

Stopping in at the preschool

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I stopped in at the preschool this afternoon. It is right across from my church, and "relating to the preschool" was actually in my letter of call. So, once a week, I lead a brief chapel service for a hundred or so preschoolers, and, lately, I have been stopping by for a half-hour or an hour, just dropping in on a couple of classes to see what they are doing.

At first, when I tried to stop over, I discovered it was nap time, so I resolved to try a different time. The next time I stopped in late in the day, late in the week. Everything was winding down for the weekend.

When I peeked in one classroom, the children were singing. Their song was vaguely familiar.

As it turned out, they were learned to sing "Silent Night" in Spanish. I stayed and listened, and resolved that I should learn "Silent Night" in Spanish, too. It seemed like a good idea.

After the singing was over, a small group of boys asked me to stay and play with them. They got out a box of interlocking tubes, a toy that didn't exist when I was growing up. The point is to put the tubes together in intricate designs and send marbles down along the tubes. None of us was that good at putting the tubes together, and at the end, we were just playing with the marbles.

I learned the boys' names, and that they were all four (although one of them claimed to be ten).

After a while I ventured down to the kindergarten classroom. That class looked pretty laid-back. They were resting, and there was some down time to talk. In a little while they were going to start watching a movie, but for a few minutes, we got to hang out. They all wanted me to know when their birthdays were. One little girl said she intended to invite me to her party. I also learned their names and a few things they liked, especially their favorite colors.

I am not sure exactly what I am doing, stopping in at the preschool. It is not writing a sermon, visiting a shut-in, or planning a worship service. It is not visiting the superintendent of schools, the mayor, or the chamber of commerce. It is not strategic planning for the future. It is just learning names and birthdays, and favorite colors, and building a tube. I do not know what good I am doing, just that I am getting down on the floor, and then being all creaky when I stand up.

But "relating to the preschool" is in my letter of call, so I have permission to do it. I have permission to put down the heavy burdens of ministry for a while and play. I have permission to take a break from dealing with grief and sorrow, from deep thoughts and difficult situations and the future of the church. I have permission to sit on the floor, sing songs, play with toys, and enter the kingdom of God, where the Holy Spirit plays and helps me remember who I am.

There are many things to do, but there is just one thing to be: child of God. There are many things to do, but one identity to nurture, and one name to become. In everything we do, in every life we touch, in every mission of service or love or justice, there is just one strategy: to learn the names. To tell the names. To tell them they are beloved. To set them free to play.

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