

A black and white photograph of two hands clasped together, with the text "The Spirit of the Child" overlaid in a yellow, cursive font. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is dark and out of focus, showing the faint outlines of other hands. The text is written in a bright yellow, cursive font, with "The Spirit of the" on the top line and "Child" on the bottom line, both centered over the hands.

*The Spirit of the  
Child*



## IN PAIRS:

- Share a spiritual memory from your childhood?
- Share a spiritual moment from your experiences with children.

*The search for God in response to God's  
search for us – Jo Anne Taylor*

*The sense making activity that both  
children and adults necessarily carry out as  
a result of the life experiences they  
encounter – Clive Erricker*

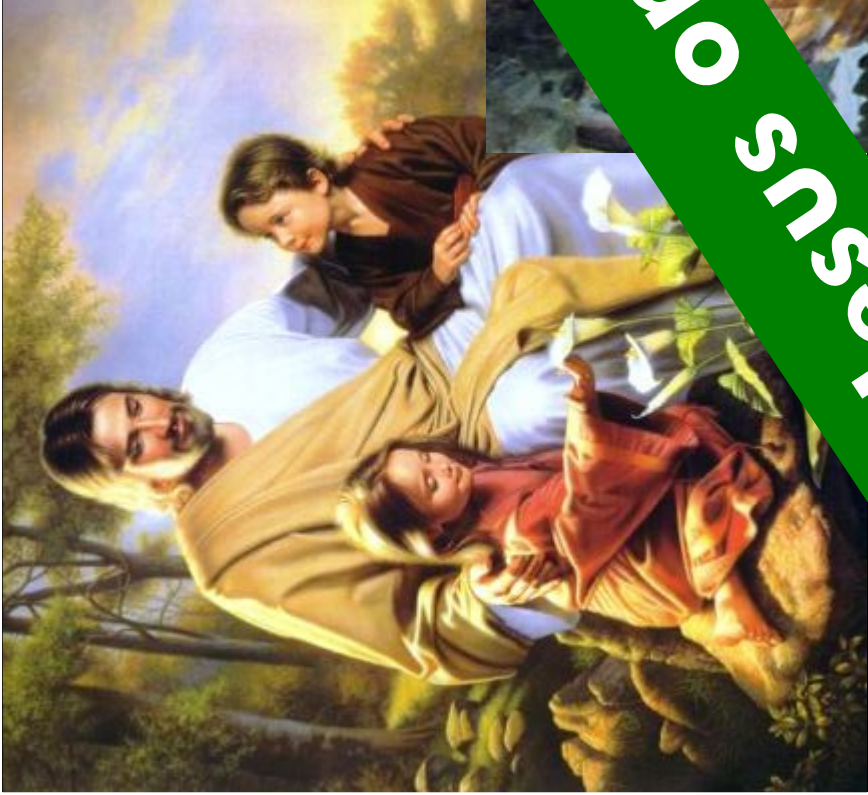
*God's ways of being with children and  
children's ways of being with God –  
Rebecca Nye*

# Plato



‘Of all wild creatures, the child is the most intractable; for insofar as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is as yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly and most insolent creature.

Wherefore the child must be strapped up, as it were, with many bridles.’



Jesus on Children

- ❖ Jesus gave children a place of honor.
- ❖ Jesus called the disciples to not despise the “little ones” and to allow them access to him.
- ❖ Jesus said that to welcome a child is to welcome and serve Him and the One who sent him.
- ❖ Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to “such as these”.
- ❖ Jesus took children and their faith seriously and called adults to do likewise.
- ❖ Jesus held up children as teachers for adults.

May et al (*Children Matter*, p. 42):

‘The Greeks and Romans viewed children as raw material to be formed, or uninformed beings to be educated. Jews believed children needed teaching and discipline so that they would learn to live like their ancestors and the adults in the faith community.

However, Jesus holds up children as teachers for adults. Within the kingdom of God, adults are challenged to be open to learn from children and others who are the least.’



# Children in Christian Thought

Gifts from God and sources of joy

Fully human and made in God's image

Models of faith and sources of divine revelation

Sinful creatures and undeveloped moral agents

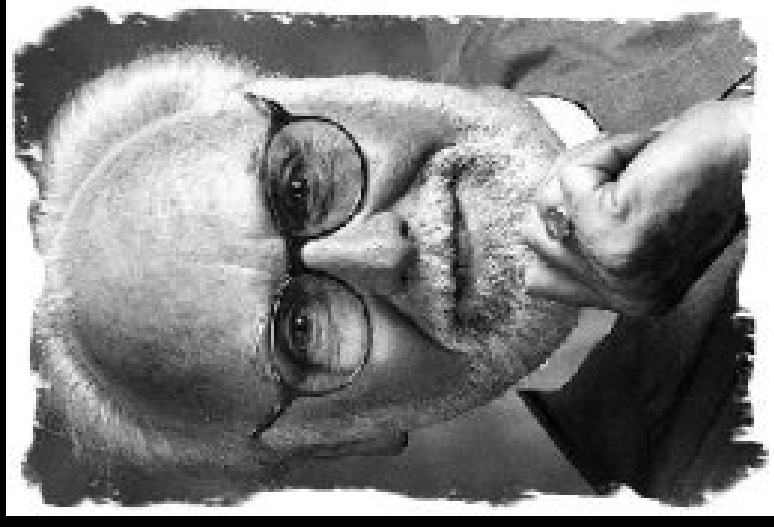
Emerging beings who need training, instruction and guidance

Burdens and responsibilities (like widows, orphans)

John Westerhoff:

*‘In a sense, children were not discovered until the eighteenth century. Before then there was no such thing as children. There were miniature adults – and adults. The discovery of children was a mixed blessing. Now they were only children, and adults had to do things to them so that would become adults.’*

(Holly Catterton Allen, p. 355)



# Production Line – ministry “to” children



# **Greenhouse – ministry “for” children**



# **Pilgrimage – ministry “with” children**





## **Some “Spiritual Advantages” of Children:**

- **Children have a more holistic ways of seeing things – their don’t analyse as much, so their perception has a more *mystical* quality ...**  
**‘mystery is a close, mostly unthreatening friend in childhood’ (Nye p. 8).**
- **Children are especially open and curious – they have a natural capacity for wonder.**
- **Children, as a whole, are less judgmental and suspicious than adults.**

## **Some “Spiritual Advantages” of Children:**

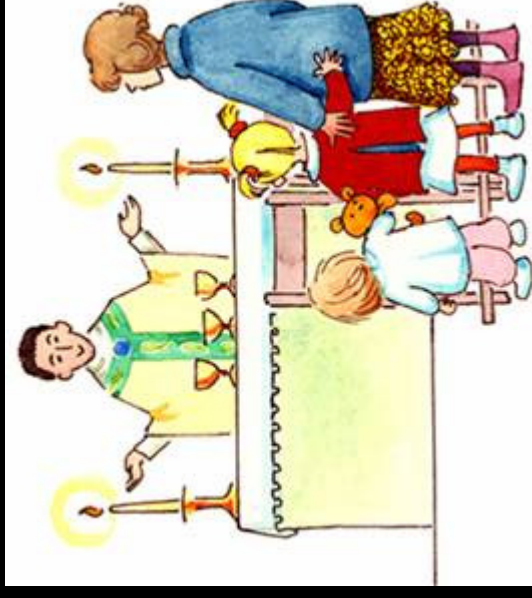
- **Children are open to discovering new things or looking at things in new ways.**
- **Children are more emotionally willing to surrender to forces that transcend their control.**
- **Children lack knowledge about many things and are OK with that.**
- **Children easily accept that their words are not adequate to describe thoughts and feelings.**

## **A Theology of Children and the Church ...**

- Honoring and welcoming children is a key and essential practice for any Christian community.
- In welcoming and honoring children, Christ himself blesses a faith community with his gracious presence.
- Children are to be valued and respect for who and what they are – unique gifts of God who bless us with their dependence, their unpredictability, their spontaneity, their enthusiasm, their imagination, their creativity ...

## A Theology of Children and the Church ...

- Adult Christians require children as models and teachers of faith.
- The nurture of faith in children is a central calling and concern for a Christ-centred community.



## Child-Honoring Ministry Practices

- Expectantly watch and listen to children as bearers of God's presence (say less, hear more).
- Avoid ways of working with children that encourage them to simply say what they think we would like to hear.
- Avoid interpreting or translating God's Word so that there is no room for children to engage with it in their own ways.
- Encourage wondering and questioning – limit explanation and answering.

## Child-Honoring Ministry Practices

- Focus less on being imaginative and creative with children, and more on evoking their spiritual imaginations and creativity.
- Focus more on the process of being with children as spiritual persons and less on achievement of fixed learning outcomes.
- Aim to welcome and bless children, not to change, control or manipulate them spiritually.
- Be actively present with them in “non religious” settings, where are great deal of their actual “spiritual processing” takes place.

