

## Church Service Family Style: How a 3 Year Old Preacher & a Beagle Made Our Sunday Unforgettable

One unforgettable Sunday our church had a three-year-old preacher, an organist who could play one song, an altercation involving the offering and a visiting beagle who knocked over the pulpit. It happened this way.

Our family car was down at the shop getting its indigestion cured and our shop recuperating from an over-exposure of truck bumper. So there we were, without wheels, on a rainy Sunday morning. Since our church is clear across town and out of walking distance, we decided to hold our own family church service in our living room.

Our four kids were delighted. Kurt, the senior sibling at nine years old, drew up plans while we finished breakfast.

"I'll be the preacher," Garin volunteered with glee.

"Oh no," groaned the two older kids. Garin is almost four.

"I'll play the organ," offered Kendy our kindergarten girl.

"All you can play is 'Three Blind Mice,'" complained Kurt.

"Well," replied Kendy, "we can sing that!"

"In church?" questioned Kurt sarcastically.

At this point baby Garth, our one-and-a-half year old, poured his orange juice over his shoulder, drenching Scratchy, our calico cat, who was waiting for stray bits of bacon and other assorted goodies occasionally floating down from the breakfast table. I declared breakfast dismissed, and we adjourned to the bathroom to prepare for church.

At nine o'clock sharp the service began with the opening chords of "Three Blind Mice." Kurt, the song leader, asked Garin to lead in prayer. Garin squinted and prayed in one rapid breath, "Bless this food in Jesus' name, Amen."

When Mom had convinced the older kids that they shouldn't laugh in church, no matter what their brother prayed, the service continued.

Kurt lead us in singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," to the tune of "Three Blind Mice." The first verse came out fairly well, but since there was only one hymnbook, the next three verses got mumbled pretty badly. Plus the fact that when the last verse was over Kendy still had the last half of "Three Blind Mice" to play.

Next came the scripture reading, and since Mom was requested to do that, it went smoothly, except for the sound of Kendy's music lesson book bouncing across and off the organ keyboard.

Kurt asked me to take up the offering. I used a saucer for a collection plate and began the rounds. "Can I have some money to put in the offering, Daddy?" asked Kendy as I stopped at the organ bench. So I got some change out of my wallet, gave it to her, and she put it in the saucer. The same process was repeated at each stop, except when I came to Garin. I gave him two dimes and a nickel, and he put the nickel in the saucer and the two dimes in his pocket.

"Put the money in the offering, Garin," I ordered.

"I did."

"I mean the dimes."

"Why?"

"Because we're giving our money to God."

"I gave a nickel."

"Give the dimes, too."

"I can't find them."

"They're in your pocket, Garin. Now put them in the plate."

"I don't want to."

There was a brief intermission while I gave Garin a little friendly persuasion in the bedroom. When we returned, he put his dimes in the plate, wiped away his tears, and the service was resumed.

We sang two more songs, both to Kendy's only tune. "Holy, Holy, Holy" didn't turn out too badly, but "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" left something to be desired.

Finally it was time for the sermon and Garin made his way up to the TV tray, which was served as the pulpit. He began to speak with great fervor, illustrating each point with his index finger, like he was scolding the air. His sermon topic rambled a bit, wandering from one important theological topic to another, such as how to drive a toy tractor, how to jump over mud puddles and how to keep a little girl next door from biting. He was just building up to an impassionate climax when our beagle, Bimbo, came streaking through the living room in a hot pursuit of Scratchy, who had snatched part of Bimbo's breakfast. I think it was Bimbo's forward momentum that made me topple over like that as I tried to grab her, knocking over the pulpit and sending the preacher scurrying for cover. By the time the two intruders had been ejected from the church and the pulpit had been restored to its former place, Garin had forgotten his sermon topic, and instead wanted the "David and Goliath" record played on the phonograph. So we listened to the story on the record, interrupted only by the sound of baby Garth riding his Wonderhorse and singing at the top of his voice "Jesus Loves Me."

We closed the service with "Abide with Me," sung to the same tune gears several times earlier. Kurt led in the benediction, asking God to forgive Garin for not putting his money in the offering, and also requesting that Kendy learn to play a new song.

Perhaps our homemade church service was not the most orthodox; perhaps some might even think it irreverent. And yet in their own childlike ways, our kids were worshipping the One who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of heaven." When the kids are grown and gone, and all other church services have been blurred together in our memories, this one hilarious yet precious Sunday morning service will linger on.

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### About the Author

Duane Shinn is the father of four now-grown kids, and is also the author of the popular free 101-week e-mail newsletter titled "Amazing Secrets Of Exciting Piano Chords & Sizzling Chord Progressions" with over 56,500 current subscribers. Those interested may obtain a free subscription by going to <http://www.playpiano.com/>