



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Evangelism

The simple act of sharing the good news of God's love in Jesus.

Welcome the Children

Let the little children come to me..." Matthew 19:14

Steve and Maria both remembered going to Sunday School as children, but their families had never been involved so neither of them had any experience of "church" beyond grade school. Now as adults, their good friends, Will and Shari, who were very involved in their church, were asking Steve and Maria if they would like to come check it out some time.

Steve and Maria were hesitant. They had no idea what church was even like, their children were three and five, and they were too embarrassed to ask Will and Shari more about it. After about six months of low-pressure invitations, Steve got curious. He knew he had driven past the church but couldn't remember the name, so he found it on his mapping app, and then was able to find the church's website. He immediately saw a headline: "New Here? What to Expect." Not only did the page describe what worship was like, there was a link to an online worship service so they could get a feel for it at home, and there was an entire section about children in worship and other opportunities for families including at home faith activities. There was even an online form they could fill out to request a free children's Bible! They discovered that young children with their typical noises were welcome in church, but a staffed nursery for their three-year-old was available if they preferred. They saw photos of children at smaller tables and chairs with fruit, doughnuts, and juice while adults visited over coffee. He noted that activity bags for children to borrow during worship would be located at the left sanctuary door and there was always a time just for children during the worship.

After watching a worship service online with Maria, Steve called Will and said they would like to visit the church. Will wondered why he hadn't thought of it before, but thought it might help if Steve and Maria followed him to church so they would know where to park and then show them around the building before worship began.

Steve and Maria said that first Sunday couldn't have gone better. Because they had viewed an online worship service, they were better able to let their children know what to expect. Will and Shari had taken time to show them around (including location of the restrooms and nursery if needed), introduced them to other friends, and sat with them in worship. The pastor had warmly welcomed them, and someone else called them later that week to invite their five-year-old to Sunday School and to drop off one of those colorful children's Bible if they wanted. Their children even asked when they could go back to that place with the long benches and all the smiling people!

Questions to Ponder:

How else might Steve and Maria have found out about this church if their friends had not told them?

If there had been no photos or welcome on the website about children, do you think Steve and Maria might have still tried it out?

How might parents with children know they are welcome? Name specific ways your congregation makes families with children feel welcome.

What might Will and Shari have done differently earlier on when they started offering an invitation to Steve and Maria?

If there are children who attend your Sunday School whose families are not connected with the church what are some ways you might begin connecting with them?

Overall, how are children incorporated into the life of your congregation? Are they full participants bringing their own gifts or merely cute entertainment? How might you more fully engage them?