

## Kids in Church

by **ROB STOUT**

I am the father of five children, aged 10 years to 3 years. My wife and I have always taken all of our children to Mass. Here are some things we have learned over the years:



1. Never "split" (spouses attend different Masses) in order to keep the children at home no matter what their ages. Sometimes it's difficult to get them all ready to go; but, if they see you are willing to make the effort week after week, they will know it must be important.
2. Go to an early Mass or eat breakfast before you come so hunger won't be a problem. Dress up for Church. Children know that you always dress up when you go to something important. Whenever you have important visitors to your home you dress up. When you go to your boss' house for dinner, you dress up. When you go to the House of God, you wear shorts and a tee-shirt. Unless your children are incredibly stupid, they are going to attach the appropriate level of importance to God. Church is a special place. It's not a market place.
3. Always get to Mass a little early. Never, never come late. Coming late forces you to hurry and "hypes up" the kids.
4. Try to sit in the front pew. (Your first inclination is to find a back pew near the escape door.) From the front pew, children of all sizes can see what is going on instead of the back of some 6-foot giant. When they see, they can become interested; when they can't, they become bored. Do you want them interested in Mass or bored with it?
5. Always, always, always genuflect and remind each child as they enter the pew to genuflect to the tabernacle. If you genuflect and they genuflect, even when no one else is doing it, they will feel less self-conscious about it as they get older.
6. If you want your children to behave at Mass, then you must behave. If you are going to socialize in the pews, they are going to socialize in the pews.
7. Do NOT bring toys, ipads or computer games except for religious books. The children need to know this is a special time to be with God and not an extension of play time.

8. Do not be concerned if your toddler occasionally (or even more often) sits on the floor making faces or sulking or fidgeting. For the most part you are the only one who can see what goes on below the level of the pew. If they are not making noise or bothering anyone, you're better off not making an issue of it.
9. Help your children become interested through explanation especially when you have a pictorial book of the Mass for children. They will show interest and watch the actual actions of the priest the attention. Start when your child is learning to understand words. "Where's the priest?" "Who's talking?" "Where are the candles?" "Who rang the bell?" "Where is Jesus?" b. As the child gets older, speak the responses and sing the hymns into the child's ear. Encourage them to respond when they can. Usually this starts with "Lord, hear our prayer." and the Great Amen and moves to the Our Father and finally, the Creed. Tell them about the church and its furnishings especially "Jesus' House" (the tabernacle). c. As the child approaches school age, begin to explain what is happening. Let them know what the priest is doing. If you yourself are not sure, you need to find out.
10. Do not let disruptions get out of hand. When a situation begins to develop – take immediate action to defuse it. If it continues, remove the offender and into the cry room until he calms down and then return. You may miss a portion of the Mass, but your first duty is to be a parent. Incidentally, do not remove him to the playground but take him decidedly less pleasant than remaining in church.
11. When you leave the church, allow the children to meet and talk to the priest. Give them a chance to get to know the priests and become comfortable around them. They need to know that he is someone who will not bite off their heads, someone in whom they can confide if they have a problem and, if you are fortunate, someone whom they can emulate when they grow up. By knowing the priests, it makes it easier to get them to pay attention to the activity at the altar during Mass.
12. Remember, that Mass is not the only time we go to Church. Children are fascinated by such devotions as the Stations of the Cross and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Recently, I was waiting in line for confession. I was astonished that my six-year-old son could describe the events in every one of the fourteen stations.
13. Your kids can go out-of-hand even after doing all you can, pray to God for help to pacify them, internally. Keep up the good work!