

Watch Night with Children and Families

Build the Background

How do we help children and families keep God in their New Year's Eve celebrations? Frame the events through the lenses of transformation and watching!

We often hear people talking about New Years resolutions. Watch Night has its roots with John Wesley's desire to provide the people with an opportunity to reflect upon the year that has passed and prayerfully prepare for the new year. Often times, the Wesley Covenant prayer is used.

*I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.*

Children are gifted at noticing changes, patterns, and nuances that often escape adults. When you consider how to observe Watch Night with your congregation, be sure to allow time for the children to reflect and respond to the changes they know we need here on Earth in the next year so that more people know God's love.

Using Text and Song

Get Scripture into the hands of the children and families before Watch Night. Send out an email blast with links to the Scripture. Send home sticky notes with the passages printed on them. As they leave church the Sunday before/

Sunday of New Year's Eve, set up a creation station where they make bookmarks with the Scripture printed. Suggested passages include:

Matthew 22: 34-40

Micah 6: 8

Philippians 4: 4-9

Add in questions to help the children and families focus their understanding.

Examples include:

- I wonder how I can better serve God this coming year.
- I wonder how I can love God better this coming year.
- I wonder how I can love my neighbors better this year.
- I wonder what my neighborhood would be like if we all loved God and our neighbors better this coming year.
- I wonder what small habit I can take on this coming year so I can hear God better.
- I wonder what small change I can make this coming year so that I show love to all I meet.

Be sure to suggest some hymns for children and families to listen to and sing. The following selections are available on Amazon Music and iTunes.

- O God, Our Help In Ages Past
- I Want To Walk as a Child of the Light
- What Does the Lord Require of You?
- Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Connecting the Meaning of the Watch Night to Daily Life

Children have a keen spiritual connection to our God. Because children are so naturally curious and observant, they will notice injustices and inequities in daily life. They begin to question why events happen and why certain people are able to act in malevolent ways. They want to see suffering end, just as adults do. Jesus has promised to return again, and at that time, the wrongs will be righted. What a glorious time that will be! Watch Night can be the time to refocus our efforts to follow Jesus's commands given in Matthew 22. We cannot control the actions of others, but we can decide how we are to act and to commit to walking in the paths set forth for us by Jesus. People spend time

making new year's resolutions. Watch Night is the time to rededicate our efforts to learn more about our faith and to serve our God better.

Send children and families home with a Watch Night bundle. In a small zippy bag, put a few squares (3 in. by 3 in.) of paper, a tea light candle, and an instruction page, explaining that each family member is to write or draw one new habit they want to adopt in the coming year. The habit should be one that will help them draw closer to God or one that will help them love their neighbors better. They can then take the tea light candle and place their papers around them and pray a blessing over their efforts. Encourage them to keep the papers in a prominent spot in the home and to pray over them monthly.

Consider creating family prayer partners for the upcoming year. They could be in the same family or from the church congregation. The partners can keep watch over each other, holding each other's joys and concerns in prayer, and chat monthly (either in person or via email or text) to update each other with concerns.

FAMILIES CREATE TOGETHER

Get copies of the Wesley Covenant prayer into the homes. Set up a small station in the church where families can take pre-printed copies of the prayer, mount them on paper, and sign. If you have access to a small laminating machine, have them run it through so that it can be preserved longer. Encourage the families to use this prayer throughout the year, particularly in busy times, difficult situations, and happy occasions. Imagine how powerful it could be to repeat this activity yearly and have the families look at how their signatures change as the years progress!

ACCESSIBLE WORSHIP

Consider supplying the children with eyeglasses and sticky notes printed on card stock. They can make notes (either written or drawn) about what they noticed during the Watch Night worship service that speaks towards watching and transforming.



I am watching for these changes this year:



This is something I can do this year to show God's love to my neighbors.
