

*Lorena Ringle is Director of Christian Formation at Christ Church North Hills in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and is shared with her permission. This article appeared in their February 2013 church newsletter. The image is of children from the congregation.*

This past summer on a quiet Sunday morning at Christ Church, a child of almost three, was intently drawing a picture at the table when I entered the Nursery. He looked up and smiled at me and told me his name, then politely asked mine. He pointed to the teen that was taking care of him that morning while his parents were in church and introduced us. Satisfied that we all knew one another, he looked at each of us and smiled a big, bright smile, then happily returned to his drawing.

In the early Christian church, children were baptized and formed in their faith by the whole Christian community; participating in prayers, listening to sermons and teachings and sharing in meals with the whole community. In 1991, the Office of Children's Ministries, drawing upon the wisdom of the early church, initiated a vision statement for the Episcopal Church that "honors children, advocates for children and recognizes their full and complete ministry within the community." It is out of this effort that [The Children's Charter for the Church](#) evolved.

The Children's Charter calls all churches to "nurture children, to minister to children, and to minister with children" and sets forth guidelines to help churches to do this. In 1997 General Convention accepted the resolution that all congregations consider their ministry with children through The Children's Charter for the Church and then in 2000 it passed a resolution encouraging all "committees and commissions to evaluate decisions on the impact it has with children by using The Children's Charter as an evaluation tool."

In November the [Diocese of Pittsburgh](#) adopted The Children's Charter and "resolved that members of each parish will be encouraged to read and study the Children's Charter to imagine and plan in an intentional way to care for, bless and to bring all children closer to God." The proposed resolution goes on to point out that much progress has been made over the years in the churches of our diocese to nurture and minister to our children, but that we are just beginning to recognize the ministry of the child.

At Christ Church we have been committed to fulfilling all aspects of The Children's Charter since its inception in 1997, however, there is always room for improvement of our ministry with children. Therefore, over the next several months we will look closely at ways to improve in all three areas of focus, but most especially in ways to foster the ministry of

children.

The first step is to realize that children do indeed minister to us.

Let's return to the story of the little boy in the Nursery. Initially we may be fooled into thinking that he is simply a friendly child, but upon deeper reflection we realize that his is an intentional act of hospitality. His charming yet skillful introduction is a conscious and intentional act of fostering community, the little community of the Nursery where he abides. Through his innocent gift of friendship, he represents Christ's love and he is ministering to us.

The Children's Charter guides us to reflect on Isaiah 11:6, "A child shall lead them." In this passage Isaiah describes an Eden-like place where a child will be able to live amongst all kinds of creatures and be able to nurture and care for them because the whole earth is filled with the "living knowledge of God". This is not an unrealistic notion for us now; indeed, God gives children unique gifts and abilities reflective of this living knowledge which we adults do not have. As we study and reflect further on The Children's Charter in the months ahead and as we spend time with the children of our parish, let us remember that Christ sees them as the very center of the Kingdom of Heaven and become more aware of how they lead, nurture and minister to us.