
Children Coming and Going

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

Two Sundays ago, I was at church by accident. I was supposed to have been away, officiating at a wedding out of town. But, sadly, because of Hurricane Florence flooding, that wedding location was changed! With many last-minute scrambles, the couple moved the location here to Atlanta – and to the amazing hospitality of the beautiful Cathedral of St. Philip.

Anyway, I was not scheduled to celebrate or preach on that Sunday; but, of course, I showed up anyway. I was scheduled, destined, to lead and love this parish from among the congregation – not from up front, where most of us think the action is. But from out in the congregation, where the people of God are. That is where the action is!

The secret of good liturgy, good congregational worship (as I have been advising our priests and liturgical ministers for some time!) is not simply around the altar, nor in the pulpit, but everywhere in the room! Out among the people. In the hearts and souls of people.

So, I love, absolutely love, coming to church and being in the pew. During that 8:45 service two Sundays ago, I sat in the next to last pew. Do you know what I saw? I saw children. Many of them had adults with them! I loved again how this place is energized by children.

I can delightfully report that I saw no one being unkind, or intolerant, or impatient, with the children. I am truly puzzled when I hear adults get impatient with children in church. These are the same adults who pray solemnly that they are “children of God.” They like that phrase devotionally. But when they are around actual children, they get impatient and intolerant. They even flee. No, if we are children of God, then we have to worship and enjoy actual children, too! ([I preached last Sunday that “Children Are The Greatest.” Check it out.](#))

And what were many of those children doing? Well, honestly, they were coming and going. In our services, little people come and go throughout the service! But, again, they are not a distraction. Indeed, that day, they gave me a chance to smile with them, to greet them silently, and simply to wonder with them. This cathedral, and this world, surely seems so huge to them!

And you know what? Adults were coming and going, too. Maybe they were not physically coming and going. But I could tell their minds and spirits were coming and going. The preacher was good that Sunday! But even we preachers come and go during our sermons. Again, I don’t mind it when people come and go. Maybe God is putting something into our souls to greet us, and to cause us joy and wonder!

This phenomenon of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, this joy and wonder and mystery and awe, occurs EVERYWHERE in the room on Sundays – certainly not just up front. God is not just at the altar, and being proclaimed not just at the pulpit. The Spirit of joy and wonder is everywhere in the room. That joy and wonder comes and goes among the children each Sunday, but also among each one of us. Thank you, children, for helping us sense the Spirit! Thank you all for helping me each Sunday worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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