

## WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN? WHERE ARE THE YOUTH?

Today, on this combined Children's and Confirmation Sunday, my sermon message is a simple one. I want to say "thank you." A sincere, heartfelt "thank you."

It's easy to look around this sanctuary, feel discouraged and say, "It's Children's Sunday. So, where are the children?" Or, "We're having a Confirmation service? But I only see one confirmand. We used to have such a large, active Sunday School and so many youth in our Confirmation classes."

It's easy to get so disheartened about our lack of young people and worried about the future of our church that we forget to say "thank you" today. It's easy to focus so much on what our church doesn't have that we don't realize what we do have. This morning, on this Children's and Confirmation Sunday, I want to focus on what we do have and to give thanks for it.

I want to say "thank you." Thank you to Laura Libby, Kathy Griffiths, Karen Jackson and all those who have helped them this past year, for their continued dedication to our Sunday School. I think Kathy and Laura have been teaching for about as long as I've been the pastor here, and I've been here for over ten years.

Long after others have stepped down from teaching, Kathy and Laura have carried on. They have stayed the course. And Karen came on a few years ago in hopes that she could help rejuvenate the Sunday School program. With little recognition, Kathy and Laura continued to come up with lessons and give of their time and energy so our church can continue to have a Sunday School. And don't we all agree that it's better to at least have a small Sunday School than no Sunday School at all?

So, thank you, Laura and Kathy and Karen, and those I might be unaware of who helped them this year. I don't know how long you will want to continue doing it in the future, but we're certainly indebted to you for all you have done for our Sunday School in the past, right up until today.

I also want to say “thank you” to Penny van Duyne, Elizabeth Deal, Liane Giambalvo and any others I’m unaware of who help with our church’s nursery. What they do is so important. They welcome and nurture and play with and teach the toddlers in their care, making church a positive experience that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Yes, thank you very much, Penny, Elizabeth, Liane and others who helped in the nursery; who chose to be over in the Parish Hall, caring for the toddlers while we’re here at worship. I know that, as much as you enjoy the young ones, you miss being over here. You make a significant sacrifice for our church, and you don’t receive nearly enough recognition for what you do.

I also want to thank the young people who attended Sunday School this year. There weren’t a lot of them, but like Jesus said, “Whenever two or more are gathered in my name, I’m there with you.” There were other places they could have been on Sunday morning, but they came here. I want to recognize Harrison and Alden Griffiths and Andrew and David Libby for their attendance. I’m sure it’s not easy when your mothers are your Sunday School teachers, but we’re grateful that you come despite that. I also want to thank Eddie and Douglas Knutson and Lydia Yocz, who made it a pleasure for me to prepare and offer a children’s message.

Finally, I want to thank Sarah Taft for taking my Confirmation class. You were my one, lone student this year. I do feel bad that there wasn’t anyone else there with you to be a part of our discussions and help answer questions. I even invited your mother Mardi to take Confirmation with you and sit in on the classes so you wouldn’t have to be by yourself, but you told her you wanted to do it by yourself.

I greatly admire your courage in willingly going one-on-one with me. I admire your dedication in doing the homework assignments and sharing your beliefs, even after having your Wisdom Teeth out! And I admire your desire and determination to learn about the Christian faith and what it means to walk with Jesus. You are a very thoughtful and intelligent young woman with a bright future ahead, and it was a pleasure and honor to teach you.

Whether our young people are in the nursery learning about Jesus during their play time, in a Sunday School class reading and talking about the Christian faith, or in a Confirmation class preparing to continue her journey as a Christian, affirm her baptism and become a member of our church, the ultimate purpose of Christian Education at every age level is to have a closer relationship with God and learn how to more faithfully follow Jesus’ way of love.

The teachers and nursery workers have done their part this year in helping to make that happen. And now it’s our turn. It takes the whole faith

community working together to help continue the process of learning and growing as a Christian. That means doing things like supporting and helping the Sunday School teachers so they know they're not in this alone. It means acknowledging our young people and saying hello when you see them. It means showing an interest in them by asking them what's going on with their lives. It means sharing our faith with them and being a tangible example of what a faithful life looks like so they can see it and maybe even imitate it. It means staying connected with them and making them feel like a real and welcomed member of the First Congregational Church of Scarborough.

I began this message by saying that it's easy to look around this sanctuary, feel discouraged and say, "It's Children's Sunday. So, where are the children? Where are the youth." The answer is, they're here in our midst. So, let's give thanks to God for the young people we have, and for our Sunday School and nursery volunteers.

Let's show our young people by the way we talk to them and treat them that God loves them, and so do we.

Let's show them that they belong here in this church with us, we want them here, and we welcome them.

Let's make sure they know they can come to us to ask us questions they have about the Christian faith.

And let's do everything we can to make them feel so special and loved and cared about that they will stay here with us and consider this church their spiritual home for the rest of their lives. If we do that to every young person who comes to our church, then hopefully, by the grace of God, someday in the future there will be no need for us to ask, "Where are the children? Where are the youth?" Amen.