

“Do you renew your commitment, with God’s help, to live before all God’s children in a kindly and Christian way, and to share with them the knowledge and love of Christ?”

“We do. We will nurture one another in faith, uphold one another in prayer, encourage one another in service.”

(The promise of the congregation, in the Baptismal service)

*Heavenly Father and giver of all grace, we ask your blessing on those who in baptism have received the seal of the new covenant and been made heirs of your heavenly kingdom; that through the prayers, the teaching and the example of those who love and care for them, they may grow up in the faith of Christ crucified and in the fellowship of his Church, to serve you faithfully all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*



### **The Children’s Charter (United Reformed Church)**

- 1. Children are equal partners with adults in the life of the Church.**
- 2. The full diet of Christian worship is for children as well as adults.**
- 3. Learning is for the whole Church, adults and children.**
- 4. Fellowship is for all, each belonging meaningfully to the rest.**
- 5. Service is for children to give, as well as adults.**
- 6. The call to evangelism comes to all God’s people, of whatever age.**
- 7. The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully through children as well as adults.**
- 8. The discovery and development of gifts in children and adults is a key function of the Church.**
- 9. As a Church community we must learn to do only those things in separate age groups which we cannot in all conscience do together.**
- 10. The concept of “the Priesthood of all Believers” includes children.**

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THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
**THE STEWARTRY OF STRATHEARN**  
(Aberdalgie Aberuthven Dunning Forteviot)



## **Children and the Church.**

This leaflet sets out the place of children in the life of our congregation.

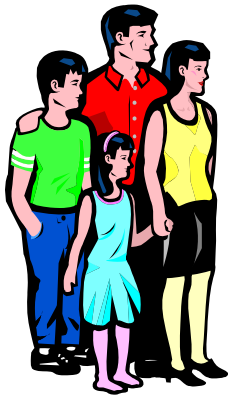
There has been a gradual change in attitude to children within the Church of Scotland in recent decades. This has largely been the result of renewed interest in the theology of Baptism as well as changes in the culture of Scotland generally.

Until the 1950s, children were not in short supply in the Sunday Schools and organisations of the Church. There was an expected progression from the “Beginners Department” through Bible Class and Youth Fellowship to Communicant’s Class and “Joining the Church”. Children had their place and that was in Sunday School. They were spoken of as the “Church of Tomorrow” and they could generally be left to the Sunday School to incubate. Their only experience of worship was the first hymn, the opening prayers, and the strange device known as the “Children’s Address” which was really there for the over 60s. The “Children’s Address” was an interruption in the flow of worship and rarely did much for children, since its moralising was above their heads and its tone was often so patronising as to be insulting.

Today we are no longer assured of a constant flow of replacement children. Those who do join us are likely to have at least one committed Christian parent-in other words, they come belonging to a family. Already these children face challenge to their faith since it is very likely that their peers will scoff at

their Church and Sunday School belonging. They are, after all, a minority in the Scotland of the twenty-first century.

What can we give them? We can offer a radically different attitude to them from that which the Church showed to children 20, 30, 40 years ago. In the first place we have a much more mature understanding of Baptism. In line with the other major Christian traditions we have recognised once more that by the Grace of God, Baptism into Jesus Christ, whatever one's age, brings the individual into membership of the Church, the Body of Christ. Profession of Faith in mature years is a celebration of that belonging-it is not a "joining". Once we recognise that the baptised child is gathered into Christ we see that he or she is not a potential member but a little brother or sister, fully part of the family of Faith.



What does this mean in practical terms? In the human family, young members have special needs in terms of physical, mental and spiritual nurture. They have responsibilities laid upon them in terms of the basic rules of the home and they have their part to play in its good running. By the same token, even the very youngest child is due not only care, but respect. "To be seen and not heard" ignores the fact that the child too has a contribution to make and a view to be heard.



On Sunday morning, when the congregation gathers for worship, there are important matters to consider.

1. Children have a right to be present with us. Sunday worship cannot exclude any member of the Christian family.
2. In line with Church of Scotland policy, no baptised person will be excluded from the Lord's Table, and children are welcome to take communion when they come with their parents.
3. Does our worship need to develop so that it is more inclusive? We must not have "kiddies" bits, far less a "dumbing down" of the service. This doesn't work for children; it is tedious for adults and, one suspects, is an unworthy offering towards God. But when children are regularly present, for instance for the prayers of intercession, language should take account of that presence. Might children not have a role to play verbally (with prayers from time to time), or in action (helping with the offerings, with a candle, bringing in the Bible, hymn books etc.)?



4. Babies and toddlers should always be welcome. The natural place for them to be is with their mothers and we will be delighted to see Baptismal vows honoured and glad that a child's earliest memories are of Church as a natural and welcoming place to belong. Babies and toddlers will make some noise and we will be happy that mothers are free to move out of the service to the crèche area if the child has clearly crossed the decibel threshold, and free to come back in if he or she has calmed down. Parents will judge when noise is clearly preventing worshippers concentrating on the service but they should always be assured that their presence with their child is appreciated by the rest of the congregation.

Children's ministry in the Stewartry is centred at Dunning and Forteviot but in all our churches we will respect our children and show interest in them. In a culture where Faith and Family are under attack we are fortunate to have little brothers and sisters like these.

*"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

St. Mark 10:14-15