



ST MARY MOTHER OF GOD CHURCH

CHILDREN AT MASS

All families and children are welcome here at St Mary's church because they enrich our worship of God at Mass in so many ways and help make our wonderful community a place of friendship and joy.

May God richly bless and protect you and your children.

Fr Martin





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The presence of so many parents at Mass with their babies and children is a real blessing for our parish. It shows how vibrant, joyful and alive our community is. Seeing so many families with young children faithfully coming to Mass really warms my heart and gives me great hope for the future. You are, indeed, the first and best teachers of your children in the ways of faith. You are doing a great job.

Here are some suggestions to assist parents with young children at Mass:

1. Talk to your children about the church. Explain to them that this is a special place because Jesus is there. When we come into God's house, this is "quiet time" where we speak to Jesus, our friend, in our hearts, as well, as with our prayers and songs. We show God respect when we behave in ways that are prayerful and respectful.
2. Weekly Mass attendance is important. When attendance is irregular, broken or happens rarely, then it is more difficult for our children to develop the ways of behaving that are appropriate at Mass. If you want your children to believe that coming to Mass is important, then you must show them that you believe it is important.
3. When you come into the church, why not bless your child with holy water or, if they are old enough, allow them do it themselves and learn to make the sign of the cross? You might explain to them that we make the sign of the cross to show that every part of us - our minds, hearts and bodies - belongs to God. These simple rituals will help your child to appreciate that they are in God's house, a sacred place.
4. Try to get to Mass a little ahead of time. Most of us would try to get to any appointment or important event in good time.

If parents are rushing into the church at the last moment or arriving late, it is almost impossible to settle your child for this "quiet time" with Jesus. If we are flustered and distracted, our children will pick up on this. If we all work to create a prayerful and composed atmosphere in the church, this will help our children.

A little time before Mass spent preparing your child for the "quiet,



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special time" with Jesus will help them to understand that the church is a different place to their homes, the park or the school playground. It will help them to distinguish between ways of behaving that are appropriate to different places and circumstances. Help your children to observe the way other people are preparing for Mass.

Example is always the best teacher. So, maybe you could kneel down together and say a simple prayer? You might read or, if they are old enough, get your child to read the words of the opening hymn and reflect on it? Or just sit, bow your heads and offer thirty seconds of quiet time to God?

5. We all need to be sensible about noise at Mass. This is public worship with children and there is bound to be some noise and movement. Therefore, we must all support and encourage our parents with young children. But, we all need to be aware of where we are, the sacred things we are taking part in and to have a real respect for those around us. So, don't rush to take your child out if there is some very "light" noise or murmuring, but if a baby is crying or a child's behaviour is disruptive, take them to the porch or, weather permitting, have a wander outside the church. But do return when your child has settled. We want you to be with us during the celebration of Mass.
6. Walking toddlers around the church during Mass can be distracting for the priest and the congregation. If your toddler is restless think about taking them for a wander outside the main body of the church. But, again, please come back into the church when your child has had their wander.
7. If your child finds it difficult to sit through the whole Mass quietly, bring a "soft" toy or, for older children, colouring or religious books - these are available from the Piety Shop. Some parents have found a post card sized photo album filled with religious postcards and pictures is effective.

Bunches of keys or "hard" toys made of plastic or metal being shaken, squeaked or banged on the floor can become very distracting. Why not



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put together a "Jesus" bag or rucksack that has a couple of items in them and becomes part of the weekly preparation for going to Mass?

8. If your child goes to Children's Liturgy during 9.30am Mass, explain to them beforehand that they must watch and listen to what the catechist is doing and saying.
9. Parents **must** consume the Body of Christ when they receive Holy Communion and of course not give it to their children to play with or eat.

Sometimes children ask to receive the Body of Christ. But if they see that their parents are deeply engaged and prayerful when they receive Holy Communion, the children will come to understand that they have to wait until they are older before they can receive Holy Communion.

10. After Mass finishes, why not visit the Blessed Sacrament Chapel with your child? If they are old enough, teach them to genuflect before the tabernacle and to light a candle. Explain to them that when we genuflect, we show Jesus respect, just like when people bow or curtsy before the Queen. Jesus is our King. We should show him proper respect. Then, given them a few moments in "quiet time" thanking Jesus for his friendship and love. These rituals will help your child to appreciate that the Mass is where we meet Jesus in a very special way.
11. After Mass, make sure you bring your children to high-five or say "hello" to the priest.
12. Coffee and juice are available after the 9.30am Mass - this is a good way for parents to get to know each other and for children to make new friendships.
13. Can we help our children to develop proper ways of behaving at Mass? Can every member of our community model that behaviors and act as good spiritual role models? If our children are to experience God's love for them and they are to learn to love Jesus and his church, I think we can.