

Volunteer Guide: St. Nick's Chapel for Children

Worship Support for Our Youngest Parishioners

August 2025

Welcome to the Team!

Thank you for volunteering in St. Nick's Chapel for Children. Your presence helps create a worship space where our youngest members can encounter God's love in a way that is age-appropriate, sacred, and joy-filled. This space is not a babysitting area—it's church, and you are helping lead worship.

This guide outlines your responsibilities and offers suggestions for how to care for children well while helping them participate in worship in meaningful ways.

Overview of Your Role

Each Sunday at the 10:30am service, 1–2 adult volunteers and 1–2 youth volunteers will be present in St. Nick's Chapel, a designated space on the south side of the church. Children age 6 and younger are invited to sit in this area, with or without their parents.

As a volunteer, you are responsible for:

- Welcoming children warmly and helping them settle into the space
- Guiding them through age-appropriate worship activities
- Ensuring they remain safely within the chapel area
- Supporting their spiritual engagement through gentle presence, modeling, and interaction
- Keeping the chapel space clean and organized.

Basic Expectations & Responsibilities

1. Supervision and Safety

- Children must remain within the chapel area during the service. If a child tries to leave, gently redirect them. If they persist, let a parent know. You may need to sit in the chair next to the chapel entrance to monitor children entering and exiting.
- If a child needs to use the restroom, needs a diaper change, or is having a hard moment (e.g., tantrum, distress), quietly go to their guardian and let them handle it. Volunteers do not take children out of the chapel space or into the bathroom. You may do this at any point of the service, though transition moments work best.
- If guardians sit in the chapel with their children, please continue to take the lead in engaging the children, facilitating worship, and directing their attention. Your role is not child care; it is worship leader, whether the parents are present or not. This includes keeping the children in the chapel area (even if parents don't seem to step in).
- Volunteers should not be alone with a child. Maintain visibility and a team-based approach at all times.

2. Sign-In Process

- At this time, we do not require formal sign-in for St. Nick's Chapel, since parents are in the same room and visible. However, take note of each child's name and make sure you know where their adult is sitting in case you need to reach them.
- If their guardians sit elsewhere, the guardians will still drop them off in the chapel area and pick them up. The children should not enter and exit the area on their own.

3. Noise and Movement

- Children will make sounds and move around—that's expected and welcome!
- The line between joyful engagement and genuine distraction is flexible. Use your judgment: if the volume or activity begins to pull significant attention from the service, calmly redirect with a quieter or more focused activity.
- Modeling calm behavior often helps lower the energy in the space without needing correction.

4. The Chapel Space

- Volunteers are responsible for keeping the chapel space clean and organized. Toys and activities are stored under the play altar until the time they are used. Volunteers arrive early to make sure the chapel space is ready for children and stay late to clean up the space.

Worship Flow & Engagement Ideas

You are not entertaining children while the adults worship—you are inviting them into worship, in their own way. You may want to use the book, *Let us Pray: A Little Kid's Guide to the Eucharist*, as a guide, which outlines every part of the service. You could even show them the page and picture at each part of the service. There are four copies in the chapel.

Here's a suggested rhythm that aligns with the liturgy:

Prelude (When the people arrive for worship before the service):

- Arrive to St. Nick's Chapel at 10:15am promptly, 15 minutes before the service starts.
- Greet children and their families as they arrive, by name if possible. Introduce yourself as well, and say to them, "I'm the St. Nick's Chapel worship leader today." Always wear your name tag.
- Rather than free play, engage the children right away. This is a wonderful opportunity to quietly read a book to the children. We want the children to immediately see you as their worship leader and starting with a guided activity sets the tone for the rest of the service. If children enter and free play right away, they will want to free play the whole service. But if they sit down and have a book read to them right away, they will better look to our volunteers for guidance throughout the rest of the service.

Gathering & Opening Hymns (When the congregation stands):

- Encourage children to stand with you. Offer scarves, ribbons, or streamers to wave gently to the music. Clap, dance, jump or sing along. Children can be active here—it's a celebration!

Opening Prayers (Collect, Gloria, etc.):

- Help children form a prayer posture (hands together, or still). You might whisper, "Now we talk to God together," or lead them in repeating a few words.

Scripture & Sermon:

- Provide coloring sheets or simple materials that reflect the gospel story (available in the weekly supplies). Quiet play with soft, sacred toys is also welcome.
- If a child asks questions, engage them quietly—this is still worship.

The Prayers of the People:

- Invite children to pray by placing objects (stones, hearts, candles) in a bowl, lighting battery candles, or offering short prayers aloud: "Thank you, God, for my dog." Let prayer be playful and physical.

The Peace:

- Encourage children to stand, wave peace signs, or blow kisses of peace toward others. Remember to keep them in the chapel unless their guardian comes and gets them.

Communion:

- During the Eucharistic Prayer, invite the children to use the play communion sets. There are (1) the wooden sets, (2) the toy church set, (3) the magnetic sets, and (4) the felt sets. Encourage the children to mirror the actions of the priest and deacon.
- Children remain in the chapel but may be brought forward by their parent if receiving communion.

Closing Hymn & Dismissal:

- Encourage participation again with movement, singing, or dancing, and/or ribbons. Let this be joyful and light.

Communication with Children

Speak softly, kindly, and at their eye level. Use short, clear phrases like:

- “Let’s stand and sing with everyone!”
- “This is prayer time—what would you like to say to God?”
- “We’re sitting and listening now—can you help color this story?”
- “Let’s stay in our chapel so we can worship together.”

Avoid shushing or discipline language. Instead, redirect gently: “Let’s do that later—right now we’re praying,” or “That’s a little loud—can we whisper it?”

What to Do If...

...a child is crying or upset:

Stay calm and offer quiet comfort. If really needed, approach the guardian (they are nearby) and let them step in.

...a child won’t stay in the chapel:

Gently remind them this is our special space for worship. If they wander, use the guardian's assistance.

...things feel too chaotic:

Lower your own voice and energy; often children will match your tone. Invite everyone to take a breath together or offer a quieter activity.

Thank You

You are helping make church a home for our children—where they feel loved, included, and close to God. What you’re doing matters deeply. We are here to support you and eager to hear your insights along the way.

If you have any concerns, feedback, or stories to share, please reach out to Fr. Derek or a vestry member. We’re all learning together.