

FROM THE PASTOR, *From time to time, Monsignor Gentili likes to run this article with updates.*

CRY ROOM VS. NO CRY ROOM: A PASTORAL RESPONSE

Why is there no “cry room” at Our Lady of Guadalupe? That is a good question! The short answer is that one was not a part of the original design, but with good reason. Upon further reflection though, this is a part of a bigger question with regard to promoting full, active and conscious participation in the Liturgy, as is encouraged by the Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all of the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.”

Many of us are familiar with cry rooms - an environment improvisation from the 1970s to respond to felt need to keep children occupied during the Mass. While all good intentioned, the cry room segregates families from the rest of the faithful engaged in worship at Mass. A church building, on the other hand, should foster inclusivity in matters of worship since all the faithful, no matter how young, are worshipping at Mass. A more theological response would include the important challenge of trying to get all people of all ages involved and participating, rather than keeping them occupied. The cry room in the end does not resolve this dilemma.

We understand the challenges of bringing your children to Mass, particularly during the pandemic. Remember that *Nothing Compares to Being There* which is a new program through the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It is very important to bring your children to Mass and to try, as difficult and challenging as that may be, to keep them interested in the liturgical actions of the sacred Liturgy. Please note, that our parish will continue to livestream Mass. But what do I do here at OLG when my child is getting just too rambunctious? Well, may I suggest a few options?

- First of all, I highly encourage parents to continue the struggle, and embrace it, of bringing your young child (children) to Mass. The cry room does not solve the responsibility that we have as adults to introduce our children to the Liturgy and to appropriate worship with full, conscious and active participation.
- Sit near a quick exit and take the child out as soon as possible to wear off the extra energy. By the way, should anyone learn how to bottle that energy, maybe we could patent it; a sure way to pay off the church! We have the narthex and the daily Mass chapel (currently undergoing renovations which should be completed by Easter). Both are equipped with monitors so you may follow the Mass.
- In the nicer weather the front of the church and the courtyard are both equipped with speakers.
- You can also take advantage of the 9 a.m. Liturgy of the Word Service for the children (currently not being held due to COVID but will return when possible). But not all parents with youngsters go to that Mass. Down the road, I would like to offer a nursery option for parents. But this is just not feasible at the present time; the resources just have not been presented yet. Volunteers?



Remember, sometimes your full, active and conscious participation is to tend to your child (children). This is just as much of a call to holiness as being physically present in the worship area, and even considerate of the people around you. Of course it is a judgment call, as to deciding at what point you make a “beeline” for the nearest exit. My suggestion is don’t fight the child’s pent up energy or try to control it. Bridle it by taking your child out quickly, until he/she can calm down a bit. It was once said that a church that does not have crying babies is a dying church.

What to bring with you to keep your children occupied is a whole other question – food, toys, coloring books and the like? I wish I had an answer for that one. Each parent must make the judgment call. Of course you always need to consider the concern of marking up the pews and leaving items and food behind.

My message to you is not to lose heart and to keep bringing your children to Mass - even make visits to the Church during the week as a preparation for Sunday Mass. Stay afterward or come early to show and teach the child about the various shrines and pieces of liturgical art in the church. You can light a candle for a special intention, offer a prayer, and teach your child about this important devotion of our Catholic Faith. Children often times surprise us with their ability to rise to the occasion! But they need the opportunity. Cry rooms appear often to encourage behavior which is really not conducive to worship. I personally applaud the parents who are trying to raise their children to appreciate the practice of our Faith. God bless you! Keep coming to Mass and keep trying! I admire what you are doing for your children, and more importantly, so does God.

As for the rest of us, who do not have young children...be patient with those who do! Remember, you were once there too, either as a parent or as a child. Isn’t it interesting how we are all experts on raising other people’s children. The parish church is large and there are other pews, however, sometimes not pews that provide as much entertainment, especially if the homily is boring! Please do not misunderstand my sense of humor, in a rather challenging and difficult situation for all of us. However, sometimes humor allows for a common experience and appreciation that we are all in the same boat together. Joy, laughter, humor are all fruits of the Holy Spirit, so are patience, kindness and understanding.