



Complex Child E-Magazine

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A Unique Church by Allison Swets

You may have never worshipped in a church with a child with special needs. If not, you are missing out. Why? Because they sometimes can add a unique perspective to the whole service.

My son Roger, who is ten with cerebral palsy, is quite a celebrity at our church. For his birthday, he gets a special visit from the pastor, and if the date happens to land on a Sunday, be prepared to hear a special prayer for him during the service. Afterward, everyone makes a point to wish him a happy birthday, and his celebrity quotient rises just a little more.



Of course, church is one of his favorite places to go. What's not to like, with all that attention, great music, getting to sit next to his Daddy, and taking his obligatory snooze during the sermon no matter what we do to try and keep him awake?

One of his unique contributions to the church service is some of the commentary he so freely provides to everyone. When the pastor announces the next song number he lets it be known that he grants permission with a loud "OK." If the sermon is not quite to his

liking, he lets out a hearty yawn that is quite visible to the pastor since we sit in the first row. And when the last hymn is sung he lets out a scream of pure delight. If I tried that, I'd be excommunicated, but they love him all the more for it. Where can I get that kind of mojo?

One way that he has further endeared himself to the church family is through his walking. Although he uses a wheelchair, we are very adamant that he get out of that chair at every opportunity. That's why he sits in the middle of the pew and not outside of it in his chair. That's why when service is over, we always try to walk him down the aisle, taking assisted steps with mom.

It is this last activity that has endeared him to the church family. You see, as you can imagine, Roger does not walk very quickly, so after the bulk of the crowd has left the sanctuary, he is probably on his fifth step. And that's only if he is in the mood to walk. Some stragglers see my plight and become his onsite cheerleaders. This helps him want to take more steps because he is showing off, as boys are wont to do.

But one person in that church has been his walking buddy from the start. It's Mr. Mingerink. No one gets Roger walking like Mr. Mingerink. With his bubbly personality and unique courage to interact with people with special needs, he is always a welcome sight.

We sit in the first row so we have a ways to go to exit out the back. Mr. Mingerink is an elder so he is required to greet people at the back. If Roger gets wind of his voice it's racing day! Off he goes, without too much prodding, to shake the hand of one of his favorite people in the world. Who would have thought that one of my 10-year-old son's best friends would be a 58-year-old kid!

So if you are ever in the area, visit us at Grace URC Church in Alto, Michigan. Have a chuckle at Roger's free commentary. And whatever you do, make sure you cheer him on to walk down the aisle afterward. I need all the help I can get.

Allison is a stay-at-home mom who homeschools two of her three children. When not tending to her kiddos, husband or three insolent dogs, she is studying to be a nurse and loves blogging and crafting. You can find her at www.candogoods.wordpress.com