Teaching Children About the Church

How important is it to teach children to love the church? Basically, the church should be as important to all of us as it it to Jesus.

In the middle of a conversation about submitting to one another in situations such as marriage the Apostle Paul writes...

> Christ died for the church to make it belong to God. Christ used the word to make the church clean by washing it with water. Christ died so that he could give the church to himself like a bride in all her beauty. He died so that the church could be pure and without fault, with no evil or sin or any other wrong thing in it. Ephesians 5:25b-27 (International Children's Bible)

Jesus loved the church completely and was willing to die for it. Not because it *is perfect* but so it *could be perfect*.

So, how do children learn to love the church?

A good beginning is to understand that the church is personal. It is made up of living and breathing people and is not simply an organisation or a building.

To make this point I used two large white poster boards. One would represent "family" and the other "church".

My Family



On the family poster I drew a large outline of a house. My drawing lines went right to the edge of the paper. I then set one group of children to work drawing their families inside that house. Families come in all shapes and sizes so the picture was quite an interesting collection of faces.

Knowing my intentions with this picture I encouraged the children to be careful to keep all of the drawing inside the outline of the house.

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My Church



Meanwhile, on the other poster I had drawn an outline of a church building. While the first group was working on drawing family members I asked the second group to think about who is in their church and to draw those people inside the outline of the church building. I loved hearing the children name people from their own perspectives. Soon the building was filled with people of all ages and various backgrounds.

Again I encouraged the children to draw only inside the walls of the church building. This would be important later on in the next step.

What is a Family?



Now it was time for part two of the lesson. After we spent some time talking about the families drawn inside of that house I took my scissors and began to cut away the outside edges. There were gasps because this was not what the children expected. Basically, I cut away the house and left the pictures of the family inside.

Then we talked about how our family is still a family even if there is no house. When we go to the park are we still a family? Yes. When we get in a car and drive to another place are we still a family? Yes. One little girl even offered up that her family was still a family even though they had moved far far away from their home country to be missionaries.

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What is the Church?



Now it was time to talk about the church. I know many adults who struggle to separate worship from formal buildings but I was a bit unprepared for the initial reaction these children had when I began to cut away the edges of the church picture. You would have thought I was committing sacrilege when I cut off the outline of the building. I even heard an accusation of “church cutter” thrown my way.

But then the children began to see that only the building was missing and that the Christians were left inside. We talked about how it is the saved people who are the church…not the building. If the church decides to meet at the park instead of a church building are they still the church? Yes. If the church travels across town to deliver food to a family in need are they still the church? Yes.

We concluded with a reminder that every person in the church is loved. Christ was willing to give up his life for the church and we all agreed that he did not die for buildings.

How to Use this Lesson

- This is a great illustration when teaching about the early church in the Book of Acts. In particular use it to teach the lesson The First Church. If you would like to teach a series of lessons about the early church from the Book of Acts have a look at these lessons here:
  - Book of Acts- Good News in Jerusalem (7 Lessons)
  - Book of Acts- Beyond Jerusalem(7 Lessons)
  - Book of Acts-Mission Journeys (9 Lessons)
  - Book of Acts-From Jerusalem to Rome (5 Lessons)
- Have limited supplies available? This lesson can easily be taught by drawing pictures in the sand or on a whiteboard. After the children fill in the inside of the picture the teacher can simply erase the buildings instead of cutting them away.
- This activity can also be used in mixed age groups of children or when adults and children meet together.

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