



Children & Families Ministry Newsletter

Telling the stories of faith

My people, listen to my teaching.

Pay attention to what I say.

I will open my mouth and tell stories.

I will speak about things that were hidden.

They happened a long time ago.

We have heard about them and we know them.

Our people who lived before us have told us about them.

We won't hide them from our children.

We will tell them to those who live after us.

We will tell them about what the LORD has done that is worthy of praise.

We will talk about his power and the wonderful things he has done.

Psalms 78:1-4 (NIRV)

As we gear up for another year of ministry with children and their families, this psalm is a great reminder that telling the stories of "what the LORD has done" is one of the most powerful ways we have of nurturing faith and helping people of all ages to grow in their knowledge of and relationship with God.

The psalmist is very clear that the stories of faith are not just for the adults, not reserved for those old enough to understand the tricky and messy parts of the story. As we read through the psalm, the early history of Israel is told with brutal

honesty. God's "power and the wonderful things he has done" are shown to be all the more remarkable because the love and commitment of the LORD to his people is not returned. Yet the psalmist says, "We won't hide them from our children."

How does that line up with what you think about which stories children should be told?



Another aspect to consider is the context in which the stories are told. The psalmist says, "He commanded our people who lived before us to teach his laws to their children ... then they would put their trust in God ..." (vv 5, 6). Parents are urged to teach their children with a clear purpose in mind - that they will trust and be loyal to God. But bringing children up in the faith is not only the responsibility of parents. The

wider context is the gathered congregation ("My people, listen to my teaching ..." sounds like the opening line of the sermon!). If we want children to understand the stories of faith and to grasp their significance, then they need to see how the community values and responds to those stories. Hearing the Bible read in church and participating in the communal response (the preaching, the prayers, the statements of faith, and the shared meal) help us to grow as the community of faith.

Continued on page 2...

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

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Issue 1 2011

Inside this issue:

Getting playgroup into the hearts and minds of the church	2
Help—I need a team	3
Using the Bible with children	4
Running games with children	5
2011 Training dates	6

Getting playgroup into the hearts and minds of the church

Is the playgroup at your church seen as a chance for the mums with toddlers to meet up, a nice way to get out of the house, and as a bonus, it feels good to say that there is something happening that connects with local families? The good news is that it is possible to change the hearts and minds of the people in your church so that the playgroup becomes valued and supported as a key and strategic element of the parish's mission.

Your church leadership (clergy and Vestry) must have a vision for "the Playgroup as a ministry of the church." Playgroups are a unique opportunity for a church to connect with families with young children. So the playgroup should be a key element of your parish Mission Action Plan. Have a strategy that recognises the opportunities to build genuine friendships between playgroup families and church members. Be committed to providing an excellent playgroup experience for the sake of the gospel.

Use every opportunity to promote the vision, "Playgroup as a ministry of the church".

Keep the playgroup visible, because it is a ministry that happens mid-week, "out of sight, out of mind". Use different ways to visually "tell the story".

You could display photos showing what playgroup has been doing and the friendships between church members and playgroup families.

Run a slideshow on the data projector as people are coming into church, with photos and dot points to tell a story, and general prayer points.

Contribute regular articles or news items to the church newsletter or Sunday bulletin, advertising playgroup times, special playgroup events, requesting volunteers or listing prayer points.

Use the power of storytelling to raise the level of interest in playgroup. You could tell the congregation how God has been at work in the playgroup

or how God has given the playgroup team opportunities for ministry. If someone in the playgroup has come to faith or been excited to see God at work, tell the congregation about it; you could interview them, or stand with them as they tell their story or tell the story on their be-

half.

Make the playgroup the ministry of the whole church by regularly asking for support. Christian families from your church with small children should be encouraged to join the playgroup. Ask some cell groups to commit to pray regularly for the playgroup, keeping them informed about needs or events. Have a working bee to maintain the playgroup room or playground; find people to prepare materials for craft projects; set up a group to provide meals for families when babies are born or in crisis situations and another to provide pamper/care packs for mums with newborn babies. Have someone to send birthday cards to playgroup children on behalf of the church.

Whenever possible, ask people to get involved in helping. It might be easier to "do it yourself" but playgroups that are a ministry of the church, rather than your sole responsibility are more effective and have greater missional impact.

Be committed to providing an excellent playgroup experience for the sake of the gospel.



Playgroup is a place for genuine friendships and sharing the love of Christ.

Telling the stories of faith - from front page

Allowing children to participate in worship strengthens their sense of belonging to the family of God, and this is a very important element of faith development.

The tragedy of the stories of faith is that so often the people forgot "God's power and the wonderful things God has done", or failed to let the stories inform and shape their

relationships with God and with each other. Observing how we the adults respond to the stories of faith and how in turn we live out our stories of the wonderful things God is doing with us and through us, as individuals and as a community is a powerful factor in helping children develop faith.



Help—I need a team!

One of the biggest hurdles to starting or continuing a ministry to children and families is finding people who are willing and able to put the time into being on the team that is needed. Don't be discouraged - this is a time for asking God to bring about his purposes.

Have a vision and a plan. Know what you want to do (e.g. run a 2-day Easter outreach in the second week of the holidays for up to 50 Grade 1-4 children from the 2 local primary schools).

Promote your vision (including enough of the plan that people will be convinced that you can achieve it and that there is a part for them to play).

Know the tasks that need to be done to achieve your vision. Using your plan, write job descriptions and/or a list of what needs to be done. Some things will be achieved by people filling a role

(e.g. music group leader, caterer), others by sharing out tasks (e.g. 2 people for registration table, 1 person sweeping the floor, 3 people serving afternoon tea)

When you are desperate for volunteers - not just anyone will do!

Observe how people relate to children. Who are the people in your congregation who give children their time and attention? Ask other people, especially your vicar and others who have leadership in the parish, to suggest possible recruits.

Pray for wisdom and discernment, and ask others to pray.

Personally speak to the people that you think might have gifts

in relating well to children and have skills that are needed. Give them a written invitation to join your team, (include your vision, and an outline of your plan - so they can see where they might fit in). **Do not** ask for an immediate response. Tell them you will call them in a few days and ask them to pray and think about whether God might be calling them to this ministry.

When you follow potential team members up, tell them about your vision and plan. You may have a role you want them to fill - tell them why you think they could. If they have never been involved in children's ministry before, ask them to take on a support role.

Listen carefully to the person you are recruiting. Do they have good reasons for not committing to this ministry? If time is an issue, are there tasks they could take on to support the team? Some things can be done outside of the actual time you are with the children (e.g. preparing craft, shopping, letter-boxing). Have any issues come up that make you uncomfortable about having the person on your team? You may want to talk such concerns over with your vicar.

Discuss duty of care with your recruit. Anyone working directly with children needs to go through the application process (see Duty of Care Handbook).

If the person needs more time to think and pray, give them a deadline and follow them up.

Never sign someone up for an indefinite time. Make the time-span clear and honour it. If it is for a year or more have a 2-3 month trial. Put a date in your diary to sit down together and talk about how things are going, and if the person will continue. Be honest if there are problems; you need to be supporting and giving feedback as the person learns their role, so you will know if the person is learning and growing or if it is not going to work out. It may be that this

person does one part of their role well but is not suited to other tasks that are involved. If so, can you find realistic ways of sharing the responsibilities with other members of the team?

When you are desperate for volunteers - not just anyone will do!

Pray, asking God to provide the people you need. Be open to possibilities - there may be people you never thought of asking because they were too old, too young, too shy, too uneducated.

Do you need to go back to your vision? Pray, ask your parish leadership to pray and discern with you, maybe God has another plan. Children & Families Ministry is not just your responsibility! If it is not a priority for your parish, you need to start working on the leaders in your parish. Children are a priority for God, so keep praying and talking to the people who will support you and who can win over the hearts and minds of the key people in your parish.



Find the people in your congregation who give children their time and attention

Using the Bible with children

Give children the big picture of how the different books and stories of the Bible fit into the big picture of God's love and care for all creation, including the themes of creation, judgement, salvation, redemption, restoration.

As you prepare ask yourself, "Why is this story included in the Bible?" What does it have to say about God, about Jesus, about God's interaction with his creation, about God's plan for salvation and redemption? What does it say about our response to God's purposes? How does it affect the way we relate to God and to his creation?

Postmodern children need to "learn for themselves" rather than be told facts, and they need to explore and engage with the Bible rather than be told what it means. They need to create meaning for themselves. The task of the adult is to be the companion on the journey, the guide, the fellow-learner. (This means careful

preparation of lessons or presentations, more rather than less.)

Children need to encounter, explore and engage with the biblical text. They need to find the answers to the questions, "What does this story tell us about God? What does it tell us about God's plans for his creation and for his people?" How you do this will partly depend on the age of the children.

Put the story into context. Where did it happen? What was life like for those people? Where does it fit into



Let children explore and engage with the Bible rather than be told what it means.

Photo by Kriss Szkurlatowski

the over-arching theme of the work and purposes of God? Provide the resources for the children to discover answers for themselves, particularly older children (in upper primary and early secondary school).

Allow children to decide how they will respond to the Bible rather than give them a life application. We need to trust that God will be at work as they think about, discuss and play with the text, and use it in prayer and worship.

Postmodern children need to "learn for themselves" rather than be told facts

Leaders to Go

Leaders to Go is a national children and families ministry leadership conference. If you are a paid or voluntary "leader of leaders" of church or school based ministry with pre-schoolers, primary-school children and families, this is for you. Featuring: Four keynotes (Leadership, Advocacy, Evangelism, Discipleship - LEAD), Market place & expo, live-in community, individual retreat, small groups, reflection, prayer & networking
Cost: \$295
Details: www.leaderstogo.org.au



Running games with children

When playing games in groups, make sure any visiting child or children can feel comfortable. If they don't know many people, make sure that the friends who brought them along have permission to keep them on their teams. When forming groups avoid inviting the children to choose their teams as they usually pick the children who are good at games (or are popular, or are in their group of friends) and the ones who are further down the list of children chosen later or last can feel embarrassed and unwanted. The following suggestions keep the leaders firmly in charge, speed up the team creating process, and avoid making children feel unwelcome or unwanted.

These suggestions keep the leaders in charge, speed up the team creating process, and avoid making children feel unwelcome or unwanted.

Numbering Off

This is a good method of dividing the children into even groups, especially when you have a mix of ages, sizes and abilities. Line the children up from shortest to tallest and number them off according to the number of groups that you want i.e. If you're having four groups, number the children from 1-4, send all the 1's to one group, all the 2's to the next group etc. If you use the

'numbering off' method it's a good idea to send each child straight to that group when you give them a number, as children tend to forget their numbers then you have to start again!

Link or Hook - Up

This is a game that results in teams of a specific number. Leader calls out "Link" or "Hook Up" [with a number] and the children have to link up their arms with a group of children that match that number. The Games Leader can call out a series of link numbers before arriving at the number required for the game.

Boys and Girls - Cross Cultural Sensitivity

No games in your program should require inappropriate mixing of genders. If it is inappropriate in your group for boys and girls to play some of the games together, particularly the ones that involve touching or holding hands, split the group for the games. You can bring the groups back together for the story and teaching points.

Ending Games

Most non-competitive games (without winners or losers) have no specific ending. Stop-

ping the game at an appropriate time to move to the next activity will be the decision of



Knowing how to organise children into teams helps children feel safe and welcome.

the Games Leader. It is a good idea not to play these games for too long (5-8 minutes is a good duration), as it is best to end

the game while the children are still enjoying themselves, not wait until they are tired of it. In this way you can maintain the enthusiasm of the children and they will be keen to play the game again in the future. You might like to let the children know that the game will be ending soon by saying something like, "This will be our last round" or "We'll end the game when two more children have a turn."

Leader's Training Tips, www.max7.org

Visit the Max 7 website for this and many other resources for children & families ministry.





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Children don't grow in status and importance in the eyes of God as they grow up. Being an adult doesn't make us more able to please God, or even better able to serve God. Children are precious to God just because they are children.

For information and support in your ministry with children and their families (including support for Playgroups) contact:

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2011 Training Dates

Aim to put two or more of these dates in your diary, and organise a group from your church to attend some training together. To find out more about any of these events, check the Upcoming Events on the [Children and families](#) page of the Melbourne Anglican website, or contact Dorothy Hughes, your friendly diocesan Children & Families Ministry Facilitator.

26 February Footprints—Ministry To Children Conference *Mt Evelyn*

20 March Refresh *Geelong*

14 May BOOST *Frankston*

17-20 May Leaders to Go *Queensland*

28 May Stories of Childhood Playgroup Conference *Parkville*

13-15 July Godly Play Conference *NSW*

30 July Overflow *Parkville*

13 August OAC Ministries Creative children's ministry seminar *Mitcham*

24-26 August Kids R Us kidshaper *Richmond*

17 September Christian Playgroup Network Playgroup Conference/AGM

March - May Join the Dots *Parkville/Frankston*

February - June OAC Ministries Power Up *Doncaster*

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