

## CHAPTER THREE

### FOUNDATIONS

TAOM had four pillars that are the foci upon which the foundations supporting it were based. The first was “Jesus and children.” Christians followed Jesus who placed children “in the midst of them.” Jesus himself came into the world as a baby and grew as a child. He used a child to illustrate the attitudes necessary for entrance into God’s kingdom. He pronounced damning judgment on those who caused children to stumble. Children were central to his teaching, and they are to the researcher. The second pillar looked at the meaning behind the metaphor “the body of Christ and community.” The Christian church metaphorically referred to herself as the body of Christ. Children, by their baptism or dedication, became members of the body of Christ. For the Christian tradition to benefit children, it must be lived out and modeled in loving communities of believers. Without the support of caring adults and a vital faith community, most children lose the memory of God’s early approaches to them or never come to understand what God was trying to say.<sup>1</sup> The third pillar was “worship.” Worship was and is a corporate action by a faith community. The ideal is that children be present in worship, where they not only see worship modeled, but where they are also incorporated in the worship

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<sup>1</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 72.

experience. The fourth and last pillar was “blessing.” God blessed/blesses his/her creation and this needs to be reclaimed and named in practice especially with children.

### **Historical Foundations**

We follow Jesus who placed children “in the midst of them.” Important to TAOM was an understanding of how Jesus viewed children and then historically how the Christian church has dealt with the little ones among them. Many theologians’ views did not fit neatly into a certain typology. The authors of the book, *Children Matter*, used these thoughts in their review of the historical roots of ministry with children.

The influence of these theologians and church leaders has sometimes shaped the way the whole society has responded to children. At other times, the Christian education of children in the church has been reformed in response to the predominant philosophical and educational theories of the period. The challenge is to be discerning about what is right and good and true and not be blown about by the “wisdom” of the day. Followers of Jesus consistently return to the Scriptures to realign their efforts with the call to serve children in the name of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

At times the lack of historical documentation was an indictment against the church and the importance or lack of importance it placed on the children in their midst.

The life and teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels give the most helpful New Testament insights concerning ministry with children. “The incarnation affirmed the importance of childhood. Jesus came as a baby and lived each phase of childhood. He

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<sup>2</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 89.

knew the love and comfort of parents and the fears, sorrows, and joys of a child. He could be a friend to children.”<sup>3</sup>

The four Gospels give evidence of Jesus’ close observation of everyday occurrences that he then used as metaphors and parables of the Kingdom. He did not live in a vacuum; and having been a child himself, he had a realistic picture of what children, even at play, sometimes do.<sup>4</sup> Jesus was a Jew, so obviously the influences of Jewish writings and the scriptures had the greater influence on his view of children. According to the Old Testament, children were a precious gift from God; and begetting and giving birth was under God’s special blessing.<sup>5</sup> Unlike their contemporaries in the Greco-Roman world, Jewish children did not have to fear exposure unto death the first week of their life if unwanted.<sup>6</sup>

The Mediterranean culture, during New Testament times, was a “shame/honor” culture. A primary aspect of such a culture was the significance of the group over the significance of the individual. Shame and honor were “pivotal values” in the culture in which the Pastoral Letters were written and helps explain the instruction to parents to bring up their children in the Christian religion. “If the children were to break with their father’s Christian faith and with the ideals for conduct inherent in that faith, this act of disobedience would bring disgrace both upon them and upon the rest of the family.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (Loveland: Treehaus Communications, Inc., 1979), 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

The early Eastern Church fathers shared basically the same view of small children.

This view included the small child's innocence and

a morally neutral state, as we can see in their lack of sexual desire, their obedience to their parents, and their lack of interest in wealth or in positions associated with honor and status in this world. We are told that it was these qualities in children that led Jesus to propose them as examples for adult conduct.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the fifth century, in the course of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine developed a theological defense of the doctrine of original sin. Children no longer were seen as innocent, because if children do not share in original sin, God was unjust when he punished them with suffering and death.<sup>9</sup> In his book, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood*, David H. Jensen stated that “dissenting voices within the tradition have often seized the doctrine of original sin as the prime example of Christian neglect of children.”<sup>10</sup>

Between the extremes of children born with sin or children born with innocence was another interpretation of childhood: children are adults-in-the-making. The United States, especially in their legal system, embodied and still embodies this theory and finds similar manifestations in its other institutions. The theologian, Thomas Aquinas, subscribed to this theory. For Thomas, reason was one of the chief markers of a full life and children are not of an age where they have full use of their rational capacities. Children must be entrusted to parents and ecclesial care to guide them into fuller

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>10</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 6.

humanity.<sup>11</sup> By using reason as a marker, Thomas “deftly avoided the harsh determination that consigned infants to total depravity and hell, and the blithe optimism of innocence that ignored the pain that children are capable of inflicting on others.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1517, the Protestant Reformation was set in motion with the nailing of Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Luther placed emphasis on children in both his preaching and his writing. From infancy until the age of understanding at seven, Luther placed the responsibility for nurturing the child’s faith on parents and the church community.<sup>13</sup> Though he did not claim that childhood was depraved, Luther suggested that parents must tame children’s stubbornness and selfishness. In some instances, Luther’s words were harsh: “If you are unwilling to obey father and mother or submit to them, then obey the hangman; and if you will not obey him, then obey the grim reaper, Death!”<sup>14</sup>

Optimistic theories about children’s nature are found during the Romantic Movement and were best expressed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile*. His writing on the innate goodness of children was in stark contrast to the theological concept of “born in sin” and the “blank slate” philosophy proposed by the English philosopher John Locke.<sup>15</sup> “This understanding of children might be considered the Christian antitype, since it

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 97.

<sup>14</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed. “The Large Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 383.

<sup>15</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 100.

distances itself from Augustinian anthropology and understandings of sin in an attempt to nurture children's life."<sup>16</sup> Rousseau felt children were born with a good nature, but that nature degenerates as they live in society. He felt that a disservice is done to children when they are taught that corruption lies within them. But even Rousseau's philosophy of childhood had conditions. He felt that the child should grow up in the model of the tutor.

When this model is afforded at all costs, it can be as tyrannical as the model that blames children for sin. Apparently, the polar opposite of original depravity may not be as sanguine toward the unique lives of children as it might first seem.<sup>17</sup>

Influenced by Rousseau, society paid more attention to children; and Christians paid attention especially to the plight of disadvantaged children in the crowded cities of the Industrial Revolution.

The Sunday school was an enterprise that arose in response to the plight of working poor children. Robert Raikes, a member of the Church of England, was frustrated by the ignorance of society towards these children. Allowed to roam unsupervised on Sundays, their free day from work, many lower-class children got into trouble. The intent behind his first Sunday schools, "was to train the factory children to read the Scriptures and, in doing so, to impress upon them values of morality and good behavior."<sup>18</sup> The support of John Wesley and his Methodist societies encouraged the growth of the Sunday school movement.

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<sup>16</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 101-102.

John Wesley's view of children was particularly significant as he was one of the founders of the United Methodist Church—the denomination where TAOM occurred. John Wesley was taught by his mother Susannah Wesley and he valued her methods and sought her wisdom as he guided the education of children in the Methodist movement. Wesley, influenced by his own upbringing, encouraged parents to take seriously the religious instruction of children.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently ministry to children became an essential part of being a Methodist preacher.

Wesley exhorted preachers to spend time with children and directed them to formalize a group if at least ten children were in regular attendance. It did not matter to Wesley whether a particular preacher had gifts and abilities suited to working with children. What mattered was willingness to fulfill what he believed was a responsibility of ordained ministry.<sup>20</sup>

One of the questions still asked at ordination of a candidate seeking full connection as an elder in the United Methodist church is the following: “Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?”<sup>21</sup>

Nikolaus Zinzendorf, a bishop in the Moravian church, stressed the importance of recognizing the unique personhood of each child. He felt childhood development was affirmed in the activity of play. Even though he was committed to Pietism, he gave children the freedom to act like children.

Zinzendorf was not concerned that the child simply learn to recite dogma; rather, he sought to lead children to a life freely devoted to God and to develop the ability to express this devotion in their own

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<sup>19</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Complete and Unabridged*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 316.

<sup>20</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 103.

<sup>21</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), 235.

words. He affirmed children in their childhood by reminding them that Jesus was once a child.<sup>22</sup>

The polarization between conversion and nurture of children surfaced during the mid-nineteenth century's Second Great Awakening. Evangelists conducting revival and camp meetings called for repentance and a public profession of faith. "The evangelists' zealous attitude and commitment to personal repentance and assurance of acceptance by God through Christ left a lasting mark on the evangelical church's ministry to children."<sup>23</sup> This group rejected infant baptism as a way for children to come to faith, and children were urged, just as adults were, to undergo a conversion experience.

Horace Bushnell, in *Christian Nurture*, rejected this revivalistic technique for bringing children into a relationship with God. The thesis of *Christian Nurture* was "that a child should grow up a Christian and never know himself/herself as being otherwise."<sup>24</sup> Bushnell opposed the concept of instantaneous conversions and felt true conversion was a growth process begun in a Christian environment from infancy and articulated at home and church by example.<sup>25</sup> Bushnell, like Zinzendorf before him, addressed the issue of children's play. "The problem with religious instruction, in his eyes, was the same problem with parenting: it dismissed play as irrelevant to the life and thought of a mature

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<sup>22</sup> James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 269.

<sup>23</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 104.

<sup>24</sup> James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 315-316.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

human being.”<sup>26</sup> Bushnell’s advice to parents was simple, play with your children. Although Bushnell spent his life as a pastor and theologian, “his writings prompted consideration of new ways of thinking that would deeply affect the way adults went about instructing children in the faith.”<sup>27</sup>

Many have called the twentieth century the century of the child. During this period, there developed a new recognition of childhood as “a special time of life that should be valued for its sake and not just as a preparation for adulthood.”<sup>28</sup> The United States saw an explosion of child related products and church and para-church groups instituted programs specifically geared toward children. Twentieth century persons, such as Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and Robert Coles invested much of their time in the study of children and have greatly affected the way churches relate and teach children.

Erikson’s perspectives of children were rooted in psychoanalysis; his emphasis was on the impact of social influences.<sup>29</sup> Erikson believed that leaders in his day were limited in solving the problems of society because they had a major blind spot in their thinking— they ignored children. No connection was made between the ways in which children were reared and how they behaved as adults. In her book, *Joining Children On The Spiritual Journey*, Catherine Stonehouse argued that church leaders today suffer from

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<sup>26</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>27</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children On The Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 44.

a similar blindness. “Although we claim to value children and give lip service to the importance of their Christian education, reference to their spiritual formation seldom becomes a significant theme in major strategies for the church.”<sup>30</sup>

Piaget’s research consisted of “intensive observations of children in the normal flow of life and of interviews that attempted to reveal the processes of the children’s thinking and to discover what caused those thinking processes to change.”<sup>31</sup> Although adults assumed that children are most like them in their thinking, Piaget discovered the likeness with children came in feeling. Knowing how children think was important in facilitating a child’s spiritual formation.<sup>32</sup>

Kohlberg, after discovering the work of Piaget, studied the moral development of children and, from this extensive study, he developed and refined an understanding of moral development.<sup>33</sup> Kohlberg gave justification for holy listening. “Effective moral education begins with parents and teachers listening, not talking.”<sup>34</sup> Kohlberg’s intent was not to give a plan for Christian education; however, many of his findings provide Christian parents and teachers with significant insights on how to facilitate the moral and spiritual formation of children.<sup>35</sup>

Robert Coles also observed children and their moral life. What Coles saw and heard caused him to question the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. He felt that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 123.

understanding the moral development of children called for more than a clinical research setting asking children what if in pre-designed moral dilemmas. In his book, *The Moral Life of Children*, he told stories of some of the children with whom he worked. He did not give a theory of moral formation, but identified some factors that contributed to a child's moral strength. Coles noted that religion and faith played an important role in each child's life.<sup>36</sup>

Coles cautions us against a narrow, simplistic understanding of the moral life.

We can be guided by insights from Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg on ways in which parents and teachers can facilitate the development of children. However, we must never assume that we control the process. There is mystery in each child's marvelous potential that is strengthened in a vital faith community.<sup>37</sup>

The Christian church metaphorically referred and still refers to herself as the body of Christ. Children, by their baptism or dedication, were members of the body of Christ. For the Christian tradition to benefit children, it must be lived out and modeled in loving communities of believers. Although quoted earlier, it bears repeating because the statement was so significant. "Without the support of caring adults and a vital faith community, most children lose the memory of God's early approaches to them or never come to understand what God was trying to say."<sup>38</sup>

The apostle Paul made a concentrated effort to communicate his own faith experience with images that would transcend culture and settings. Through his efforts, many meaningful images of the faith have arisen—the most enduring of these images was

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>38</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 72.

his analogy of the church as the body of Christ. This image has been used since the early church, but only in recent history has the body of Christ become more inclusive. In the last few decades, prophetic voices have called the church to an awareness of its “sinfulness” in excluding blacks, women, Hispanics, the handicapped and other minority groups from both leadership and participation in the affairs of the church, but a group is still excluded—our children.<sup>39</sup>

Publications dating within the last twenty years have finally looked at children as meaningful and necessary components to a healthy body of Christ. David Ng and Virginia Thomas, both Christian educators, were two of the early prophetic voices who questioned why the church did not include children as the body of Christ. In their often-quoted book, *Children in the Worshiping Community*, they laid out convincing and scriptural support for children belonging to the body of Christ.

The kingdom of God was not to be without children. Children belong with the worshiping congregation because the body of Christ has no age requirement. Children can and do contribute to the life and ministry of the congregation. They do so simply by being present; the church would not be whole without children. Children are bearers of love and hope and grace. Love, care and nurture—ministry to one another—often is embraced, by provocative questions, by laughter, by tears, and by simple deeds. Such ministry is often done by children.<sup>40</sup>

In his current publication, *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children*, James H. Ritchie, Jr. used the metaphoric term body of Christ to explain the church’s purpose in worship of *re-remembering* which puts back together something that has been *dis*-membered or *dis*-assembled.

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<sup>39</sup> W. Alan Smith, *Children Belong in Worship* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984), 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 20- 21.

At the close of worship, that body is disbursed for service in the world—*dis-membered*, if you will, or *dis-assembled* until that time when it is again *re-remembered* or *re-assembled*. Each person present (children included) represents a unique chapter in the greater narrative that is the community's faith story. The body moves toward completion or wholeness as the many chapters are gathered together, remembered, and retold or rehearsed.<sup>41</sup>

With the body of Christ gathered for worship, it was rehearsing one more retelling or remembering of the individual stories and of the greater Story that incorporated all of the stories. The rehearsal metaphor versus the performance metaphor not only accommodated the presence of children in the body of Christ, but also joyfully welcomed them.<sup>42</sup>

People need community for their wholeness—children need community for their wholeness to be all they are created to be. God provided the community for the nurture and care of children, but the relationship with God also needs a faith community. Historically, Jewish children had wonderful experiences of learning the stories of God's purpose as they worshiped with their family and with the whole faith community.<sup>43</sup> Many church fathers encouraged this same model. Thomas Aquinas felt children must be entrusted to parents and ecclesial care to guide them into fuller humanity.<sup>44</sup> From infancy until the age of understanding at seven, Martin Luther placed the responsibility for nurturing the child's faith on parents and the church community.<sup>45</sup> John Wesley,

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<sup>41</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 129-130.

<sup>44</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 97.

influenced by his own upbringing, encouraged parents to take seriously the religious instruction of their children and exhorted preachers to spend time with children.<sup>46</sup> Horace Bushnell believed that children should grow up as Christian and never know themselves as being otherwise. He saw true conversion as a growth process begun in a Christian environment from infancy and articulated at home and church by example.<sup>47</sup>

Sometime in the twentieth century, children were no longer included and or welcomed in the corporate worship and the mission outreach of the church. Although most children in churches were not strangers to church members, they had become almost invisible and only considered in programs designated for them. They became connected in community only to their peers and a few adults who work with them.<sup>48</sup>

The Gospel was and is for all persons, regardless of age. Jesus' message seems to focus not on when children can become disciples, but on the need to encourage the child's coming to him. Worship was and is a corporate action of a faith community—coming to Him. The ideal was and is that children be present in worship, where they not only see worship modeled, but where they are also incorporated in the worship experience.

The Old Testament's first use of the word "worship" occurred in Genesis 22:5, when Abraham and Isaac are going up Mount Moriah because Abraham has been told by God to sacrifice his son. The two servants with them are told to wait while Abraham and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>47</sup> James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Hollman Publishers, 1993), 316.

<sup>48</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 133.

Isaac go ahead to worship. “After that lone occurrence in Genesis, the word worship and its derivatives occurred scores of times throughout the biblical text.”<sup>49</sup> Worship was a complex concept, with many aspects of worship involving actions, while other aspects involved encounters. But from the Bible’s record, it is evident that worship is important both to God and to God’s people.<sup>50</sup> Jewish children worshiped with their families, in the temple and through rituals prescribed by God. These rituals, the Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths, were a means of teaching the faith to the next generation. When the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, “the Passover sacrifice ended and a new Passover observance developed, and that ritual actively involved the children.”<sup>51</sup> Early Christian families worshiped in their homes and it was assumed children worshiped in these household churches.

Since few Christians could read during the medieval period, oral tradition was crucial for teaching and learning. Although oral instruction was a primary means of educating children, they also learned through popular practices of piety such as holy days, procession, passion plays, wayside shrines, pilgrimages, and adoration of saints. Biblical scenes were used in windows, carvings and statues when Romanesque and Gothic churches were built—these became teaching tools.<sup>52</sup> Without literacy to serve as a division between young and old, medieval worship was far more child-friendly and it

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>51</sup> Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Beverly Johnson-Miller, “Medieval Education,” in *Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 454.

appealed to all visual learners.<sup>53</sup> Worship in a visually rich Christian environment was part of the faith formation of children at this time.

The church's educational goal shifted during the Protestant Reformation. Persons needed to understand their need for repentance and justification. "Preaching replaced the sacraments and arts as the primary teaching method."<sup>54</sup> Ministers were trained in universities so they could train laity to worship correctly. Worship benefited those who could read and even though that excluded many adults, it certainly did not benefit children.

Sunday schools in England began as a place to educate poor, working children. Sunday schools in America followed the English pattern at first, but in the 1830's public schools' increased enrollment changed the goal of Sunday schools—they now refocused on evangelical training and functioned as the religious complement to the public schools.<sup>55</sup> Although Sunday schools were used for evangelizing children, children seemed to remain in worship with adults.

Horace Bushnell, always focusing on children in the church, placed the problem of children and worship to the fore: "I think I see it clearly, we do not preach well to adults because we do not learn how to preach to children."<sup>56</sup> Besides advocating for child-oriented education, Bushnell strongly supported children's participation in worship.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 104.

<sup>56</sup> W. Alan Smith, *Children Belong In Worship* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984), 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

“And now the children may leave for their Sunday school classes/children’s church”—these words comprised a new liturgical phrase in many mainline Protestant congregations in the United States. The 1950’s were years of unprecedented growth in U.S. churches. In opposition to society’s increased workplace competition, the church became a haven of harmony, group solidarity, and nurture.<sup>58</sup> To accommodate the increasing larger numbers of people entering their sanctuary, multigenerational worship was replaced with children’s Sunday school or a children’s church running concurrent with the worship hour.

As an increasingly hurried pace of living along with intensified patterns of age segregation became more normative elsewhere in the culture (promoted by advertising and further promulgated by the rise of developmental psychological perspectives engaged in educational theory in schools), patterns in congregational activity shifted.<sup>59</sup>

Sunday morning became a segregated time for many families in suburban America—children and adults operated in separate spheres in the congregational life.

“Children’s Ministry” magazine, a publication of Group Publishing, Inc. asked the following question on their poll site ([www.cmmag.com](http://www.cmmag.com)) in 2005. “Where should kids worship—with adults in “big” church or in their own children’s church setting? Of the 2, 032 people who responded, 48% said definitely in the corporate worship setting; and the other 52% said in a separate children’s church setting.”<sup>60</sup> Two children’s ministers gave their views on why they believe strongly in their position. The titles used for each

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<sup>58</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 183.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>60</sup> “Face-Off: Where Should Children Worship?” *Children’s Ministry*, May/June (2005): 55.

view were biased in themselves—“Build Families Together”<sup>61</sup> and “Real Worship for Kids.”<sup>62</sup> This article did not answer the questions affirmatively one way or the other but provided some examples concerning what each group did with children concerning worship. Neither group addressed this issue—will youth and young adults, when leaving childhood years behind, remain in worship based on their childhood experience?

Building on Robert Cole’s book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, some Christian scholars believed that even the youngest children have a sense of God’s presence. The primary way children are communicated faith is through the acts of worship of a congregation.

Children themselves are worshipers, who like other worshipers praise God, seek God’s forgiveness and restoration of relationship, and receive God’s Word through the sacraments and preaching . . . Children practice and proclaim faith and share love and joy during worship. They express trust and can encourage others to be trusting.<sup>63</sup>

God blessed his creation and this needed to be reclaimed in practice, especially with children. As stated earlier in this paper, sometimes there was very little historical documentation and this was particularly true of blessing of children.

The usual meaning for blessing in Genesis and the Old Testament was associated with fertility and the survival of family and the nation. Children were a precious gift from God and begetting and giving birth was under God’s special blessing.<sup>64</sup> The priestly

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<sup>61</sup> Jessica Nelson, “Build Families Together,” *Children’s Ministry*, May/June 2005, 56,58.

<sup>62</sup> Debbie Rowley, “Real Worship for Kids,” *Children’s Ministry*, May/June 2005, 57,59.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Kines Myers and William Myers, *Engaging in Transcendence: The Church’s Ministry and Covenant with Young Children* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1992), xxi.

<sup>64</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (Loveland: Treehaus Communications, Inc., 1979), 15.

blessing, found in Numbers, has continued from its origin with Aaron and his sons, through the worship of ancient Israel, through the postexilic temple, through synagogue, worship, through the practices of the early Christian churches into the continued worship practices today.<sup>65</sup>

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.<sup>66</sup>

Blessing in the context of Jesus' activity with children was best shown in the gospel of Mark as the word bless was used. "And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them."<sup>67</sup> The important message of this passage was that Jesus touched and blessed the children. Westermann said that the gospel writer and its parallel accounts are bringing to our attention that the activity of Jesus was not limited to adults but was for children as well.<sup>68</sup> The writers of *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*, believed that Jesus' touch was a significant part of his blessing because it communicated his acceptance and love.<sup>69</sup>

In their book, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Herbert Anderson and Susan Johnson had this to say about children, church and blessing.

In its theology, the church is committed to welcoming children and honoring childhood. The invitation of Jesus to "let the children

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<sup>65</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 45.

<sup>66</sup> Numbers 6:24-26 (NRSV)

<sup>67</sup> Mark 10:16 (NRSV)

<sup>68</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 85.

<sup>69</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 42.

come” permanently expanded the membership of the people of God. The church today is called to do what Jesus did: to welcome children in order to bless them.<sup>70</sup>

As Christians, our understanding of the created human person was and is in relation to their likeness to the image of God. In *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood*, Jensen observed that historically the church had fallen short in translating this affirmation into practice—especially with children.<sup>71</sup> We wanted children to have sameness—in behavior, in knowledge, in appearance—instead of blessing the unique difference of each. God blessed not by impressing a uniform shape on each of his creation, but “in the staggering diversity of our differently shaped lives under God.”<sup>72</sup>

The image of God was and is less some quality that children possess than it was and is the blessed life in difference that God called and calls us to embrace. Jürgen Moltmann made the point well:

Children are close to the kingdom of God not because they have characteristics which adults have lost—innocence, perhaps, or purity, or naivety. It is rather that the kingdom of God is close to them because God loves them, embraces them and blesses them. Anyone who experiences the nearness of the living God in the fellowship of Jesus becomes like a child: life is born again and begins afresh.<sup>73</sup>

Jesus affirmed the gift-status of children as he blessed them, as do those who practice “Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture.” This practice was developed by three key persons: Dr. Don Rogers, The Reverend Leanne Hadley and Elder Jacqueline Nowak only

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<sup>70</sup> Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 111.

<sup>71</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *In The End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 14.

recently. Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture created an environment that was conducive to children's connection with God through the provision of sacred space, Sabbath (quiet), Holy listening, blessing and a respectful attitude toward children as fully human beings with inborn innate spirituality.<sup>74</sup>

### **Biblical Foundation**

Jesus placed children "in the midst of them." Jesus himself came into the world as a baby and grew as a child. He used a child to illustrate the attitudes necessary for entrance into God's kingdom. He pronounced damning judgment on those who caused children to stumble. During the last week of his life, he treasured their songs of "perfect praise." Children were central to his teaching.

The greatest story ever told began with a baby in a manger, the Savior of the world. God sending His son as a baby showed the importance of childhood to God. The Bible claimed that Jesus increased "in wisdom and stature."<sup>75</sup> He embarked on his ministry journey with the memory of his own childhood and the vulnerability of it.<sup>76</sup>

Children did not warrant much attention by New Testament writers, yet amid this omission there were included some suggestive encounters of Jesus with children. These encounters exemplified Jesus' attentive and caring response toward children and their valuing as children.

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<sup>74</sup> The Blessing Center, [http://www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness\\_of\\_Children.bsn.htm](http://www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness_of_Children.bsn.htm), (accessed March 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Luke 2:52 (NAS)

<sup>76</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 22.

The most familiar of these stories was Jesus' blessing of the children. This encounter was included in each of the synoptic gospels—Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17. Children were discouraged from coming to Jesus by his disciples, but Jesus rebuked them and invited the children to come to him. Some writers discounted these encounters as only metaphoric, but Hans-Ruedi Weber in his book, *Jesus and the Children*, claimed that these biblical stories are actual accounts of Jesus taking children in his arms and showing his deep care for them.<sup>77</sup>

Jesus came to upset the normal order of life. During the time of Jesus, education was transmitted from adult to child. In Mark, Jesus responded to the disciples' question concerning who among them was the greatest. A child became central to his response, not as one whom receives instruction, but as the very answer to the disciples' question.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."<sup>78</sup>

Again it can be acknowledged, the child in these biblical accounts was a metaphor for the disciples and the early Church. However, this view did not alter the fact that Jesus commended children to our care and he placed great value on childhood.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and Children: Biblical Resources for Study and Preaching* (First printed Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979 Reprinted Loveland: Treehaus Communications, Inc., 1994), 27.

<sup>78</sup> Mark 9:33-37 (NRSV)

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Jesus said that children are important to him. And then he said they should be important to us. “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”<sup>80</sup> These were Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Matthew. How do persons cause a child to sin or to stumble? Usually, it is done through bad examples being mimicked by the child. Now listen to what Jesus was saying. “It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”<sup>81</sup> In order to understand that, persons had to realize that child should be more valuable to them than their own lives.

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”<sup>82</sup> Within the body of Christ, the church, all persons came to experience the calling to faith by God through Jesus Christ. Since children were an integral part of that body and can experience the presence of God; they should be encouraged to be part of all the body’s fellowship—especially corporate worship of the body.<sup>83</sup>

The Hebrews celebrated their faith in community celebrations. Although the home was the center of Hebrew worship and parents were the primary instructors, young boys were expected to appear in the Temple for the three required feasts. But children were

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<sup>80</sup> Matthew 18:6 (NRSV)

<sup>81</sup> Matthew 18:6 (NRSV)

<sup>82</sup> Romans 12:4-5 (NRSV)

<sup>83</sup> W. Alan Smith, *Children Belong in Worship: A Guide to Children’s Sermons* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984), 35.

always included in the community's festivals and learned their faith by actions and objects rather than words and ideas.<sup>84</sup>

You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, "What do you mean by this observance?" you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses."<sup>85</sup>

In their book, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Herbert Anderson and Susan Johnson made this statement about child baptism and dedication. "The initiation of children by baptism or by dedication established the church as a communion in which oneness leads to equality."<sup>86</sup> Publicly, the church had declared children are people with full membership in the family of God and this proclamation began the lifelong process of forming faithful Christians. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>87</sup>

The gospel was and is for all persons, regardless of age. Jesus' message seemed to focus not on when children could become disciples, but on the need to encourage the child's coming to him. Worship was a corporate action by a faith community. The ideal was that children be present in worship, where they not only saw worship modeled, but where they were also incorporated in the worship experience.

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<sup>84</sup> David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 49.

<sup>85</sup> Exodus 12:24-27a (NRSV)

<sup>86</sup> Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, *Regard Children: A New Respect For Childhood and Families* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>87</sup> Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)

In their book, *Children in the Worshiping Community*, Ng and Thomas instructed the readers to read aloud Romans, chapter 12. They asserted, “This message of encouragement and exhortation to the church was as meaningful for children as for any group.”<sup>88</sup> The researcher realized this passage vividly portrays the rightful place of children in the life and work of the church.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.<sup>89</sup>

Many times children were excluded from worship because worship was thought of as performance and the spontaneity and activity of children would ruin the event. Ritchie in his book, *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children*, alluded to this thinking. “Thinking of worship in terms of performance places undue emphasis on the event itself, and concern for the passing of judgment on the quality of the performance.”<sup>90</sup> Who was doing the judging? Amos, speaking for God, said that God was not appeased or impressed by the quality or performance of worship.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your

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<sup>88</sup> David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 21.

<sup>89</sup> Romans 12:1-3 (NRSV)

<sup>90</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 13.

harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.<sup>91</sup>

God blessed his/her creation and that blessing can be extended by any person, because he/she is acting as an agent of God, naming and claiming the blessing for each of God's children. Claus Westermann, in his book *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, said this about blessing. "When the Bible speaks of God's contact with mankind, his/her blessing was there alongside his deliverance."<sup>92</sup> Too often, the evangelical church stressed the deliverance (salvation) and not the blessing part. Children were given only one half of the biblical history of God and his people. Westermann's use of the word "history" began with the Exodus—especially when the nation changed from a nomadic to a settled life. Here one saw "the God who saves is the one who comes; the one who blesses is the one who is present."<sup>93</sup>

Genesis and Deuteronomy were the two books chiefly concerned with the concept of blessing that God bestowed on his people. The words "bless" and "blessing," occurred more frequently in these two books than anywhere else in the Old Testament. Walter Brueggemann noted in his commentary on Genesis, that blessing was mentioned in the creation narrative. The term was used of living creatures (1:22), of human creatures (1:28), and of the Sabbath (2:3). Although some traditions saw a deep gulf between God

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<sup>91</sup> Amos 5:21-24 (NRSV)

<sup>92</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

and the depravity of the world, these passages show “the world itself is the vehicle for the blessings God has ordained in it as an abiding characteristic.”<sup>94</sup>

To help explain blessing, Westermann used the writings of Johannes Pedersen. Part of Pedersen’s understanding of blessing was tied into the soul. The Hebrew *nephesh* “soul” expressed a person’s total state of being alive and the soul was a totality, filled with power. “This vital power, without which no living being can exist, the Israelites called *berākhāh*, ‘blessing.’”<sup>95</sup> Vitality equaled blessing and blessing manifested itself in differing ways. The usual meaning for blessing in Genesis and the Old Testament was associated with fertility and the survival of the family. Abraham’s promise from God was that his descendants would be multiplied as the stars of heaven.

He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, so shall your descendants be.”<sup>96</sup>

Another Hebrew word used for blessing was *shālōm*. While *berākhāh* blessing was vertical and passed from generation to generation, *shālōm* blessing was horizontal and was the well-being of the community.<sup>97</sup> Abraham’s family showed the blessing continuing from one generation to the next because Abraham was given a son. Isaac was given sons of which one was blessed and one was not. Joseph’s story dealt with the well-being of the community; it started with a rupture of relationship but ended with relationships restored.

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<sup>94</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 36-37.

<sup>95</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18.

<sup>96</sup> Genesis 15:5 (NRSV)

<sup>97</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 29.

Blessing was significant in the act of worship for Israel. When the newly built temple was dedicated in Jerusalem, the first act performed in it was a blessing of the king on the people.

Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. He said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David.”<sup>98</sup>

Westermann quoted Signund Mowinckel concerning the significance of blessing. “The purpose of the cult is to secure blessing for the community and for the individual.”<sup>99</sup>

The pagan neighbors of Israel also used their temples as the source of blessing for their people and land. The uniqueness of “Israelite worship consisted in the fact that its history—the history of God’s dealing with his people—played a decisive role.”<sup>100</sup> There can be no doubt that the bestowal of blessing was important to the Israelites and this blessing was related to God’s activity as the one who blesses.<sup>101</sup>

The priestly blessing, found in Numbers, has continued from its origin with Aaron and his sons, through the worship of ancient Israel, through the postexilic temple, through synagogue worship, through the practices of the early Christian churches into the continued worship practices today.<sup>102</sup>

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance

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<sup>98</sup> I Kings 8: 14-15 (NRSV)

<sup>99</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 35.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.<sup>103</sup>

Westermann identified four distinctive features in this blessing, which should be considered when using blessings in BBSN:

- 1) The real subject of the action, the one who acts through the activity of the priest, is God.
- 2) The act of blessing includes both word and rite.
- 3) Blessing involves God's friendly approach to those who will receive him. Its meaning is discovered in the contexts that present God's actions of bestowing blessing.
- 4) The appropriate place for the blessing is at the end of worship when the community is dismissed. The blessing is to go with those who receive it, out into their life outside the times of worship.<sup>104</sup>

Understanding of blessing in the context of Jesus' activity with children, the gospel of Mark was the best source because the parallels in Matthew and Luke do not use the word itself.

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.<sup>105</sup>

The important message of this passage was that Jesus touched and blessed the children. Westermann said that the gospel writer and its parallel accounts are bringing to

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<sup>103</sup> Numbers 6:22-27 (NRSV)

<sup>104</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 43.

<sup>105</sup> Mark 10:13-16 (NRSV)

the reader's attention that the activity of Jesus was not limited to adults but was for all persons.<sup>106</sup>

### **Theological Foundations**

Joyce Ann Mercer in her book, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*, searched for a theology for children. The purpose of this researcher's paper was similar, yet different in that it must not only find a theology that is grace-filled and welcomed children, but must also worked in harmony with BBSN.<sup>107</sup> One goal of BBSN was the liberation of children, allowing them to be whoever God created them to be.

For this reason, the researcher found theological basis within the feminist practical theology to defend the assumptions of this act of ministry. According to Mercer, "a feminist practical theology of childhood involves persons and communities in actions on behalf of children, based on the conviction that in Christ, God already is at work on behalf of children to bring about transformation toward the reign of God."<sup>108</sup>

Jesus came to upset the normal order of life. The family he was born into was not the expected family of the Messiah who would save his people. We read that the person he chose to place in his midst was not an adult male disciple who desired a position of honor and power—the person he honored was a child. Through his gospel, Mark used children as a primary means to tell his version of the story of Jesus and this gives the

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<sup>106</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 85.

<sup>107</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

reader clues for a liberation theology of childhood.<sup>109</sup> Although many discounted the use of children simply as a superficial background device for a more important point unconnected to children per se, feminist liberation theology did not. Mercer felt when we take seriously the sociopolitical context of this gospel, it “becomes a story of the Jesus movement told from the perspective of subjugated people.”<sup>110</sup> Children are the most disenfranchised and therefore stand to gain the most when liberated from oppressors, whose goal was to keep the lowliest ones down.

Obedience to Christ’s demands called and still calls the church to show concern for the children among us. In *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace*, Richard Mouw assumed that every theology had a corresponding sociology. We can fully understand the claims of a theological perspective only if we attempted to see what it would look like if those claims were fleshed out in the life of a community.<sup>111</sup> If Mouw’s assumption was correct, then the church’s theology in relationship to children matters because it shapes their relationships with them.<sup>112</sup> The church’s concern and action sprang from the three basic ways of looking at children: children are born into sin and have a bent toward evil—therefore, we do to children; children are born as unformed clay—therefore, we do for children as we form them; children are born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing—therefore, we

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>111</sup> Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 74.

<sup>112</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 52.

do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them.<sup>113</sup> The church's response to children dealt with the theological questions of original sin or grace.

For many theologians, especially Augustine, children were considered only in their relationship to baptism and "original sin." In the beginning of the fifth century, during the Pelagian controversy, Augustine developed a theological defense of the doctrine of original sin. He believed children enter a world marked by original sin, being not innocent and having a bent toward evil. This emphasis was necessary to maintain the idea of God's justice: "for if children do not share in original sin and hence are innocent, God is unjust when he punishes them with suffering and death."<sup>114</sup>

Much of the educational resources distributed by evangelicals were oriented toward the sinful nature of children that must be brought under control by parents whose restraining parenting enabled the children to become good.<sup>115</sup> Although this stance stressed the sinful nature of the child, it also exhibited characteristics of forming children with a right formula.

If all were created in the image of God (the *imago Dei*), children were not born as unformed clay or sponges to fill. In their book, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*, the authors examined the metaphors used for learning. When volunteer Sunday school teachers were asked to identify a common metaphor for learners, nearly all first used the "sponge" metaphor followed then by

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<sup>113</sup> The Blessing Center, [http:// www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness of Children.bsn.htm](http://www.blessingcenter.org/Holiness_of_Children.bsn.htm), (accessed March 25, 2006).

<sup>114</sup> O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 281.

<sup>115</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 119.

similar metaphors. When asked what they have in common, the answer always was one of shaping, forming, or filling.<sup>116</sup> Most metaphors of this nature were inanimate and most certainly not biblical. Children taught and responded to in this manner had the image of God discounted in them.

Thomas Aquinas was a theologian who represented to some degree this outlook on children. Aquinas felt that one of the chief markers of a full life was reason and since children were not capable of full contemplation, they were entrusted to parental and ecclesial care to guide them into fuller humanity. This theology valued children not so much for who they are, but for who they would become—with help, what form they would become as adults.<sup>117</sup>

Children were born holy, in the image of God, with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing, that is liberating theology. Karl Rahner, a twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian, was credited with bringing a positive understanding of childhood to the church. One of his assertions, used by liberation theologians, was the “full humanity” of marginalized persons, including children.<sup>118</sup> In Rahner’s “The Christian Awareness of Childhood,” he put forth this theological anthropology in terms of a Christian understanding of the nature of childhood. Children were from the beginning

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<sup>116</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 5.

<sup>117</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 8-10.

<sup>118</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 25.

“the partner of God . . . a man [sic] right from the start.”<sup>119</sup> Children, born holy and in the image of God, are full recipients of God’s prevenient grace (the Wesleyan tradition).<sup>120</sup>

Mercer, in her book *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*, stated, “that no one has actually seen a church that fully welcomes children, that completely and without contradiction bears God’s hospitality to all God’s children . . . and practices fully in relation to God’s reign of abundance and justice.”<sup>121</sup> How children’s faith identity was formed was at best provisional and partial in any particular church, but that does not negate opportunity to change churches. Feminist liberation theology addressed these church issues with its emphasis on full inclusion of children in all aspects of church ministry and outreach. This practical theology would agree that churches can do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them—partners in our shared faith journey.

The New Testament’s word for church, *ekklesia*, implied something different: “an assembly of people “called out” from the world in order to serve it in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>122</sup> When children are excluded, we are not living “called out” from the world, but merely mirroring its practices.

Children did not grow into the covenant; they are already a part of it by their baptism or dedication. John Calvin’s sacramental theology was not a baptism of salvation

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<sup>119</sup> Karl Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 38.

<sup>120</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 54.

<sup>121</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 176.

<sup>122</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 102.

but rather, a sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children."<sup>123</sup> Since the church, the body of Christ, promised to uphold children in the faith, their exclusion from the covenant community's presence also abandoned that theology. In the United Methodist Church, the congregation responded to the pastor's questions after a child was baptized using these words:

Do you, as Christ's body, the Church, reaffirm both your rejection of sin and your commitment to Christ?

*We do.*

Will you nurture one another in Christian faith and life and include [this family] now before you in your care?

*With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ.*

*We will surround [this family] with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their service to others.*

*We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.<sup>124</sup>*

The baptism of children sealed a special covenant within which God, parents, children, and congregations entered into community. Vows were taken in which the adult participants promised to care for children and with their parents, show the love, grace, and mercy of God. "Baptism propels us into transformational ministry on behalf of all children because the way of Christ is liberating, healing, comforting, just, and inclusive."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes* (1559) 4.15.1.

<sup>124</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 96.

<sup>125</sup> Cassandra Williams, editor, *Children Among Us* (Louisville: Witherspoon Press, 2003), 84.

Calvin's baptismal theology and the United Methodist Church thus embraced a stance that is rarely embodied in practice: children are as vital to the ongoing life of the covenant community as elders, pastors, deacons, and members.<sup>126</sup> For the Christian tradition to benefit children, it must be lived out and modeled in loving communities of believers. Again the researcher used the authors of *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*. They take this stance. "Without the support of caring adults and a vital faith community, most children lose the memory of God's early approaches to them or never come to understand what God was trying to say."<sup>127</sup> Don E. Saliers, in his book *Worship as Theology*, argued "that the continuing worship of God in the assembly is a form of theology. In fact, it is *primary theology*. Worship in all its social-cultural idiom is a *theological act*."<sup>128</sup> Worship as used by Saliers suggested a vital activity, a corporate action, by a faith community, but nowhere in his book did he directly speak of children as part of this vital activity.

Worship was a corporate action, by a faith community, where children participated with adults. This was the theological basis for including children in worship that Ng and Thomas expressed in their book, *Children in the Worshiping Community*.<sup>129</sup>

The United Methodist Church expressed a theology via a "marketing" slogan—radical hospitality. Like most slogans, persons looked to see truth in the application of it.

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<sup>126</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 105.

<sup>127</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 72.

<sup>128</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>129</sup> David Ng and Virginia Thomas, *Children in the Worshiping Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 18.

The ideal was that children feel radically welcomed in worship, where they not only see worship modeled, but they experience hospitality as they are incorporated in the worship experience. “Although most children in our churches are not strangers . . . within many churches children are invisible and not considered except in programs designated for them.”<sup>130</sup> Hospitality will be offered to children when they are welcomed into the place that is important to our congregational life—corporate worship. Many United Methodist churches did not extend radical hospitality to children. After studying the North American church for two decades, George Barna expressed a deep concern for the church. “The stumbling block for the Church is not its theology but its failure to apply what it believes in compelling ways.”<sup>131</sup>

The great Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard contended “that in Christian worship God is the audience, the congregation the actors, and the minister the director.”<sup>132</sup> Ritchie pushed this contention even further in his book *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children*. Ritchie stated that by definition there can be no repetition of a performance. Rather than performance, which tended to separate performers from the audience or worship leaders from the congregation, the task of worship was rehearsal.

Preparation is what happens *during* worship, not just prior to it.  
 We worship to prepare, rather than prepare to worship. Rehearsal  
 speaks of one more retelling or remembering of the individual  
 stories and of the greater Story that incorporates all of the stories.  
 One more reassembling of the Body, aware that the assembly takes

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<sup>130</sup> Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 133.

<sup>131</sup> George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 5.

<sup>132</sup> W. Alan Smith, *Children Belong in Worship* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984), 36.

place in the presence of God. . . . Worship, rather than an end in itself, is a step in a larger process—that of transforming those of us who gather for worship.<sup>133</sup>

The rehearsal metaphor did more than just accommodate children; it celebrated their presence.<sup>134</sup> Rehearsal meant perfection was not required. “Worship,” Susanne Johnson posits, “was the work that the generations do together; hence, it is to include women, men, children, and even strangers and sojourners (Deuteronomy 31:12). The church was particularly responsible for drawing children and other uninitiated people into the Story.”<sup>135</sup> Children, when they leave worship, should depart with stories they can savor and tell others—“the Story as well as their story of how it was told to them . . . They keep the ‘learned community’ honest, asking questions about both content and process that force the rest of the community to both rethink and to more effectively communicate who they are and how their worship expresses that identity.”<sup>136</sup>

“And now the children may leave for Children’s Church or Sunday school classes”—as stated earlier, this phrase became a liturgical phrase in many congregations in the United States.<sup>137</sup> Churches have legitimated the sequestering of children from full participation in the practices of the congregation. Children were valued for their symbol of vitality to the congregation and this should have elevated their status, but it did not.

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<sup>133</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 13.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>136</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 14.

<sup>137</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 180.

Mercer, a feminist practical theologian, felt we were “worshiping the presence of children, instead of including children’s presence in worship.”<sup>138</sup> Church leaders, especially church growth specialists, viewed children and their related activities only in respect to their parents—keep the children happy and the parents will come. These same specialists shared and often espoused the view that children were impediments to adult worship. The prioritizing of adult interests represented adult hostility to children’s differences and to their presence and, according to Mercer, were masked in rhetoric of doing what was best for children.<sup>139</sup>

When applied to children, the paternalistic perspective on worship—as something adults possess and may or may not choose to share with children—sets up a scenario that looks suspiciously similar to that of the disciples attempting to turn children away from their efforts to see and touch Jesus.<sup>140</sup>

This view implied that only children have something to gain in worship. Working from a liberatory theology of childhood, Mercer suggested that “children as divine gifts and blessings offer the congregation an opportunity to live into its identity as a community walking in the way of Jesus.”<sup>141</sup>

In their book *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Anderson and Johnson had this to say about children, church and blessing.

In its theology, the church is committed to welcoming children and honoring childhood. The invitation of Jesus to “let the children come” permanently expanded the membership of the people of

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 228.

God. The church today is called to do what Jesus did: to welcome children in order to bless them.<sup>142</sup>

Theologically, nearly every Christian understanding of the human person was that they are created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. In *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood*, Jensen observed that historically the church has fallen short in translating this affirmation into practice—especially with children.<sup>143</sup> We wanted children to have sameness—in behavior, in knowledge, in appearance—instead of blessing the unique difference of each. God blessed not by impressing a uniform shape on each of his creation, but “in the staggering diversity of our differently shaped lives under God.”<sup>144</sup>

In *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, Westermann looked at other exegeses of the gospel text of Jesus blessing the children. His conclusion was that the evangelists in their portrayal of the work of Jesus regarded this blessing of the children as a possibility that required no justification because it was part of the Old Testament tradition and Jewish practice. Since it was children whom Jesus blessed, the Gospels showed that Jesus’ activity was not limited to adults but was for the whole person.

That means it was for men and women in their coming into being, their growth, and their maturing, as it was said of Jesus himself. That is precisely what blessing means—growth, and maturing, the health and well-being of children.<sup>145</sup>

Jesus affirmed the gift-status of children as he blessed them as BBSN affirms the gift-status of children. Neither affirmation excluded the messiness, the challenges, the

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<sup>142</sup> Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 111.

<sup>143</sup> David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>145</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 84-85.

problems or the grief experienced with children. According to Mercer this was what blessing children affirms.

To say that children's messiness is included in their gift-status is simply to say that the gift that a child is depends not upon the conditions a child evokes in the lives of those around her or him. The gift that a child is depends solely on the child's being made in God's image and, as Rahner asserts, sharing in the childhood of God. Such an affirmation means that even a child whom others may experience in primarily negative terms—whether due to behavior problems, material or emotional drain to the family, or whatever—remains fundamentally a gift.<sup>146</sup>

This was what feminist liberation theology desired—equal affirmation and blessing for the least of these.

Westermann's last chapter looked at the meaning and function of blessing in worship and the rituals of the church. "The significance of blessing in worship and in the rituals of the church—whether of a practical, liturgical nature or a systematic, doctrinal nature—must stand in a recognizable relation to what the Bible says about God's blessing."<sup>147</sup> The church needed not to imitate the ritual of blessing that was found in the Bible, but its bestowal in today's church is a responsible practice only when based on a comprehensive knowledge of the biblical data—even a rejection required the same precondition.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 247.

<sup>147</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 103.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Permission was granted to the researcher by the senior pastor and the administrative council of Greene Street United Methodist Church in Piqua, Ohio to conduct TAOM in the church she was serving as program minister. The Research Project Congregation Consent Form (Appendix A) was signed at the August 2006 administrative council meeting and at that time the Interview Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) was also shown. It was suggested that the church be informed about this research. So, a concise overview of the research (Appendix B) was printed in the October 2006 church newsletter.

The purpose of TAOM was to give children opportunities to be part of the worship service, not as passive observers, but as active participants. Four worship services were designed so this could be possible. All four services were videotaped as another observation tool for research. No children's church was available on these Sundays, but children came prepared for worship participation because of sacred space observed, holy listening practiced, the Word read and blessing received for two years in children's church. Parents knew prior to these services what was happening, and children clamored to be a participant in congregational worship. If children had a part in the worship, they were given the words they were to read ahead of time to practice reading out loud and, if doing something, were given an opportunity to see what it would look or

feel like. My context associates helped plan, implement, direct and evaluate these services.

The first planned worship service was the last week of August as children were ready to start a new school year. The subject was recognizable to the children, as it was based on the children's story *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper. The idea for this sermon came from a book *Storybook Mentors* by Brenda Waggoner.<sup>1</sup> The second planned worship service was a participatory World Wide Communion Sunday and the children were already familiar with staying in worship on communion Sunday. The third planned child-friendly worship service was Stewardship Sunday. Ideas to include children came from the book *ABC's Of Handling Money God's Way*.<sup>2</sup> The fourth planned worship service was the annual children's Christmas program, always presented on a Sunday morning during the worship hour.

The researcher's academic training, professional experience, interpersonal skills, limitations, biases, and curiosities called for using phenomenological interviewing for TAOM qualitative research.<sup>3</sup> "In this approach, interviewers primarily used open-ended questions. Their major task was to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions. The goal was to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study."<sup>4</sup> The most distinguishing of its features, phenomenological interviewing involved conducting a series of three separate interviews with each

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda Waggoner, *Storybook Mentors* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 88-99.

<sup>2</sup> *ABC's of Handling Money God's Way* (Longwood, Florida: Crown Ministries, Inc., 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2006), 4

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

participant. The following was involved in each interview: first—established the participants' experiences; second—allowed participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurred; third—allowed the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience held for them.<sup>5</sup>

Although Irving Seidman suggested ninety minute interviews in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, he also added the disclaimer that this would be too lengthy for children and some research. What was most important was to determine the length before the process began. The researcher determined that each interview of children would be less than thirty minutes.<sup>6</sup>

The three-interview structure was followed with questions adapted as follows to test the researcher's hypothesis: Authentic Christian worship happens when the church gathers in all of its diversity, complete with the presence of children and children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community—the church, the body of Christ.

**Interview One (life history):** What are your earliest memories of church? (What happened when you went to church as a child?)

**Interview Two (contemporary experience):** What is it like to worship in Greene Street's sanctuary on Sunday morning? (Give details, observations, and feelings)

**Interview Three (reflection or meaning):** What does it mean to be in worship? (Given what the participant has said in interview one and two, how does he or she make sense of his or her time in worship?) These interview questions were given following the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 20.

four Sundays with planned worship services including children. Twenty persons, comprising three groups: ten children ages 6-12; five parents having children ages 3-12; five adults having no children in worship were chosen at random to answer the questions. The children's interviews (with the exception of one) were all conducted in the sanctuary. The conversations were taped so the researcher would not have to depend on memory—with notes taken on body language, facial expressions with each interview. The adults were given the interviews in a three-part written form, with a direct interview following the completion of the entire process. Each participant or parent of child participant signed a written consent for participation with the assurance that anonymity would be maintained.

Once the interviews began and before completion, Seidman recommended starting to write verbatims on the first set of interviews, which helped facilitate future interviews with each individual. “Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statement, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an *essence* description.”<sup>7</sup>

These were the steps used to analyze the data: Step one was organizing and preparing the interview data for analysis. This involved transcribing each interview and sorting and arranging the data into different categories depending on the information. Step two was reading all the data seeking a general sense of the information so its overall meaning became obvious. Step three involved a detailed analysis using a coding process. Coding was the process of organizing data into similar “chunks” so that meaning could be

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<sup>7</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 191.

forthcoming from these “chunks.”<sup>8</sup> Step four was using the coding process to create a description of the persons involved in the context. Coding helped generate a small number of themes. These themes became the major findings in this qualitative research. Step five was the narrative passages that convey the findings of the research. Step six was the final step in data analysis and involved making an interpretation of the data, including lessons learned, new questions to be asked, and actions to be taken.

Had the researcher’s intent been to assess what children and adults knew about worship, quantitative research methods would have been appropriate. Rather the goal was to identify what children and adults remembered about worship—sights, sounds, smells, feelings of connection with persons and traditions, and meanings attached to elements of worship, so the research required qualitative methods.

A final justification for a qualitative approach for this research emerged from the critical role children played in enabling a congregation to experience community. Children effectively shared with adults the joint role of teachers for the purposes of this qualitative research. Without the voice of children, this research was incomplete. The literature review affirmed the need for children in worship, but with the exception of Ritchie’s book,<sup>9</sup> it did so in adult voices. This empirical research afforded children an opportunity to speak for themselves and to teach adults about their perspectives on worship.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>9</sup> James H. Ritchie, Jr., *Always in Rehearsal: The Practice of Worship and the Presence of Children* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005).

To test the validity of the findings, “member-checking” was used.<sup>10</sup> The final report or specific descriptions or themes were taken back to the participants for them to determine whether they felt the findings were accurate.

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<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 194.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

George E. Koehler, in *Learning Together*, stated the following.

The point is that each generation has some unique gifts to share with the others. And each has some unique needs for which it turns to the other generations for help and support. The work of the church is only intergenerational when there is active sharing of these gifts and needs across the generations, when persons of different generations minister to each other.<sup>1</sup>

With this premise in mind, the researcher developed four unique worship services for TAOM where children, as one stage of the generations, contributed to the intergenerational worship of Greene Street Church. This was not the researcher's first effort. Since being employed by Greene Street Church, she had found ways for children to participate in worship besides the usual acolyting. One area of participation she introduced for the children to do every Sunday was the offering bucket brigade for missions. Every Sunday before the ushers moved through the aisles with offering plates, the children went first with tin buckets to collect the congregation's change. They chose the mission the money would be used for such as the Heifer Project, Jackson Area Seed Ministries, Bishop's Miracle Offering or the local food pantry to name a few.

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<sup>1</sup> George E. Koehler, *Learning Together* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1977), 8.

### The Worship Services

August was a special time for students returning to school at Greene Street and, because of her BBSN classes, the researcher suggested to the senior pastor that one Sunday should be used to bless the children as they return to school. A fellow deacon in the United Methodist church had used “a blessing of the backpacks” in her church and gave the researcher the litany she used (Appendix D). With this as the foundation, each year the involvement of children in the service has expanded toward the total focus for TAOM. In this service, the children participated by doing the call to worship, reading the scriptures and coming forward at the end of the sermon for “the blessing.” Although the researcher requested the senior pastor to preach a sermon relevant to children returning to school, he gave the researcher the challenge for TAOM. His theory was that a sermon cannot be relevant to both adults and children, while hers was that it could. The sermon “I Think I Can, I Think I Can” was given by the researcher and was based on Exodus 3:13, 4:1, 10 and Philippians 4:8-9, 13. The subject was recognizable to the both children and adults alike as the children’s story *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper, which was part of childhood for each group. This was the concluding paragraph of the sermon.

Blessed are those who know they cannot endlessly chug along on their own power. Blessed are those who feel inadequate, yet fall on their knees and surrender their hearts to God day after day, relying on Him for the ability to say, “I think I can.” Blessed are those who place their confidence in God’s strength and purposes rather than their own, and who are willing to try their best because God is the One empowering them, pulling them up, up, and over to the other side of the mountain. Chug, chug. Puff, puff. The little engine that could rolls along, one wheel-turn at a time, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brenda Waggoner, *Storybook Mentors* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 99.

The children were then asked to come forward with their backpacks. The congregation did the backpack litany and the service concluded with each child's hand held and blessed with roll on sparkle lotion and these words. Their name was spoken and the phrases "God created you, God loves you and God will be with always and will bless you this year in school" were said by the researcher. Junior high, high school and college students were invited forward for the blessing and many chose to join the children. If the number of children participating with their backpacks at the altar was an indication of success, then this service was successful. But the researcher rated success in the joy shown in the faces of each child as they were blessed and the support shown by the congregation to these young children.

Worldwide Communion Sunday was the second service given to the researcher by the senior pastor for TAOM. In the United Methodist Church, an elder must bless the elements so the senior pastor was present for that part of the communion service, but the rest of the service was done by the researcher and the children. It was appropriately called a participatory sermon, "Setting the Table," which is found in Appendix E. Bishop William Willimon shared this story in the July/August issue of *Circuit Rider*.

When I began my scholarly career, upon being invited to teach worship at a United Methodist seminary, I visited a renowned Catholic liturgical scholar at Yale. "I've got to teach liturgics to Methodist who have, despite our roots, neglected the sacraments," I told him. "What should I do to excite future pastors about their sacramental leadership?" He replied, "I would teach cooking classes." "What?" [was Willimon's reply] "Until they experience the joy of setting a good table, they'll never know what Jesus was doing in the Upper Room," he explained.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Willimon, "Do This . . .," *Circuit Rider*, July/August 2006, 10.

With the call to worship and the scripture already read by children, this challenge was spoken to direct the rest of the children to begin setting the table for communion. What was special about this participatory service was that communion items could be divided if more children decided to attend that Sunday. No preparation was necessary except for minor coaching by the context associates at the back of the church before the children were sent forward carrying their contribution to the communion table.

Before the congregation was invited forward to take communion and be blessed by the children, the prayer done at homes before eating our meals was mentioned. This signaled to the senior pastor to lead the congregation in “The Great Thanksgiving.” The reaction after the service was positive. “Communion has become very ordinary for me, just something we do once a month, but today it was special, very special.” The children were the leaders of worship that Sunday morning and did an exceptional job.

The third worship service given to the researcher was stewardship Sunday. This was a tough subject because many adults do not like sermons on giving. Since this service followed Thanksgiving, the children began the sermon part of the service by holding up cut out letters that spelled THANKSGIVING. A child said that the word was really two words, which was the signal for the children to split the compound word by putting a space between the children at the letters s and g. The researcher asked the children, “Which part do you think we are more likely to forget?” Some children answered, “thanks,” while others said, “giving.” With that answer (different than she had expected), the researcher said, “Sometimes we forget to say thanks, and many times we forget the second part—the giving. Giving was the part that really was the test of how thankful we are.” The researcher addressed this subject by asking questions and having children tell the congregation how the Bible answered each question. Again, children did the call to

worship, read the scriptures and helped with the sermon. In no way was their participation part of a children's sermon. The questions asked and the children's responses are found in Appendix F. This was followed by a message by the researcher on "Getting or Giving," based on feeding the multitude in John 6:5-13, a scripture text children dearly loved because a child was involved in the story with Jesus. The reaction after the service was positive, but the researcher received one spoken negative comment at the sanctuary door. "Some people aren't going to like your sermon today," which the researcher took to mean that he did not like the sermon.

The last worship service of TAOM for this researcher was the children's annual Christmas program. The context associates and researcher made an intentional effort to keep performance as a low priority and the Story the focus of the program. Children and their parents enjoyed this Christmas program because many practices were not required. Many of the songs used were familiar so the children did not need to learn new ones and, at the conclusion of the program when all the clapping was done, each child gave the researcher their hand as they exited the platform and they were blessed by name. Children were used to receiving God's blessing and what more appropriate time than when the congregation was remembering the greatest blessing of all—His Son. The adults were not excluded as the benediction involved the blessing with members holding another's hands as the blessing was given for them as well.

Based on these services, children and adults were interviewed to determine the spiritual value and or spiritual significance of having children participate in worship. Nearing the completion of the individual interviews, the researcher devised a system of color coding to note recurring "chunks" as she reviewed the verbatims and replayed the interviews from the tapes. Blue indicated a mention of connection between children's

church and worship; orange high-lighted references to worship services that the children considered special; yellow represented mention of difficulty staying interested during worship; green was used to identify connections between persons and experiences; purple pointed out references to sacraments; red indicated feelings; and pink indicated descriptions.

Although the intention was to make copies of the verbatims that could be cut up and placed into stacks according to category, the researcher resisted that approach of analysis. She felt it was important to maintain the wholeness and integrity of each child's interview. To separate the child's interview from his/her comments, reduced the information to mere data collection and this was not the intent of this research. The key to this research was in the act of listening, reporting and struggling to find meanings. The researcher tried entering each interview as the student; the children came to the interview as teachers. The researcher wanted to know what they remembered, felt and defined concerning worship and church.

### **Remembered Events**

“What are your earliest memories of church/worship?” the researcher asked each child as they sat together on a bench in the sanctuary and began the individual interviews. The interview setting—the sanctuary of Greene Street Church—increased the number of visual clues for the children and hopefully helped them focus on worship. Included are not the entire interviews of each child, only significant passages or experiences the researcher noted that each child remembered. The researcher resisted the urge to jog the child's memories for other significant events, even though she knew they existed from working with the children for many years.

A twelve-year-old girl, Jean (all children's names have been changed), was the first interviewed. She participated in all TAOM worship services. Because she was in sixth grade, she also was part of this year's confirmation class, but the class had just started. Her regular worship attendance began when her father gained permanent, sole custody of her at the age of nine. She mentioned feeling safe at Greene Street Church. Her memories of church converged on the act of baptism. After participating in the "remember your baptism" service, where those not yet baptized were invited to participate in anticipation of their future baptism, she asked that same Sunday to be baptized. She said, "All the memories I have about church begin with my baptism." Almost all her responses to memories of worship returned to this significant moment in her life. Jean mentioned the time she gave the blessing during the children's participation in World Wide Communion Sunday, acolyting, collecting offering in the buckets and singing both for Christmas programs and for worship.

Margaret was the second person interviewed. She was a very, shy, immature eleven-year-old. Bringing her baby doll to church each Sunday gave her something to share with scared or disruptive little girls in children's church. The researcher thought she would have a wealth of memories, since she attended Greene Street Church most Sundays for all her eleven years and was part of all TAOM worship services. Her memories were less descriptive and more emotional. She used the word safe and friendly many times. She described sitting with her family in a specific area of the sanctuary each Sunday, which seemed comforting to her. The minister was included in her memories of worship. "I like the stories Rev. Jim tells in the sermons." Singing was mentioned more than once, especially all her Christmas program participations. Margaret liked children's church and she recalled step by step what happened when children leave the sanctuary and go into

their special area of worship. She remembered the participatory nature of worship and included the times she helped in worship including: acolyting, collecting the offering buckets, singing, playing the piano. She said, “I don’t like when people are just looking at me, like when I have to play a solo on the piano.” She remembered the time she served communion to the congregation—including serving her mother and father. Her parents had left their normal station for taking communion to be served by Margaret on the other side of the church.

Anne was a verbal ten-year-old. She was in fourth grade and proudly told the researcher about the gifted program she was part of in the public school system. Her attendance at church was erratic, but she did participate in all TAOM worship services. She did say she liked coming to church because, “you are with your own kind of family and everyone is nice.” She began her memory recollection with this phrase, “Well, when we first come in Rev. Jim starts and he asks for joys and concerns, and then we usually go unto, is it mmmm. I forget what we do next.” She wanted to be exact in sequentially describing what happens during the worship hour. The researcher asked if she was trying to remember the “call to worship.” That bit of information started this next run of information.

Oh yeah, then we do the worship and usually after we do the worship we do our hymnals, and then we greet each other and then we sit back down and Rev. Jim does the scripture and we do the buckets, where we go around and collect change for donations and the children are dismissed for children’s church. Children’s church we go around and do the kid’s joys and concerns, then we do the call to worship and then, you (the researcher) do the scripture and then you do the blessing and if we are really good you give us a sucker.”

This was followed with the recollection of all her participation in worship. She included: acolyting, reading scripture (at one of TAOM worship services), Christmas

programs, collecting the offering buckets, singing, and taking communion. When asked what she remembered about taking communion, she said “Well, when I was little, my parents tried to stay away on communion Sundays, because they didn’t want me to do an accident so we usually didn’t come on communion Sundays.” It was also mentioned that on communion Sunday, children did not get to go to children’s church so the service seemed longer, but she liked communion because you get the bread and wine and even though she said wine, instead of grape juice, she did have an explanation for the elements in communion.

Anne was the only child that actually looked closely at the sanctuary and then described the altar area with the open Bible, the candles, the banners hanging on the walls, the cross, and the altar cloth’s color change. It was white the day of the interview, having been changed for communion Sunday, but she thought it was for Easter. When the researcher explained the cloths were white for communion and we had just started the Lenten season, this brought the recollection that Rev. Ed always placed ashes on her forehead for Ash Wednesday. When looking over the front of the church, she mentioned the people that sang up there (choir), but added, “they’re hiding up there, because you can’t see them.”

Her voice was excited when she remembered her baptism. The researcher incorrectly thought she had been baptized as an infant so she would not remember it. Her response was, “Yes, I do! Tatum, my little sister, Reed, my cousin, and I were all baptized together.” She remembered the act of water in great detail, but not why she was baptized.

The first boy the researcher interviewed was Thom. He was a talkative and observant second grader, who also participated in all TAOM worship services. When the researcher picked him up after school, he got into the car and asked her what she wanted

to know about his school. Fortunately arriving at the church and sitting in the sanctuary redirected his thoughts, but not to worship in the sanctuary, but to the worship that took place in children's church.

About the ABC room where we go there, the Bible passages, when we light the candles, and we unlight the candles and we can talk again about what we are happy or sad about and at the end we do the blessing and at the end you pass out treats and on our birthday or close to our birthdays you give us beanie babies.

He was then asked if he had any memories in the sanctuary area. His first memories of being in the sanctuary pertained to the children's bulletins, which he loved doing uninterrupted—so was upset during the greeting if his parents made him leave his bulletin to participate in greeting others in church. He said he liked singing, when the researcher pressed for any special song, he said the only one he knew was the one we sang at children's ministries on Wednesday night for prayer time, "Seek Ye First." He did say that when singing and listening to the minister, he liked to lean against his father. When giving the list of things he did in worship, he was very descriptive about acolyting.

When I am acolyting I come in and I am usually in a robe with green right down the center, one has a broken zipper and so I have to wear that one because it is the smallest. When I am acolyting I come up and am really quiet, don't talk to anyone, light the candles and then come back.

TAOM Sundays, when children participated in or did the morning worship, Thom remembered that his grandma took his picture during the blessing of the backpack Sunday and this year he will get his own Bible. World Wide Communion Sunday, he remembered serving the bread while his older brother did the grape juice. Thom's words, "Yes, that was fun because communion is remembering."

Of all the children interviewed, only Thom remembered his Sunday School teacher and class as part of his church experience. Again, Thom was very descriptive of

what he did in the class and named his teacher many times. He did not forget the fun games they play to remember each Bible story.

The next three children were all fourth graders and they all attend a private Catholic school during the week and, as part of the curriculum, must attend mass each Tuesday. Their worship at Greene Street Church was compared with their experience at mass and the priest who presides over their school and the masses.

Ada came from a family where she was an only child and her mother has involved her in many extra-curricular activities. Her attendance was erratic, not because she desired not to worship, but because her parents were involved in different events on weekends. When asked what she remembered about coming to church/worship, this was her first response. "Umm, just seeing the people, like a lot of the people I recognize are friends and family." Her next response was unique as it involved deeper thinking.

I like to sing and the things we do in church, umm, I like going to children's church because you learn a lot about the Bible. I like getting my first Bible in third grade because it helps me get through tough times because I can read the scriptures out of the Bible.

She remembered how well she read the call to worship on World Wide Communion Sunday and also the times she played her violin for Sunday worship and Christmas Eve services. This launched her into remembering Christmas and all the different parts she had in the church Christmas musicals. She liked singing Christmas songs the best. Rory and Cory are fourth grade twins. They had their interview together. These two are unique in that they attended the first service and have never been part of children's church. They did take part in three of the four acts of ministry. They did not participate in the World Wide Communion Sunday participatory worship service. Worship attendance was regular for them and, because their family had the only children

attending first service, they were given roles in the service that children attending second service did not have. When asked about their memories of worship, Rory remembered doing a sermon with the researcher (Stewardship Sunday). Cory remembered when she was four singing at a Christmas program and always singing in church. Rory chimed in that he usually did not sing. Both did the offering buckets and, unlike the children in the second service, had also served as ushers. Rory liked the greeting part of the service, but Cory did not. She said, “They like to greet me even though I don’t like to greet them.”

They both explained how much better they liked early worship service compared to the second service and, for the benefit of the researcher, gave the general location where everyone sat. Rory compared first service worshipers to “their own little family.” Even though their grandparents go to the second service, it was too crowded for their liking.

All of a sudden Rory said he had only known Rev. Jim and “him changing is really going to be different (Rev. Christy retired this year) for early service.” They felt their minister was nicer than the new priest at their school.

When referring to praying the Lord’s Prayer, they both said they started saying that prayer when they were two and a half. Cory stated, “like our mom started saying it with us maybe a year after we were born.” Their focus now turned to Jesus. Cory mentioned the big picture in the back of the sanctuary and said she liked that picture of Jesus “because it was his last supper with the disciples.”

Rory was the only child to notice the architecture of the sanctuary. He liked the whiteness of his church and the stain glass windows. He felt because of the design, the church could go without microphones. Cory, not to be forgotten, referred to the old lights

hanging down from the ceiling of the sanctuary and how they just fit and it was lucky when one broke they could make more like it.

Raven was a third grader, who missed the blessing of the backpack service because she was hospitalized as the result of a tick bite from church camp, but the researcher gave her blessing at the hospital. She participated in three of TAOM worship services. She remembered that she had to get permission from her dad to attend and give the blessing at the communion station during the World Wide Communion worship, because it was her father's weekend to have her. She did the call to worship for Stewardship Sunday.

She said she remembered another church other than Greene Street Church in the interview, but the researcher learned the memory came from pictures of her baptism at that church and a happier time when her dad was part of the family.

Significant to Raven's remembering were things she liked to do during the worship service. She liked praying, collecting the bucket offering, lighting the candles and greeting the people around her in the sanctuary. She did not like singing up front with the children when she did not know the words to the song. Then she talked about children's church. She remembered vividly the entire worship service of children's church and gave the correct order of the service as it took place on Sunday.

Sammy, a five-year-old first grader, was the second boy interviewed. His sister was Raven. When asked the first question, Sammy replied, "in church we think about God." He remembered singing and praying the Lord's Prayer with the minister. A part of worship Sammy particularly enjoyed was collecting the offering buckets. The younger children had special worship bags with their names on them and Sammy remembered getting that when he first entered the sanctuary, although he did not mention what was in

it. Like his sister before him, Sammy recounted going to children's church and said, "we talk, we have the Holy Spirit." Sammy, even at five years of age, recited the blessing word for word. Sammy usually was not here for communion because of custody issues, but did remember helping set the table for TAOM participatory communion worship service. His part was carrying a napkin forward to cover the bread.

The children had some very descriptive and positive remembrances of worship and their part in TAOM four services. What did adults remember about worship/church as children or with their children? The adults were asked to write down during a two-week period anything that came to mind. Complete sentences and correct grammar were not necessary. The first group of adults all had children participating in at least one service of the four.

The first parent interviewed grew up in a small Presbyterian church. Her childhood memories all were associated with that church. She remembered many relatives going there and it being near her home, but did not like the mean Sunday school teacher she had, who was the minister's wife. Worship brought back memories of solemn services with much reverence for the sacraments. She mentioned her sibling's baptism and the support the congregation gave to the families of the newly baptized. The season remembered best was Christmas. When the minister of her childhood left, her memories included leaving that church and missing the support, love and prayers of her church.

The second parent interviewed stated, "I remember as far back as pre-primary age, probably as young as three or four, playing in the nursery of what was St. Paul United Church of Christ in Piqua." Again, as with the first adult interviewee, her childhood memories were associated with only one church. Her memories included Sunday school and vacation Bible school and the wonderful ladies who taught her songs

and made home-baked cookies. These persons gave her the first remembered hearing about Jesus. Christmas and Christmas Eve were mentioned two or three times as was singing. She visually described her church. A minister in her later childhood was liked, but he made choices outside of his marriage and the church leadership made him leave. She was hurt by the actions of the minister and the church leadership and did not complete the final steps of confirmation.

The third parent interviewed started her memories with “I was baptized when I was six weeks old.” Her memories also involved only one church as a child and it was a Lutheran. Learning about Jesus happened in Sunday school. Singing took place both in Sunday school and worship. She remembered having to first learn about communion and acolyting in third grade before being allowed to participate. Confirmation took place in sixth grade and she remembered learning about Martin Luther.

Although the next parent remembered events in church around her mother, the organ, and choir, a specific church or denomination was not mentioned, only the state she lived in as a child. Family was a large part of her memories, especially being part of her grandfather’s children’s sermon and sitting with her mom during services. Helping with the microphone system was also a part of her memory as an older child.

The last parent interviewed was a young father with two small daughters. His remembrances were of interest to the researcher, because he was her son. They reflected on how she as a parent helped him learn to worship and how that influenced her call to ministry with children. Sunday school was part of his earliest memories and the songs he learned there were now sung to his daughters. As far as the worship service, he stated, “I remember standing in worship service while everyone was singing and repeating the words in my head and learning songs before I could even read.” Music seemed to

dominate a large segment of his memories. It was interesting that all his earliest memories were of only one church he attended from five to seven years of age. Seeing his grandmother in the choir and the church being huge were also remembered. He liked that everyone knew his name, either because they knew his parents or grandparents. Originally, he expressed the most vocal opposition to children being in worship, but this exercise helped him realize the responsibility he had for helping his daughters learn to worship.

The last group answering the written interview questions did not have children in the services. Two were young adults who had been at Greene Street Church their entire life. The researcher began with these two.

The young man went through all the children's programs of Greene Street Church, never missing Sunday school, vacation Bible school, Wednesday night ministries, or scouts. Church was an integral part of his life. He remembered specifically children's church and that a video story was shown and a different adult leader was present each Sunday. He liked the children's songs they sang from a big notepad in front. He remembered the songs of the Christmas musicals. He transitioned from being in children's church for most of the worship hour to attending worship during confirmation with little difficulty and even chose to sing in the adult choir in high school.

The young lady, soon to be married, remembered Christmas Eve as an earliest worship memory. Her memories included standing on the pew to sing the carols, the advent wreath, the lights being dimmed as "Silent Night" was sung. She said she learned about the Bible, while teaching little children in Sunday school during her junior high years. She remembered her years in children's church, which ran concurrent with most of

the worship service, but their time in children's church replicated more closely an actual worship service.

The next adult interviewed had two teenage sons. She encouraged them to remain in worship with her at a younger age than most children at Greene Street Church. They did not attend children's church after fourth grade. She started her written response with these statements. "I remember going to church EVERY Sunday—the whole family, and there was never any doubt that we were going. You only missed church on Sunday morning if you were really ill. We had only one Sunday morning service and no Wednesday services." She remembered strong family ties in the church she attended as a child. Most of her memories were of events that took place in church, aside from the actual worship service: like rummage sales, Mother-Daughter banquets, nursery duty and vacation Bible school. She remembered communion because she was not allowed to take it and it was done only four times a year so those Sundays were never missed. She mentioned both Easter and Christmas, but in relation to hats, corsages and large attendance. Details of her confirmation were sketchy except the memory of a white robe, red carnation and feeling special.

Because the next adult was close to the researcher in age, the researcher wondered if similarities would be found in their worship memories of childhood albeit in different churches. All her memories focused on music—either as the listener, the performer, or the student. She named the choir director of her childhood, who was also her music teacher and cherished the copy of "Messiah" given to her by this music teacher. Her memories included sitting with her family, writing in the bulletin, acolyting and just feeling great in church. Greene Street Church laid the foundation for her memories of worship.

The last adult interviewed was one of the oldest members at the church. Greene Street Church was a central part of her life, as it had been for her mother. When the church doors were opened, she was usually there. Because she was over seventy, the researcher was surprised that her memories of worship as a child involved going to children's church. She remembered leaving from Sunday school and going directly to children's church. The researcher had dated the beginnings of children's church as the 1950's for Greene Street Church, when it was used already in the 1930's. She mentioned her baptism, but with the disclaimer that it was not remembered. Most of her memories were of Sunday school starting with the primary department and learning little songs about Jesus to moving to the junior department where opening was held for singing and collecting offering before dismissal to classes. She liked Sunday school as a child because she had nice friends there. She sang in the children's choir.

The researcher listened. She listened to the children at Greene Street United Methodist Church as they remembered church/worship. She then listened to the adults via their written interviews. From the ways the children and adults remembered their childhood church/worship experiences and the coding devised by the researcher to find themes, patterns and emphases in their memories, five overt categories of memories became apparent. The researcher labeled these categories familiar, functional, focus, favorite, formal.

The interviewee's familiar remembrances—those things that were well-known, customary and even habitual—were easily recognized. Both the children and adults repeated the same memory time after time. Children's church, Christmas Eve services, Christmas programs and singing all were remembered and repeated in some form by almost all participants. For children and adults alike, well-known persons whether family,

Sunday school teachers, choir director or minister were part of their collective memories. The children remembered actual worship services better than the adult, realizing children had the advantage of a shorter passage of time. This was one desired outcome of having children not only be in worship, but participating in worship—that they would remember and with that memory claim ownership of worship.

The category called functional remembrances involved remembering what task or work they were given to help with church/worship either in the sanctuary or any place in the church. For the both children and adults, these functional memories included performance singing, playing bells and acolyting for worship. The children all added passing the buckets for mission offerings as well as giving the blessing during the conclusion of children's church. Because of TAOM, children reminisced about children reading the call to worship and scripture and their ability to serve and bless during communion. Three of the adults expanded this category of functional remembrances at church because, as children, they remembered being included at church-related service events with their parents. Being part of the church involved knowing that a child can make contributions to the worship and the service of a church.

Remembering for focus, suggested to the researcher detail-driven memory and personalizing this detail as a significant image in the child's memory. For at least four of the ten children and two adults, a significant image of childhood was baptism. The children could not explain why they were baptized, but remembered the process that took place and adults mentioned baptism as a significant part of remembering church though they knew the actual event was remembered only in the retelling by others.

At least two of the children tried very hard to repeat step by step what took place when they came to church either in the sanctuary or children's church. Their little faces

showed the struggle to recall—then the excitement when some remembering occurred. One adult's focus was not on worship, but on things she associated with church as a child—such as Easter hats, corsages, the white robe and red carnation worn at confirmation and the large number of persons at Easter and Christmas services. Significant to almost all memory was a focus on the one church of childhood--its structure, its people, and its placement of children during the worship service. The researcher noted the strong positive or negative feelings adults remembered of their childhood church.

The category labeled as favorite remembrances showed a preference or value to what took place in church. Even before the children told the researcher, the videos attested to the children's enjoyment as they left the pews to greet others around the sanctuary. Some children ventured to the pulpit area to shake hands with the minister. Only two said they disliked greeting and, for the one young boy, only because it distracted his concentration from the children's bulletin—a very important task to him. Although not named as a greeting time, many adults had fond childhood memories of knowing people and being known by adults at church and associating church attendance with friends. With the exception of one, all valued singing and remembered it as significant part of worship and performance in the church. Three children and four adults valued Sunday school, while a greater number gave positive preference to their children's church experience. All seemed to prefer the Christmas worship services, the carols sung and the special participation allotted them during that season of the church year. The children differed from the adults in that they actually stated a preference for having a part in the worship service as children. The adult father remembered not wanting to go to children's

church as a child and preferring adult worship. The adults that remembered going to children's church gave no indication that other options were available to them.

The researcher's category labeled, form remembering, had to do with arrangement and structure in worship and church. The prevalence of this remembrance was less than the researcher expected based on church growth information—that buildings and worship spaces were significant factors for people coming to church. Only the young boy who went to early service mentioned the actual architecture of Greene Street Church. One young girl described what was on the altar each Sunday morning, while two girls mentioned the banners, the change of color on the altar and the big "Last Supper" picture in the narthex. Only two of the adults, even though most had remembrances of one church, described any item or significant structure in their childhood churches. The oldest person interviewed remembered the heavy black ten-foot curtain that once separated the Sunday school area from the sanctuary at Greene Street Church. The male parent remembered his childhood church as being huge.

The spiritual nurture of children was the major goal for the researcher. She inferred that coming to church, participating in worship, building special relationships and valuing childhood encouraged children to remain in a worshiping fellowship when it was their choice to make. Children, by remembering what was done in worship, showed the researcher they were being initiated into the rites and rituals of worship at Greene Street Church and could claim it as theirs. The adults interviewed, by their presence in church, were still practicing what was claimed by them when they were children at the church they attended.

### **Contemporary Experience**

The researcher realized during the interview process that the children's contemporary experience in worship was not different than their remembrances. Therefore, the researcher dealt more with feelings about church, especially the time spent in worship with the entire congregation.

All the children enjoyed being part of worship. This conclusion was drawn not only from their interviews, but also from their enthusiastic participation in all TAOM worship services. The researcher did not have to coerce any child to participate—the problem was whether she could depend on the parents bringing them to church for those Sundays. Even though they wanted to participate in worship with the researcher, this did not replace their interest in attending children's church. The next Sunday the children used to going to children's church went right back to the familiar—waiting at the end of the pew for take-off when the minister gave the dismissal direction for children's church. When I asked why they liked children's church—this was Thom's conversation with the researcher.

Researcher, "What do like best about coming to church—the very best?!"

Thom, "I like children's church."

Researcher, "Why do you like children's church?"

Thom, "Because it is more fun."

Researcher, "Why is it more fun?"

Thom, "Because there is more stuff to do."

Researcher, "But you don't really do that much in there."

Thom, "We bless, we tell our joys and concerns, we pass the lamb."

Researcher, "You mean you get to talk—you get to share."

Thom, "Yes, and we get to do little jobs too, just kids."

The children seemed to like or at least tolerate worship until it came time to leave for children's church. If they stayed for the entire service as on communion Sunday, only one child said it was too long. All children liked taking communion with their parents and felt they could occupy themselves until they got the bread and juice. The researcher felt it was the anticipation of something coming and knowledge of the time involved that enabled children to not dread the time spent in worship.

Children did not like being the focus of the worship service if they were unfamiliar with what was happening—especially with performance singing, which for many years was the only part of worship given to young children. Listening to some of the children, many stated they stopped coming to the weekly children's ministry because they did not like to perform in front of people. Because everyone volunteered for TAOM worship services and all the children enjoyed their experience in worship and felt pleased that they could do what adults usually did, the researcher concluded that children's dislike of singing did not stem from a fear of standing in front of people. Rather it came from too much emphasis being placed on the children's perfect performance and practice for that performance for the congregation instead of a focus on just contributing to the worship of God.

Although many adults were emphatic that children were bored in worship, only two children used that word to describe their feelings about worship. Rory, from the early service, used the word bored and said he just went to sleep in worship when he was bored. With closer scrutiny, the researcher realized he was tired when he came to early service on many Sunday mornings. Anne said, "I start looking around and it starts fading away and then I come back and listen to what he (the minister) says." Boredom or not listening came usually during the sermon time. The children were probably more honest

then adults because no adult admitted to being bored either as a child or as an adult with the worship service.

Many children used positive expressions when talking about their participatory function in worship. Ada said, “I like to acolyte a lot cause I never really get to light candles and I just love it, umm, I think, my opinion is it shines—it makes the church brighter and because Jesus’ light comes into the church when you light the candles.” Very young children were given participatory roles other than lighting candles in worship. All the children felt good about collecting change in the buckets for mission and participating each in their own way with TAOM worship services. The only two positive participatory experiences during worship adults remembered from their childhood were acolyting and singing.

Most of the children expressed their knowledge of the pastor and the upcoming pastoral change. It was not a negative response, but rather a recognition that the change was occurring and things would be different. Rory, from early service, felt more personally tied to Rev. Jim probably because of the casualness of that service. He said, “I can have a bad Sunday night, and I come Sunday morning and Rev. Jim just fills me with joy.” When pressed why they would miss Rev. Jim, the children responded that they “would miss his funny stories and jokes.” Children did listen to parts of his sermon.

All the children expressed positive feelings of having friends and families with them in worship. Raven was unique in that she alone liked “spending time with God” in church. Rory and Cory, the children who never attended children’s church, were adamant that they did not like second service—the service that most children attend, but rather the more “cozy” first service. They described the second service as too crowded and they were “squished” when they came to it. The researcher felt they attend second service with

their grandparents only on special Sundays when attendance was higher—Mother’s Day, Easter and Christmas.

The adults interviewed gave more specific details about what they did not like rather than what they liked. The researcher was pleased that the adults interviewed no longer had a negative experience with children in worship. The reader may remember that some parents insisted on having children’s church the entire worship hour when the researcher was first employed by Greene Street Church. The parents of little children were more concerned that their child disrupted the worship of someone else. The parents recognized that it was their responsibility to help their children learn to worship and many enjoyed worshipping with their children and seeing other children in worship. One parent with grown children mentioned that she did not have the help given now by the researcher to children and parents—such as children’s bulletins and worship bags. Another parent realized the difficulty her son had adjusting to attending an entire worship service after confirmation.

Three of the younger parents and one parent of teen age sons specifically said that they would not be comfortable worshipping in a contemporary worship area and one even mentioned a dislike for the contemporary service. The researcher noted this because this was contrary to the perception of the church leadership. Many Greene Street Church leaders felt this church has lost young families due to only offering traditional worship services. The beautiful architecture, stained glass windows, and acoustics were all mentioned as uplifting to the worship experience by the adults.

Time after time singing was mentioned, but the young father observed that many persons did not sing or participate when expected and this set a poor example of worship for the children. One parent criticized the poor participation in the choir. All the adults

enjoyed hearing the children sing or play bells for the worship service and those with children felt this made their child feel special. Sometimes, what the parents and adults felt was different from what the researcher heard the children express.

Many noted that the worship service provided fellowship with other believers. One parent raised the question whether worship was more fellowship than worship? She felt “a scheduled hourly worship is too short to really get into worship—too scheduled for me to let down my guard and allow myself to truly worship.” The young adult male called worship “awesome and amazing,” while the young adult female said worship was “calming and settling.”

The researcher realized that a congregation and parents cannot assume they know what their children like or dislike about worship without asking them and observing them in worship. The researcher found that children were not bored in worship if they are a part of the service. Anticipating their part, they tended to follow what was going on much closer than when they were only part of the audience. If a minister was more attentive to children while preparing a sermon, children could follow and be more appreciative of the significant points in the sermon and not just the jokes. Based on no remembrances of sermons, the researcher felt too much emphasis was placed on the sermon during worship. If it were that significant to worship, would not more adults mention the sermon when remembering their contemporary worship experience? One did mention the sermon in explaining worship’s meaning to her. Although adults were not the focus of TAOM, the researcher found that the church leadership also could not assume they know what adults prefer in worship without asking and then listening to what was said or left unsaid.

### **Worship’s Meaning**

The final question asked of all persons, both children and adults was the meaning of worship. The researcher started the third interview with each child using this statement and question. "When we come to church, we say that we worship. Can you tell me what the word worship means?"

This question generated the least response, especially among children. They hesitated answering, fearing it was a trick question. When Thom was asked this question, this was his initial response. "I just had it, now I just lost it." After a fair amount of time elapsed and seeing his struggling, the researcher expanded the question with this statement. "Maybe think about who we worship." Thom's face lit up and he said, "Ah, God and Jesus." Now that he was on the right track, his additional comment was, "things God likes. They have to do stuff like singing and praying for God."

From the early service, Cory answered, "Worship is like a definition of praising God and praising Jesus." Rory added, "Like Jesus and God are the audience." When Ada answered the question; she said, "We come to church to worship." Both the researcher and Ada laughed when she realized she used the word she was defining as her answer. Again the researcher offered this help, "Who do we worship?" Then Ada answered. "God and Jesus." Anne responded by saying, "It means that, worship means you praise someone." Margaret did much better than the other children. She said, "Worship is about praising God and we do that by singing, praying, giving our offering and loving each other." Jean mentioned that worship was talking to God and Jesus. Sammy and Raven both said, "Worship means praying and worshiping God and Jesus."

Many found it difficult to define without using the word "worship." The researcher noted that when the children described children's church, they were defining worship without realizing it. After three years of following the same pattern of worship in

children's church, they understood the act of worship rather than the definition of worship. The researcher found that the congregation and pastoral staff of Greene Street Church were helping children understand the act of worship even though it had not been intentional. The researcher was gratified that not one child felt worship should be something done for him/her. This was credited to the groundwork laid through BBSN in children's church and children's preparation for TAOM worship services.

The adults wrote lengthy responses to the final question. The researcher felt the words of the adult interviewees were significant in their entirety because they were addressing one theme, worship. Other themes may be interfered, but the researcher wanted to see how closely they mirrored the action definition of the children. These are the adults' responses to the final question in their entirety.

Why did you save the toughest one for last? Being in worship is a time of prayer, celebration, assurance, remembrance, a thoughtful, reflective time. I am not a "daily devotional" sort of individual, and a Sunday morning worship service affords me the "regimen" of setting aside that time for study, prayer, reflection, rejoicing. It is also an important time of fellowship with other people with similar beliefs, needs, concerns. While it is not necessary to be in a sanctuary to be in worship, I find that that setting best satisfies my needs. As previously stated, I am only comfortable in a "traditional worship" setting (old-fashioned in my ways!!).

It means showing respect and appreciation for God and his Son, our Lord, Jesus. I grew up thinking worship was supposed to recharge me for the week ahead. I've since learned that it's not so much about "me." Worship gives me the opportunity to give thanks, praise and humble myself to God. This is very difficult (in my opinion) to convey to children. They think everything should provide "instant gratification." Of course, that is the age we are living in, which doesn't help. All we can do is plant the seeds, knowing that someday, they will "get it." Probably the most important thing we can do for children is to show that that in fact, Jesus loves them and so do we, the church family.

Being in worship means learning about Jesus with an open heart and allowing the Spirit and the Word into your heart. As a child, I

feel that worship means a time to be with other people, of all ages, to learn about Jesus and how he can and does live in all of us. We all need to feel loved, and by attending worship, you learn this and it is reinforced.

Worship, to me means that you are praising God in every way and everything that you do. Taking the time to devote to praising, honoring and listening to God. Worship does not only have to happen on Sunday mornings in the sanctuary. Worshiping God could be taking place at any time or place. We need to be in constant conversation with God and doing what he wants us to do.

It means a lot to me. If I miss a Sunday—I feel that I’ve lost something—the feeling of being in the Lord’s House gives me courage and strength. I know God is everywhere but I get that extra uplift of feeling closer in the church. If I have worries—problems—it seems like God speaks individually to me thru the sermon. Being with friends in church and praying for their needs—or giving thanks for happy good things. It is good to see new people come to church and keep coming because they feel your fellowship.

To be in worship means to be focused on one thing, Christ. It means devoting your whole self on praising and loving Christ. Not only at church but outside of church. Worship means speaking and spreading what you know and your passion for Christ. In worship it is almost like being child-like having someone looking out for you.

To be in worship means to be connected to God. We become like babies in a womb listening to God’s every call and receiving his nourishment and vittles. You do not have to be in the sanctuary to be in worship, you can be in the car listening to k-love and a song tugs on your heart, or nearing bedtime and reading the Bible and devotional. God calls us to come to him and he often calls us into worship through song or a conversation. Being in the spirit of God is worship.

“To be in worship” to me is a state of being in which the person or group of people is in direct communion with God. This communion has two parts, being recharged by the Holy Spirit and actively praising God.

I don’t know at what age children can realize that they are being recharged by the Holy Spirit. Although I recall having fun and enjoying worship and other Christians as a child, I do not recall this “recharge” until being in my teens, especially after leaving home. I also do not believe one can experience the Holy Spirit unless they are worshipping, if even in their own way. With this in mind, I

believe it is very important for children to be active in the worship service, so they can both learn to worship God and ultimately feel his presence by doing so. I believe children, especially those that can read, should be encouraged to sing to God, pray to God, and pay attention to the reading of God's Word with the adults.

Younger children should be encouraged to do as much as their attention span will allow. I used to have a slight problem with my children being in the worship service at a very young age because they distracted me from my worship and I feared that they were distracting others. On reflection, I realize that other people's children almost never bothered me, therefore mine probably do not bother them. Teaching my children how to worship is ultimately more important than my discomfort.

Worshipping means to be in a community of believers praising God. Worship is not about me, but about Him. In worship I look beyond my human condition and focus on the power of God to soothe and help my human condition. But I start first with God, praising Him. Worship is done in a community. There's real power there! There are NO "Lone Ranger" Christians. The human spirit seeks the power of the community, of the body of Christ to bring about healing. At the same time just as Jesus was in community, he sought needed solitude in the desert. Worship is about praising God. When the praises go up, the blessings come down. Through worship we develop an attitude of gratitude for all that God has done, is doing and will do. We realize anew Sunday after Sunday that we are sinners saved by grace and are in constant need of divine intervention and the healing power that the body of Christ can render to us.

The very first thing that comes to mind is trimming, in the back forty, on a cold snowy morning, just a couple of weeks ago. The back of our property is often a sanctuary for me—in the quiet stillness—alone with my thoughts—busy with my hands—talking to God—sometimes out loud—about random things on my mind—thoughts that are finally given an opportunity to rest and be pondered before God. That conversation with God is one way worship happened. Another worship—or a time I was 'in worship' was at Ichthus several years ago—taking communion with thousands of youth. Standing with Mandy—my pre-packaged communion wafer/juice in hand—blaring music from the band on stage—I felt that same peaceful calm alone with God and my thoughts—that feeling of true worship when one is communal with God—a time quiet enough to hear God (it was odd to be among so much noise—yet God breaks through).

People are worshiping at Greene Street Church; they are worshiping in ways they understand, and they are open to sharing the worship experience with children. This was the goal expressed in the title of this dissertation—*Children in Worship: The Body of Christ; Living Our Theology*.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

The roots of TAOM extended deep into the researcher's own story, her call to ministry and her ministry with children. During the intervening years of ministry, the researcher struggled with the United Methodist Church and its inability to effectively include children in worship and the minister's inability to structure the liturgy and proclamation of Word to accommodate the needs of children. Even though many churches used part of the worship time for a children's sermon, many were poorly planned and were disconnected to the message and scripture focus of the day. Grown-ups enjoyed them more than the children and, with attention focused on them, the children became embarrassed when asked to make moral connections beyond their capability. Although there were programs available to help prepare children for worship, this denomination per se was not one of the mainline churches to implement these programs. Children were expected to suddenly appear in worship near the completion of elementary school armed with the knowledge and experience necessary to participate with the adults in congregational worship.

For many years, the researcher had this unsubstantiated theory: Children who experience worship as young children with the adult congregation will continue to value and participate in worship as teenagers and young adults. This theory came from years of observation in the church with her children, their friends and succeeding years of others'

children. The researcher felt that her denomination was perpetuating “the seeker” mentality within its own doors, while the very children entrusted to their care for spiritual instruction and nurturing never received that.

This research, first of all, laid a theoretical foundation for the role of children in the church, beginning with “Jesus placing a child in the midst of his disciples as teacher.” The exclusion of children in our denomination’s worship had parallels to the disciples turning the children away from Jesus as mentioned in Mark 10: 13-16. Children were born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing; therefore we do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them. Using this, one of the main theories of BBSN, the researcher achieved the goal of placing children back in the midst of the community of worship. The church community, when including children will delight in experiencing God with them, as well as learn from and teach the children about God.

Greene Street Church pleasantly survived having children not only sitting in worship, but also joining them as participants during the worship time. Because TAOM worship services were planned, the children were not out of control nor did anything happen that was unpredictable as some church leaders feared. To the researcher’s knowledge, no one felt uncomfortable having children included as equal participants. A sermon given by the researcher based on Mark 10:13-16, two years before TAOM began, might have challenged the congregation to include the children of the church. One of the greatest fears the researcher had was that families would leave if their children were not in children’s church for most of the worship hour. Waiting over six years and preparing the children through BBSN in children’s church dissipated this fear. Greene Street Church members, the pastoral staff and the children anticipated this new direction of

worship. No parents left the church and parents have realized their role in helping their children learn how to worship.

Through TAOM, the researcher helped Greene Street Church review the church's theology of the body of Christ and how it needed to be lived out with children in worship—the body was incomplete without their presence. Even though Greene Street Church would not support feminist liberation theology and originally the researcher herself disagreed with this theology, she found that feminist liberation theologians such as Joyce Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore and their emphasis on inclusion of children melded with the researcher's call to the Order of Deacon and its ministry of service, justice and Word. BBSN and its view of children allowed the researcher and the congregation to work and learn together with children. All in the context grew closer to God in worship together.

Planning for the inclusion of children in worship was not without intense preparation, creativity and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The thoughtfully planned TAOM worship services took into account the diversity represented by the adults and children of Greene Street Church each Sunday morning and was intentionally prepared so the service engaged children frequently, if not constantly, throughout the service. Sermons were made more child-friendly by emphasizing story over application and limiting the auditory part of the sermon. For children, engagement required more than one of their senses. Besides the usual auditory and visual senses, movement was purposely employed in the worship services. Children allowed movement as they participated in the worship service had less difficulty sitting still for other parts of worship.

The preparation necessary for including children in worship was seen as the major drawback for its continual use by senior pastors unless child-friendly worship leaders are

intentionally involved and pastors become more informed about including children in worship through seminary training. Seminaries, in their lip service to the care and instruction of children, did not back the message with training for pastors. Children's sermons, when employed, also need more preparation before being used.

Although the researcher thought worship would be defined as what the participants received from it, she was surprised to learn that the first focus of those interviewed was God, not themselves. TAOM worship services specifically moved intent of worship from performance to rehearsal, which could more easily celebrate the presence of children. Children understood that what they do in church was for God's benefit, not others—this truth has not reached all adults yet. It was pointed out by more than one parent that many adults did not participate when the congregation was expected to during the service and this set a poor example for children. Many adults, by their lack of participation, became only the audience to be performed for by others during a worship service. They were not the example of worshipping the researcher intended for the children to emulate.

Even before TAOM worship services, the congregation of Greene Street Church saw the invoking of blessing during worship when special events for children were celebrated, such as confirmation, baptism, graduation and receiving third grade Bibles. Adults experienced it themselves when the researcher and senior pastor did a "remember your baptism" service and they extended the blessing for each adult. Children experienced it most Sundays at the conclusion of children's church and it became a very significant rite between the children and the researcher. But during one of the TAOM worship services, children were given the privilege of extending the blessing of God. This was a spiritual moment for the researcher. Adults and children were on equal ground—all

as children of God—the children giving and the adults receiving. Most adults gave their first names to the children as the researcher directed; only a few adults could not relate equally with the child and gave their title of Mrs. or Mr. Just as the hearts must have swelled when their children were blessed by Jesus, so were all moved when they were reminded by the children that God created them, that God loved them, and that God would be with them always. Giving and receiving God’s blessing became a visible tool of spiritual nurture for the children.

To the historical, biblical, and theological foundations of this research were added the voices of ten children, who not only participated in TAOM worship experience of the researcher, but also critiqued them for the researcher. Although adults, including the senior pastor, believed children were not capable of executing worship tasks, TAOM worship services proved that theory wrong. The children were pleased with the ease and success they had participating in worship. Many asked to do it again. Children remembered by doing and hopefully when asked to remember worship as the adults were, they will remember more than Christmas and Christmas Eve services and singing.

Participating with adults in the worship of God helped children develop a sense of belonging to the community called Greene Street Church. Many used the term family and friends when they remembered something about church and worship. The videos showed children were active greeters during the worship time of greeting one another. Adults enjoyed also greeting the children. As one adult stated in his interview, “It was important as a child that everyone knew his name.”

The children were more willing to participate in TAOM worship services than children’s choir. The researcher felt the different attitude came from stressing that worship was one more rehearsal of the Story not a final performance of it. For years, the

children's choir directors and parents stressed performance to children when they appeared in front of the congregation. Children already experience too much pressure to perform. Using the term rehearsal and explaining that God was okay with mistakes and that adults make them too, freed their inhibitions and all completed their parts in TAOM feeling great about what they had done. After the first act of ministry, children volunteered quickly for participation in the next one. Children looked forward to their participatory role in worship. The researcher hoped that in their future memories of worship, they would remember doing worship as children.

The comments of the ten children and the ten adults underscored their similar shared remembrances of worship. As those childhood remembrances spiritually sustained the adults, the children's positive worship remembrances will become part of the spiritual nurture that will sustain these ten children through adulthood.

All ten children provided the researcher with helpful data. The United Methodist church and other denominations would do well to integrate children into the long range planning of the church. Questions asked of children require that the answers be listened to very carefully by adults. For example, the researcher found that they were not as unhappy and bored in worship as many adults believed. Children shared the innate desire to be with God and they also said as much. They want to share the experience of God with others.

Although the researcher had been using BBSN in children's church for over two years, TAOM for the doctoral program was rather short in duration. Many of the children's responses during the interview process led the researcher to think of additional questions. But asking them would have sent the research into other unplanned areas. It became evident to the researcher that these same ten children needed to be interviewed

two and possibly five years from now. Realizing some variables would be changed, it would be of interest to the researcher whether children participating in worship during TAOM continued to have a desire to worship when many are given the option by parents to choose in their teen years. Only after these interviews would the researcher know whether the second part of her hypothesis remained true—that children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community.

This particular United Methodist Church will need to focus on the spiritual significance of Easter for Christians. It saddened the researcher that, even though the interviews took place during Lent, no one mentioned Easter as a memorable worship service or significant to worship. Our faith, centered on the resurrection of Jesus, has lost significance with both adults and children. Christmas has become more endearing to worship/church memories of Greene Street Church. Could it be that children before TAOM were only allowed to participate during this time of year? This could be another research question.

Parents were still the best models for learning about faith and worship. As stated earlier, worship was better caught than taught. Even though the researcher feared that adults would leave Greene Street Church if children were incorporated in worship, the research was worth that risk. By choosing feminist theology, the question of children in worship became one of justice for the researcher. Part of the justice question was helping the people at Greene Street Church understand how important it was for a faith community to care for the spiritual nurture of its children and that including children in worship was part of that care. The researcher was encouraged that parents realized the role they must play in helping their children incorporate rites and rituals that have meaning across generations, so they feel familiar in congregational worship. A

compromise occurred; parents were willing to help acclimatize their children to worship if the researcher continued to model BBSN worship with their children during the children's church time running concurrent with the sermon. Parents have gotten over their initial reluctance of worshipping side by side with their children and at least some of the adults appreciate the contributions children bring to worship.

Children who participated in TAOM worship services were not void of any intellectual functioning. Children's bulletins, left in the pews and the worship bags, gave evidence that children were reading the morning's scripture. Pictures drawn on scraps of paper were symbols representing spiritual ideas such as crosses, hearts, and doves. The children also answered the interview questions with evidence that they met God in the setting the church calls worship.

Including children with the congregation in intergenerational worship was and continues to be a commitment worth making. Any church that chooses to do this must be prepared to support that decision with planning, persistence and passion. The researcher does not expect churches to redesign their worship to make them primarily a child-centered experience. This was not done in any of TAOM worship services because the researcher was aware that adults needed to worship God in ways that were relevant to their own daily struggles. A church that is serious about children and adults worshipping together as the body of Christ needs to find a middle ground by making minor, but significant, changes that include children in worship and effectively teach the congregation's children about worship.

The researcher and the congregation of Greene Street Church saw authentic Christian worship was happening because this church has learned to gather in all of its diversity as the body of Christ inclusive with their children to worship God. Only time

will tell whether children continue to value the worship of God, but for now they do because of their participation in TAOM.

**APPENDIX A**  
**RESEARCH PROJECT CONGREGATIONAL CONSENT FORM**

Research Project Congregational Consent Form

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Title of Act of Ministry: WORSHIPING WITH CHILDREN: THE BODY OF  
CHRIST; LIVING OUR THEOLOGY

Researcher: The Reverend Arlys A. Mindt Fogt, M.A.R.E.  
Doctor of Minister candidate at United Theological Seminary Trotwood, OH

Proposed Site: Greene Street United Methodist Church

Location (city and state): Piqua, Ohio

\*\*\*\*\*

The following information is provided to explain this research act of ministry and your participation in the narratives concerning the act of ministry. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this form, the research, or the information given. All questions will be answered.

The participation of your congregation in this research is totally voluntary. You may request to read the rough draft of the dissertation before its final submission.

\*\*\*\*\*

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH ACT OF MINISTRY AND  
NARRATIVES

1. This research is based on the belief that God has given children an innate ability to know and love God. This is the quality that needs to be nurtured from birth onward by the faith community. Good spiritual formation during the earliest years of a child's life is the basis for a positive spiritual journey as they mature. Congregation worship as a multigenerational experience of the body of Christ needs to be reclaimed with children invited and involved in the rituals and rites of the church. Using the principles of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, the goal is to provide a spiritually solid foundation for involving all God's "children" in worship. Children are born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing and together in worship adults will do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them whereby all will be blessed. The act of ministry will provide opportunities and worship experiences for the faith community to live out their theology as the body of Christ by welcoming, worshiping and learning with children in corporate worship. My hypothesis is that authentic Christian worship happens when the church gathers in all of its diversity, complete with the presence of children and children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community.

2. The procedure for participation in the research narratives begins with the context associates providing the researcher with the names of twelve grandparents, names of twelve parents and names of twelve children who participated in at least three of the four services used as the act of ministry research. From each of these groups, the researcher will randomly recruit eight from each group. Parents of participating children will be contacted directly by the researcher. Their signed consent will be required in order for the child to participate.
3. All interviews will take place at the church, in a classroom designated for research use or the sanctuary. Narratives will be scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The narratives may be tape-recorded, if possible notes will be taken by researcher.
4. Given the researcher’s experience with children and adults in a wide variety of settings and her skill in relating to children and adults, the narratives should be non-threatening for all participants with the only inconvenience being scheduling the interviews.
5. The congregation stands to benefit from this research in developing new or refocusing resources to best serve the children in worship.
6. Identifiers linking audio tapes, transcripts of the tapes, and notes about respondents will be retained as will the four videos used in the actual act of ministry. Anonymity will be maintained with the use of coded names in the final published dissertation. The church will be identified only if permission to do so is granted by the pastor and administrative board.

\*\*\*\*\*

We have read this consent form, understand the procedures to be used, are aware of what participation will require, and believe that confidentiality will be maintained of the individuals participating in the narratives. With the understanding that individual participants may withdraw at any time and that the congregations may see the draft before publication, we consent to our congregation’s participation in this research act of ministry.

SIGNATURES:

\_\_\_\_\_

Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson, Administrative Council

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**D.MIN. ACT OF MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENT PRINTED IN THE**  
**CHURCH NEWSLETTER**

D MIN Act of Ministry Announcement Printed in the  
Church Newsletter Prior to Recruitment of Participants

Rev. Arlys A. Fogt, Program Minister at Greene Street, is a doctoral candidate at United Theological Seminary, Trotwood, Ohio. As part of the act of ministry for her research, she has planned four worship services with the specific incorporation of children. Arlys' work with our congregation and children has been approved by the Administrative Council, the Pastor Parish Relations Committee and by Rev. Jim Christy. Arlys and her context associates will be contacting children, parents and grandparents for narrative interviews to react to the children in worship. These narratives should help the congregation better live out the theology of the body of Christ with children. Please be supportive if called upon to participate in this research.

This research is based on the belief that God has given children an innate ability to know and love God. This is the quality that needs to be nurtured from birth onward by the faith community. Good spiritual formation during the earliest years of a child's life is the basis for a positive spiritual journey as they mature. Congregation worship as a multigenerational experience of the body of Christ needs to be reclaimed with children invited and involved in the rituals and rites of the church. Using the principles of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, the goal is to provide a spiritually solid foundation for involving all God's "children" in worship. Children are born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing and together in worship adults will do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them whereby all will be blessed. The act of ministry will provide opportunities and worship experiences for the faith community to live out their theology as the body of Christ by welcoming, worshiping and learning with children in corporate worship. My hypothesis: Authentic Christian worship happens when the church gathers in all of its diversity, complete with the presence of children and children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community.

**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM**

Interview Participant Consent Form

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Title of Act of Ministry: WORSHIPING WITH CHILDREN: THE BODY OF  
CHRIST; LIVING OUR THEOLOGY

Researcher: The Reverend Arlys A. Mindt Fogt, M.A.R.E.  
Doctor of Minister candidate at United Theological Seminary Trotwood, OH

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent if Participant Minor: \_\_\_\_\_

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The following information is provided to explain this research act of ministry and your participation in the narratives concerning the act of ministry. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this form, the research, or the information given. All questions will be answered.

Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary. You may refuse to participate or choose to withdraw at any time.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH ACT OF MINISTRY AND  
NARRATIVES

1. This research is based on the belief that God has given children an innate ability to know and love God. This is the quality that needs to be nurtured from birth onward by the faith community. Good spiritual formation during the earliest years of a child's life is the basis for a positive spiritual journey as they mature. Congregation worship as a multigenerational experience of the body of Christ needs to be reclaimed with children invited and involved in the rituals and rites of the church. Using the principles of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, the goal is to provide a spiritually solid foundation for involving all God's "children" in worship. Children are born holy, in the image of God with unfolding potential as well as immediate revelatory standing and together in worship adults will do with children, teaching them, and modeling for them as well as learning from them whereby all will be blessed. The act of ministry will provide opportunities and worship experiences for the faith community to live out their theology as the body of Christ by welcoming, worshiping and learning with children in corporate worship. My hypothesis is that authentic Christian worship happens when the church gathers in all of its diversity, complete with the presence of children and

children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community.

2. The procedure for participation in the research narratives begins with the context associates providing the researcher with the names of twelve grandparents, names of twelve parents and names of twelve children who participated in at least three of the four services used as the act of ministry research. From each of these groups, the researcher will randomly recruit eight from each group. Parents of participating children will be contacted directly by the researcher. Their signed consent will be required in order for the child to participate.
3. All interviews will take place at the church, in a classroom designated for research use or the sanctuary. Narratives will be scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The narratives may be tape-recorded, if possible notes will be taken by researcher.
4. Given the researcher’s experience with children and adults in a wide variety of settings and her skill in relating to children and adults, the narratives should be non-threatening for all participants with the only inconvenience being scheduling the interviews.
5. The congregation stands to benefit from this research in developing new or refocusing resources to best serve the children in worship.
6. Identifiers linking audio tapes, transcripts of the tapes, and notes about respondents will be retained as will the four videos used in the actual act of ministry. Anonymity will be maintained with the use of coded names in the final published dissertation. The church will be identified only if permission to do so is granted by the pastor and administrative board.

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We have read this consent form, understand the procedures to be used, are aware of what participation will require, and believe that confidentiality of last names will be maintained. With the understanding that participants may withdraw at any time if such action appears to be in the best interests of those involved, we consent to participation in this project.

SIGNATURES:

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent of Participant if Minor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**APPENDIX D**  
**BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS**

“BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS”

Left: Crayons,  
 Right: Pencils,  
 Left: Scissors,  
 Right: and glue.  
 Center: Backpacks, school bags, pencil boxes, too.

Left: Getting up early,  
 Right: Walking,  
 Left: Riding  
 Right: or taking the bus.  
 Center: New teacher, new classmates; new subjects to learn.

Left: So very much to learn.  
 Right: So many to help:  
 Left: Teachers, counselors, principals  
 Right: Bus drivers, secretaries  
 Left: Cooks, librarians and janitors, too.  
 Center: God is with us in our learning and in all that we do.

Unison Prayer: We thank you, God, for the resources and school supplies that help our children and students of all ages learn. We thank you for children and all involved in our children’s education. We ask you to bless workers with children, the children of this extended community, and persons of all ages who seek to learn and to grow. Amen.

**APPENDIX E**  
**PARTICIPATORY SERMON – SETTING THE TABLE**

Participatory Sermon

“SETTING THE TABLE”

We have all had company over to our house for dinner, for birthday celebrations, Thanksgiving, or just because. We do certain things to prepare for this occasion. Many clean their house; they go grocery shopping; they cook the meal; they set the table. Something similar happens to get ready for this special meal that we are celebrating together today. The janitors have cleaned the sanctuary, someone bakes or buys the bread and grape juice, especially for communion and the communion steward, comes early to prepare the food and set the table. She did this for the 8:30 a.m. service.

Today the children are going to help set the table for Greene Street’s special meal. Many persons place candles on their tables when guests are present, because of the warmth they bring. Today our acolytes have already lit the candles that signify that Christ is the light of the world and the host of this meal. The next item that belongs on our table is the special tablecloth we call an altar parament. A child carries it forward and it is placed on the altar.

Celebration tables have a beautiful centerpiece of flowers. Ours today will be wheat sheaths and a bunch of grapes, also symbols of communion. A child comes forward carrying the centerpiece and places it on altar.

Next we need to add the dishes. We have some very special dishes that we use for communion. These dishes have special names. The plate is called a paten and we use two of them and the cup is called a chalice and we use three of them because we serve communion from three stations. Five children carry the patens and chalices forward and place them on altar.

Napkins are used on the communion table to cover the food and show reverence for it. Two children bring the napkins forward and place them on altar.

We can not have a meal without food. Our special food for this meal is bread and grape juice. We eat these foods because Jesus changed their meaning in the Passover meal to remember his body broken and his blood shed for us. Some faith communities around the world may be using different bread and the juice may be wine, but the remembering is the same. Children process with the two loaves of uncut bread and the pitcher of grape juice.

Today, the children have set a good table for Jesus, who invites all who follow Him to share this special meal no matter their age, level of understanding, or denomination—all are welcomed to come to His meal.

Before we eat together at home, we bow our heads and pray. As we begin our communion meal, we start with a special prayer called the Great Thanksgiving. It is a little longer than our grace at home, but it is really the same kind of prayer. Thank you for helping set the table, as I prepare for our special meal, the choir will sing “You Bake the Bread.” After Rev. Christy leads us in the Great Thanksgiving responsively, the children who are helping serve communion and giving the blessing will come forward to their stations.

**APPENDIX F**  
**GETTING OR GIVING**

## “GETTING or GIVING”

The children are going to help us look at the word “THANKSGIVING” today (children will come forward with the one child holding each letter). Actually this word is made up of two words. What are they children? Sometimes people forget one of these parts. Which part do you think we are more likely to forget? Sometimes we forget to say thanks, and many times we forget the second part—the giving. “Giving” is the part that is really the test of how thankful we are.

The children are going to help me tell you what the Bible says about giving as they have learned in Sunday School, Children’s Church and A.S.K. Children’ Ministries because as Second Timothy 3:16 says, *the whole Bible was given to us...by God and is useful to teach us what is true.*

Sara, Who owns everything?

*Everything in the heavens and earth is yours, O Lord.* I Chronicles 29:11

The Bible tells us that God owns everything so who takes care of God’s belongings. Jean will tell us what the Bible says.

*It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.* I Corinthians 4:2

Linda, will tell us how we should do our jobs as good stewards.

*Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord.* Colossians 3:23.

Thom will tell us what the Bible says about the first thing God wants us to do with the money we earn.

*It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Acts 20:35

and with this request comes a promise...

*He who gives to the poor will never want.* Proverbs 28:27

Aiden, does the Bible tell us to save?

*The wise man saves for the future; the foolish man spends whatever he gets.*

Proverbs 21:20

Mary, what does the Bible say about being happy with what we have.

*For I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little.*

Philippians 4:11

Addison will tell us what the Bible says about getting into debt.

*Keep out of debt.* Romans 13:8

Does it matter how we obtain or get the things we have. Margaret has the Bible’s answer to this question.

*You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.*

Leviticus 19:11

Thank you boys and girls for helping tell us what the Bible says about all God's possessions and how to use them GOD'S way.

Anne will read our scripture passage for today -- John 6:5-13

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