



Nursery Foundations



*This article supports
parents' faith as they
raise their young child.*

THEOLOGY OF THE NURSERY FOR PARENTS

There's perhaps no time in life when you're more in touch with God's creative work than when you become a parent. Suddenly you are responsible for a child of your own and must pay close attention to every pound your child gains and every hour they sleep. Suddenly you have a clear mission: working hard to ensure your child's well-being!

During this time of life, you may be more astounded than ever by God's love—for what else could explain the miracle of this new life that was given to you? Enamored by a little one who possesses more charisma and power than you ever imagined possible, you get a glimpse of God's love for you.

More tightly bound to your faith as a new parent, you may also recognize your connection to other parents who have experienced this wondrous miracle and awesome sense of responsibility. Across the world live others whose experiences are similar to yours, who are also so bone-tired that they realize God must be carrying them or they couldn't survive.

Connecting is what a church community is all about: smiling knowingly and compassionately at other parents who are dealing with fussy youngsters; swapping stories with someone else who's made the effort to get to church with an infant; delighting in how our children begin to recognize familiar faces.

But sometimes the connection requires more work—like when you leave your child in the nursery with someone else for the first time, and suddenly discover one important role of prayer. Deciding to use the nursery means taking a new step of trust toward depending on people God knows, even if we don't. We begin to learn how we will always be tied to our children in spirit, even when we're not physically present with them.

In the church nursery, you will meet other parents going through similar spiritual experiences of wonder, commitment, and trust. In a sense, the church nursery serves as a church within a church. Those who gather there are joined with others to share sacred tasks and to be filled by God's guidance and grace.

Early Christian worship services from thousands of years ago followed a four-part structure that many worship services today still use. The four main parts are: 1) gathering, 2) hearing God's word, 3) sharing a meal, and 4) sending. We could say that the church nursery relies on these same building blocks.

Gathering includes moving from one part of life to another to focus on God in the midst of busy lives. Children in the nursery are also spending time with God, lived out in different ways for various ages. For parents, spending time with God may be filled with prayer and singing hymns. For children, this time may be devoted to looking at books, playing with toys, and interacting with other kids.

God's word is shared during the scripture reading and sermon in worship. Meanwhile, in the nursery, servants of God are living out God's word by caring for, loving, and tending to children within a safe, attentive community. They may also read a Bible story or two for young children so that they hear scripture during their time in the nursery.

God's meal in worship consists of communion bread and wine or grape juice. In the nursery, that meal may be crackers and juice. Jesus loved to share meals with people as part of his ministry. Surely children are getting a foretaste of the feast to come, whether they are part of communion served around the altar or sitting around a low table sharing fish crackers with their neighbor.

Sending happens during worship as the community is sent out into a world to bless others. Little ones in the nursery do their own purposeful work of picking up toys and being joyfully reunited with their families.

Your little one will get to know the routines and rituals of your church nursery. As they do, look for ways that their actions echo the ancient structure of gathering, hearing God's word, sharing a meal, and sending that our ancestors of faith have followed over many centuries. Their first steps in faith are made side by side with many who have worshipped before them.