

## ***AWE - Children's Ministries***

Once, when I was the Vicar of a small church in Connecticut, there was a three year old boy, Jeffrey, who came to the altar rail week after week with his mother. Because of his age his mother was reluctant to allow him to receive the Sacrament “until he was old enough to understand.” Over the course of several weeks, she and I had several conversations about why children are included in the Eucharistic Feast. We talked about Baptism as full membership. We talked about food as nourishment for the body, hugs and kisses as nourishment for the mind and soul, and the Eucharist as nourishment for the spirit. We talked about how Jesus had called little children to himself and how it is quite possible that young children “understand” more than we realize and actually come to God with a sense of awe that we have somehow lost as we matured.

Intellectually, the mother grasped what I had said, however, she was not yet convinced. The boy needed to “understand” if he was to receive. She continued to bring Jeffrey to the altar rail for a blessing. Week after week, the little boy would extend his hands to receive the host and week after week the mother would pull the boy's hands back to his chest with a thump. But, one Sunday, Jeffrey was not to be denied. He extended his hands, his mother pulled them back not once, but three times – thump, thump, thump! And then it happened. Jeffrey yelled at the top of his lungs “Jesus, Jesus! I want Jesus! Give me Jesus!” and thrust his hands forward once again to receive the host.

I remember that moment like it was yesterday. The air throughout the church was filled with the Spirit. You could have heard a pin drop as we waited in awe. I looked at the mother; the mother looked at me and with a tear in her eye said, “Okay.” I barely choked out “The Body of Christ” as Jeffrey took Jesus into his hands and pronounced a loud “amen” for all to hear. I looked up and down the altar rail and I glanced around the nave. The church was filled with smiles and individuals dabbing their eyes with tissues. Jeffrey knelt in awe before Jesus that day and we were each filled with awe as we searched our own hearts and shared his experience.

Because of this and other similar experiences, it came as no surprise to me that the word “awe” came up repeatedly when I recently met with a group of diverse individuals throughout the Diocese who are all committed to children. What I hadn't anticipated was that “AWE - Children's Ministries” would become both the title and the acronym by which we would be known as a committee.

The letters A-W-E stand for Advocacy, Worship and Education – the three teams that compose AWE – Children's Ministries. With a sense of vision of what we were to be about it wasn't long before we developed a Mission Statement and Team Goals (see box). In addition to these goals, we plan to sponsor a Children's Day with the Bishop, to revamp *The Christian Educator* and to increase the ways we communicate information to interested parties and parishes.

This new vision and expanded understanding of Children's Ministries arises out of our

call through the *Children's Charter* to be a church that not only cares for and ministers to children but also recognizes that children minister to us. Children are an awesome gift from God. Children look to God with awe in a way that often escapes adults. Our God gives us an awesome task to care for and minister to children and an awesome gift in being ministered to by children.

In the months ahead, I will attempt to unpack the AWE of Children's Ministries. In the meantime, if you have a heart for children and are ready to get caught up in the "awe" of God give me a call; additional members for the various teams are welcomed.

The Rev. Debra J. Kissinger  
Missioner to Children and Child Advocate

## ***AWE - Children's Ministries***

- ***Enabling children to experience and live God's love through Advocacy, Worship and Education***

### ***Advocacy Team***

- Keeping the Diocese informed, through Parish Advocates, about spiritual, economic, social and political issues which relate to the rights and well-being of children
- Leading individuals and parishes to action for the welfare of those who cannot vote or speak for themselves

### ***Worship Team***

- Providing worship, education and resources for clergy, parishes and parents in order to nurture worship practices
- Enabling and encouraging the full inclusion and participation of children in the life and liturgy of the parish.

### ***Education Team***

- Facilitating the training and nurturing of teachers and leaders
- Disseminating information about resources for education and spiritual development of children
- Developing Diocesan goals for Christian Education