

## Tips for Introducing the Children's Offertory

The good news is that you don't need a lot of time or energy for rehearsals. The bad news is that the first time (and maybe even the second time) leading this rite will feel clunky. The second piece of good news is that it will get better. We recommend that you introduce the Children's Offertory for a season. Lent works well. Expect a clunky start on weeks one and two. It will likely really click on weeks three and four. You might hear someone say they want this every week. But by weeks five and six, it is starting to feel tired, the kids may be less enthusiastic, and it is time to pack it away for another season. I've often said to those wanting it every week "I like my Christmas tree too, but I can only really manage enjoying it for a season at a time."

Another helpful tip is to assign tasks by age. Very little children can take part – my daughter was three the first time she was involved and she carried in the corporal. But assign tasks based on ability. And how breakable your vessels are! I tend to give very small children roles like bringing the corporal or the lavabo towel. Older kids tend to have better developed fine motor skills and are better equipped to handle roles like pouring wine and water. Some kids have the temperament to be careful with fine vessels while others do not.

The verses are staggered with a musical interlude for a reason. Some tasks, like pouring wine, take longer. Or some children can complete a task faster. Let your musicians watch the children's pace during the musical interlude. Add more verses if the action is moving slowly; skip verses if the children are moving more quickly.

If you have lots of kids, spread out the jobs. So a little child could come forward with a purificator alongside the child with the chalice. Add extra jobs so everyone gets a turn – for a time, I had a child bring the altar missal so everyone got a role every week. If you have fewer kids, invite adults to take a role. Children love to teach adults and help them along.

Have a sturdy step-stool handy. Many children need a step or two to reach the counter height of most altars. Have spare and clean options available. It is very likely someone will drop a purificator on the floor, so having a clean one handy for use during communion can be helpful.

Consider using different vessels. I know, this seems to undermine the principle of trusting the children with the real thing. But, if you're introducing it in Lent, that might be an opportunity to use sturdier, less ornate, less breakable, simpler vessels. Maybe your church does this anyways. My current parish puts away the silver for Lent and brings out wooden and pottery vessels. Another great idea is having the children make their own vessels. I've done this for three parishes now by working with a painter to have the children paint their own vessels.

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pottery studio. Use ready to paint wine glasses, bowls, cruets, and plates. Have an activity day where the children paint the vessels and then get the pottery studio to glaze and fire the vessels. Ask for food safe quality. The turn around can be as short as a few days, but might take a week or more, so plan ahead. The gift of this option is multifold: altar guilds are sometimes happier to have kids use alternative vessels. The kids learn about the types of vessels as they paint them. Finally, it becomes a type of meaningful stewardship for the child. They create something special and rather than taking it home for themselves to keep, it is gifted to the church and they get to see it used as the community gathers for the sacrament. Children have no money to give, so it is rare and valuable for them to see something precious to them gifted to the church to be used and enjoyed. If your church has a tradition of blessing items for worship, then be sure to let the kids see their created items blessed for use at God's holy table.