

Guide to Youth & Children's Ministries

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Baltimore

by The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley on September 9, 2017

Since 2006, our church has been intentionally reaching out to families with children and youth, and building new programs to support them. The staff, volunteers, and parents in our church are proud of the loving Christian community we have built. Ours is not a slick professional childcare program, with lots of staff and resources. Our groups are more home grown, with lots of involvement from parents and volunteers. We are more like a co-op, and because of that we have the expectation that parents who drop off their children for our programs will also make an effort to help out in a variety of ways. We are friends, young and old, walking side by side on a spiritual path. We are an urban village raising our children together in the Christian faith. We invite you to join us for the groups and programs described in this guide.

Nursery Care Program

Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to Noon, downstairs

At Old St. Paul's we cherish children so they will come to know they are cherished by God. We want our youngest members to have warm and safe associations with being at church. Our church is growing and we have many new babies, which is really something to celebrate! Thank you for bringing your little ones into our Christian community. They bring so much joy!

In the fall of 2016, we moved into a newly renovated Nursery that is lovely in every way. The vestry is pleased to provide quality space and furnishings for the families in our church. The Nursery is staffed by Theresa Pearson (Nursery Care Coordinator, teresa.pearson@comcast.net), Qiana Scott, and Nadine Williamson.

We want to invite your help as we create an expanding nursery care program. For the health and safety of the children in our care, I am asking for your support as we live into these guidelines for the nursery.

- 1) Nursery Care is for babies who are three months old, and up to three -plus years of age. Due to our space issues, children who are four and older are not to be in the nursery.
- 2) Nursery Care is for infants and toddlers while their parents are participating in Old St. Paul's programs and worship.
- 3) On Sundays, the Nursery is staffed from 9:00 a.m. to Noon. Parents are asked to pick up their children no later than Noon out of respect for the staff.
- 4) Safe Church Standards require us to keep a one to five ratio of adult leaders to children.

- 5) Infants and toddlers may be dropped off and picked up by parents only. If you want an adult other than a parent to drop off or pick up your child, please pre-arrange this with me (Mary Luck Stanley) at least a day in advance so that I can inform the staff.
- 6) At the drop off, parents are required to sign in and leave a current cell phone number where they can be contacted while they are at church. Please double check that you have your phone with you, and it is set to vibrate so you can respond to calls.
- 7) In order to prevent illness from spreading, children who are sick should not be left in the nursery.
- 8) Parents are asked to leave fully stocked diaper bags (marked with the child's name) so that all supplies will be available for each particular child, including diapers, bottles, snacks, and an extra set of clothing in case of emergencies.
- 9) The staff has a policy that when children are crying for an extended period of time, their parents will be called so that they can come to the nursery to comfort them. We think this is in the best interest of the child.
- 10) Parents are always welcome in the nursery as they are transitioning their children.
- 11) When you have questions, ideas, or concerns, feel free to contact Theresa Pearson, who is the Nursery Coordinator (teresa.pearson@comcast.net), or The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley, who supervises the program (mary@osp1692.org).
- 12) Young children are invited to participate in Children's Worship in the undercroft (during the first half of the 10:30 a.m. service) as long as those under the age of five are accompanied by their parent. Children's Worship is set up for young children and their parents to worship together. Children over the age of five may participate independently.
- 13) Children are invited to transition into the youngest Sunday School class when they: A) are 100% potty trained and are able to go to the bathroom and clean up independently, and B) they are able to sit quietly in a circle and participate in the program, C) are at least three years of age. A parent may need to attend Sunday School with their young child for a few sessions in order to transition the child into a new routine.
- 14) The Nursery is a "shoe free zone" so that the carpet may be kept clean for the children who spend most of their time on the floor. When arriving, please remove your shoes and encourage the children to remove their shoes as well. Children will be allowed to drink water while in the nursery. The juice boxes and chocolate milk boxes were spilling on the carpet, so in order to keep things clean for the babies, we invite everyone in the nursery to no longer drink juice, milk, or coffee in the space.

Thank you for reading through the norms listed above and for abiding by these guidelines.

Because of the baby boom in our church, we have installed a second diaper changing area in the handicap bathroom near the kitchen. There is also a diaper changing area on the lower

level near the back elevator. We have also added two new Soft Spaces in the sanctuary for families with infants and toddlers. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns about our nursery care program. We love having children and young families in our Christian community!

Soft Spaces

In the body of the Church we have created several soft spaces for families with infants and toddlers. By removing pews and installing extra soft carpet, we hope these areas will be comfortable spaces where families can worship together while little ones play nearby.

Play Group

With the baby boom in our church, we have hired Kate Brantley, to be our Community Builder for Families with Infants and Toddler. She has been hosting various events including “Play Group” for parents, and their infants and toddlers up to age three. During the program year, Play Groups are hosted monthly on Saturday mornings from 10:00-12:00 in the undercroft and nursery. Kate sends out email invitations regularly and Play Group dates will also be included in the weekly E-pistles, leaflets, and newsletters. Parking is available in the St. Paul Garage next door to the Embassy Suites. We know that parenting young children is easier and more enjoyable when parents have friends to turn to for support and advice. Parents who need childcare in order to attend are invited to contact The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley so that she can make arrangements. Contact Kate at kate.brantley@gmail.com.

Children’s Worship:

Sundays at 10:35 in the Undercroft

Since starting this program in 2006, we have seen Children’s Worship grow to the point that we now have a full house of children and parents who are joining us on Sundays from 10:35-11:00 a.m. in the undercroft. Last Easter Children’s Worship included 94 participants.

Children’s Worship is intended for younger children and their parents. On Sundays during the first half of the 10:30 worship, young children and families are invited to go downstairs for songs, led by Joe Smith, and the Good News, presented by the clergy. It is a joy to get to spend this special time together.

I want to ask for your help as we try to create a positive worship experience for our families, and especially for the children.

There are some basic expectations that I want to invite you to preview and review with your children so that they are aware of what we are trying to do together as a worshipping community. Will you please share these hopes with your children and then assist during Children’s Worship with some gentle guidance, as we try to teach our kids what it means to worship as a Christian community?

Here are some basic guidelines for Children's Worship:

1) Circle up: Every person in the room gathers in the circle, with everyone in the front row. Our circle reminds us that we are all connected as a community, and that we always make room in our circle for everyone. As latecomers arrive to Children's Worship, we let them know they are welcome by moving aside and inviting them to join the circle. We leave the center of our circle open to make room for God to join us. We do not sit in the center or lay down on the carpet because it creates a distraction for others during worship. We do not leave the circle to play privately on the sidelines because that is not fair to the others who are gathered.

2) Participate: Everyone in the room is invited to participate in Children's Worship and there are no onlookers watching from the sidelines. Parents, as you participate and do the hand motions, you model how we worship together. Children who do not want to participate are invited to excuse themselves and either go to the nursery, or go back upstairs to worship. We ask parents and their children to sit on the floor in the circle, unless they are unable to do so. When Children's Worship is in session, we ask that there not be any onlookers in the undercroft. When children sense that they are being watched, it can cause them to feel uncomfortable. So, unless all adults and children in the room plan to participate in the program, they are asked to go back upstairs into the church.

3) Be present to what we are doing: Children's Worship is a time for being together with our whole group, and for singing, dancing, praying, and listening to the Good News. It is not an appropriate time to eat or chat privately. There is plenty of snack time before and after Children's Worship so food should not be part of this experience.

4) Children who are five and under need a parent or other adult to support them: We find that it's important for our youngest children to have an adult present to guide them during Children's Worship.

5) Dancing: We will have "dancing songs" and "not dancing songs" at Children's Worship. And the leaders will let the children know when we are having a "dancing song." During these times, it's great to have the children dancing either in the middle of the carpet or in the circle. But during other songs, when we are not dancing, it's only fair to other children that we all do the same things together as a sign of our unity.

6) Playing instruments: Participants will be invited to get percussion instruments to play for several songs. But when the leaders announce that it's time to put the instruments away, please be considerate by gently placing them back in the baskets. At Children's Worship we enjoy singing loud songs and soft songs, so please honor putting away the instruments when it is time to sing some quiet songs.

7) Marshmallow toes: When it's time to end Children's Worship and go back upstairs to join the rest of our community, all are invited to put on their "marshmallow toes" so that they can walk softly and quietly into the church.

8) Use the stairs to the right: When we sing our dismissal song and we quietly walk back upstairs, please turn to the right and use the back stairs instead of going through the Bell Tower. The problem is that there are sometimes strangers coming in and out of the Bell Tower entrance, so we cannot guarantee the safety of the children in that space. Please only use the stairs to the right when going back up for communion.

Thank you for joining us on Sundays for Children's Worship. The experience is a joy for me, and I know Joe, Chris, and Mark feel the same way. We will try to do some reinforcing of our expectations, but the children will understand a lot more if you preview and review the norms with them. Also, please feel free to step in to help with discipline if you see a situation that needs attention. I trust that all of this will lead to a better and more meaningful worship experience, full of kindness, caring, and love.

Sunday School

Sundays, 9:25-10:20 a.m.

Our Church is blessed to have Jeanne Neifert working as our half-time Sunday School Director. Jeanne has years of experience teaching children in the Church, as well as operating a professional child care program. She has a degree in early childhood education. She is doing a wonderful job of supporting and leading our programs for children. I know she is excited about working with the excellent team of adult leaders we have assembled for the 2017-18 program year.

On Sundays, families are invited to gather in the undercroft as early as 9:15 a.m. This is often a fun time for people to socialize before Sunday School. At 9:25 a.m. sharp, parents will be invited to depart and go over to The Forum while the children will form a circle and join in the Opening Ritual, led by the clergy.

When Sunday School ends at 10:20 a.m., you can either pick your child up from Sunday School; or the children can stay downstairs for music time with Mr. Joe, which transitions into Children's Worship. Children must be five or older in order to be unaccompanied by an adult during this transition time, as well as during Children's Worship. You are welcome to join your children. After Children's Worship the children will be brought upstairs to join the congregation.

Little Lambs: Sunday School Group

This group is for older 3s out of diapers, 4s, and younger 5s. The group gathers on Sundays at 9:25 a.m. in the undercroft for the Opening Ritual. At the end of the Opening Ritual, children will be dismissed so that they may gather as a group in the Little Lambs Room, which is on the right, off of the big room.

In order to participate, children must be 100% independent in the bathroom, since I ask teachers to stand outside the bathrooms while children are inside. Children must also be willing to sit in a circle and be engaged in the program activities. Parents may be called in the case of emergencies, or in rare cases of persistent behavior problems.

This class is being taught by Eileen Donahue Brittain, who is an expert in early childhood education, and Suzanne Popa, who has been working with the children in our parish for many years. The children will always see a familiar face when they greet their teachers.

When the youngest children transition into the Little Lambs group, it may be necessary to have a parent stay with them for a period of time, just to help them get acclimated. As soon as is possible, we would like to invite parents to allow their children to stay on their own, knowing that Eileen and Suzanne will always be there to provide support.

Parents are required to fill out a registration form when they drop off their children for the first time so that the teachers have information including the parent's cell phone, etc. Parents are to pick up their children from the Little Lambs class right at 10:20 and either take them upstairs or to Children's Worship. Joe Smith leads songs between SS and Children's Worship from 10:20-10:35 while children and parents are getting ready for the program to begin.

If you have any questions about how your child is doing in this group, feel free to contact Eileen (ebrittain@gmail.com), who will be glad to fill you in.

Rainbow Kids: Sunday School Group

This class is for older 5s, 6s, and all first graders, and 2nd graders. The group gathers on Sundays at 9:25 a.m. in the undercroft for the Opening Ritual and is then dismissed so that they can have their program in the Rainbow Room, which is on the left of the big room. In order to participate, children must be 100% independent in the bathroom, since I ask teachers to stand outside the bathrooms while children are inside. Children in this group must also be willing to participate appropriately in the program. Parents will be called and asked to return in case of emergencies, or in case of persistent behavior problems. The class is taught by parents and other adult volunteers from our congregation:

1st Sundays, Kate Buckley & Terrence Buckley

2nd Sundays, Kate Widmayer & Corey Serio

3rd Sundays: Rebecca Leege & Angela Kozalowski

4th Sundays: Anne Monroe & Dennis Rivera

5th Sundays: Anne Monroe & Dennis Rivera

If you have questions, then please contact Jeanne Neifert, Sunday School Director at 847-648-5048 or sjn612@comcast.net, or any of the volunteer leaders listed above.

Breakfast Club: Sunday School Group

Jeanne Neifert, our Sunday School Director, will be leading this group for 3rd and 4th graders, as well as any 5th graders who want to join the group. Breakfast Club kids will gather in the big room at 9:25 for the Opening Ritual, and then be dismissed to move into the Club House, which is located down the hallway next to the bathrooms. From time to time, the Breakfast Club will go as a group to Starbucks in order to enjoy some social time with adult leadership. Through games, stories, discussions, and crafts, this group will reflect on the meaning of Christian faith and tradition.

Youth Group

Audry Gagnon is our new part-time Youth Minister, who has years of experience leading programs for tweens and teens in the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia. Originally from Georgia, Audry just spent the past year working as an Intern for the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. The Youth Group is a Sunday morning experience for young people in middle school and high school. Youth Group begins at 9:30 sharp in the Upper Room, and will include games, projects, and conversations about important faith questions, and basics of the Christian tradition. From time to time, the Youth Group will have special events including service projects, parties, and outings. Typically, youth group kids serve as the narrators for the Christmas Pageant, and they assist the Easter Bunny with hiding eggs for the annual Easter Egg Hunt. For more information, contact, Audry Gagnon at acgagnon@charter.net

The Forum: for adults

On Sunday mornings from 9:30-10:20 a.m. all are invited to what I like to call, “Sacred Conversations about Life.” I invite a variety of guest speakers to stir up conversation about real life issues that are relevant to our faith. Then I publish a calendar of topics and speakers so that people can cherry pick the Forums they want to attend. Most Sundays during the program year, September-May, thirty-forty members gather for The Forum at The Grand, which is the elegant building next door to the Church. Parents are especially invited to join us for an hour of self-care when you can actually spend some uninterrupted time having adult conversations about important issues in our lives. Just drop off your children for the Opening Ritual in the Undercroft at 9:25 a.m., and then walk next door to The Grand for fifty minutes of personal time. Contact me, The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley, for more information: mary@osp1692.org.

Acolyting

Acolytes serve on Sundays at our 10:30 worship services. They wear blue and white robes. And they carry the cross, torches, banner, spirit stick, Gospel book, and incense in the Opening Procession, the Gospel Procession, and the Closing Procession. Acolytes get to serve on a team with their friends, once a month. Over the years, it has become clear to me that children enjoy going to church more when they can sit with their friends. Once it is age appropriate, serving as an acolyte can also feel like both an honor and a way to contribute to our church community. As they lead our processions, the acolytes set the tone for our worship, and their ministry elevates our experience of the sacred presence of God in our midst. Keith Murray is our Acolyte Coordinator, and he enjoys training and supporting both the adult acolytes and the young people who acolyte. If you are interested, please contact either Keith Murray or The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley.

Helping Children to Find Faith:

An Essay by The Rev. Mary Luck Stanley

What are your hopes for your child's faith development? I asked parents to respond to this question, and it was moving to hear responses like, "Right now, my daughter loves coming to church and I really hope that enthusiasm continues." "I want my kids to know they are loved by others in our church, and loved by God." "I hope my children will be shaped by the Bible stories and the Christian traditions, learning how to follow in the footsteps of Jesus."

In the twenty-seven years I've been working on Youth and Children's Ministry in the Episcopal Church, I have learned that children develop a Christian identity in the midst of their relationships with other Christians. **Faith is caught and not taught.** The development of faith is a matter of the heart, as well as the head. Faith formation takes place primarily in the midst of loving relationships.

As Episcopalians, we value education, yet it is not enough to just teach content to kids. The development of a love for God, and sense of belonging, as God's beloved children, comes first and foremost as children experience other human beings loving and forgiving them in a Christian community. If faith is caught and not taught, then **children catch faith by being in relationship with other Christians** who will model for them what it means to walk the walk, and talk the talk. **At St. Paul's, Baltimore, we cherish children so they will know they are cherished by God. We do this by spending time together as a Christian community, and by modeling how to love our neighbors as ourselves.**

We are moving away from the "school model" of Christian formation where parents simply drop off their kids at their classes so that the "experts" can teach the kids content about how to be good Christians. We know this old fashioned model doesn't always work very well. So, we are moving toward an "extended family model," where parents join their kids in their church activities, in a variety of ways, modeling what it means to be participants in a Christ

centered community. If our church is more like an extended family, and we have weekly family reunions on Sundays, then we are all involved, taking turns helping out, and seeking to include all ages.

With more than seventy participants in our youth and children's programs this year, we have become more of a home grown, volunteer and parent led co-op, than a slick professional enrichment program for kids. Parents especially, are expected to participate in programs along with their children. Faith development, for both the children and the adults, takes place within the context of friendship and community.

When it comes to faith development, it's all about relationships with each other and with God. Think about it. The Bible is a big book full of stories about relationships that are blessed, broken, unjust---reconciled, healed, and transformed. We are building up the bonds of love in our Christian community, trusting that as we cherish each other, we are also cherished by God.