

Where are the children?

Seek, pray, serve – a simple framework to develop churches' engagement with children



'Where are the children?' is a question for many churches today. It is tempting to look back with rose-tinted spectacles to an earlier period when there were large Junior Church classes, thriving children's clubs and many families making their presence felt on a Sunday.

Times have changed, and, for a whole host of reasons, many churches now have fewer children or even none at all. However our calling today is to read the signs of the times, and to respond in ways that build the kingdom.

Jesus said: 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:14, RSV). In this, we can hear Jesus asking us: 'Where are the children?' So, this booklet invites us to consider where children are in our hearts, our premises, our community, our church life and our worship.

Using the simple model of **Seek • Pray • Serve** (originally developed by Jess Poole, Synod of Scotland, based on Matthew 7:7)

We encourage you to:

Seek: Discover the answers to 'where are the children?' for your church. *'Seek and you will find.'*

Pray: Prayerfully discern how your congregation could be extending Jesus' welcome to children in the most appropriate ways for your context. *'Ask and it will be given you.'*

Serve: Start to serve children directly or indirectly in ways that reflect your gifts and resources. *'Knock and it will be opened to you.'*

Our vision is to see children playing their part in the mission of God. This requires every church to find and fulfil their role in supporting children. It could range from praying for the local primary school to running children's clubs and events; from providing baby basics for struggling families to enabling children to lead worship; from blessing local volunteer children's workers with cakes to supporting children's passion for justice and environmental issues. If we all play our part, then Christ can build us up together and his kingdom will grow.

We pray this booklet will be the start of an exciting journey that will connect your church with children in myriad ways and enable you to experience the blessing and hope of engaging with those beloved by Jesus.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Sam Richards' and the signature on the right is 'Jenny Mills'.

Dr Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work

The Revd Jenny Mills, Convenor of Children's and Youth Work Committee

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Where are the children in your hearts?

Seek: Spend some time identifying the children you carry with you in your heart. Think about:

- **Personal relationships:** Children you feel connected to through family, friends, neighbours.
- **Children who share particular passions with you:** Sport, arts, drama, hobbies, environment, social justice.
- **Children coping with particular issues:** Health, disability, poverty, family breakup, bereavement, homelessness, victims of crime or abuse.
- **Children in or from other countries:** Migrant and asylum seekers, those suffering the impact of war, famine, natural and man-made disasters.

Reflect on why you feel connected to these children – is this an invitation from God to love your neighbour? Is it a calling to care for these children of God, to be part of the community with a shared responsibility for them (it takes a village to raise a child)?

‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40, NRSV)

Pray: Consider how you could hold these children in prayer.

On your own: put a photo of the child or children somewhere you will see it every day and pray for them; when you see children in your daily life or in the media be prompted to pray; use particular dates or days of the week to pray for children in particular circumstances:

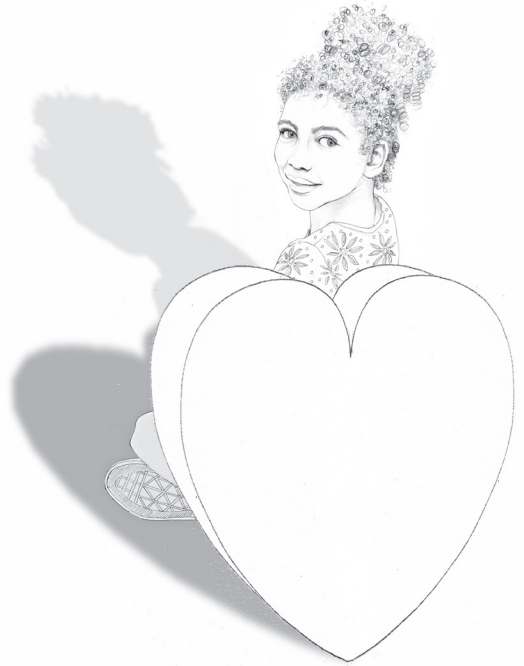
*...Wednesday's child is full of woe,
Thursday's child has far to go,
Friday's child is loving and giving,
Saturday's child works hard for a living...*

Get a copy of *The Gift* booklet (see the advert on page 24) and use the calendar to pray for a particular child you are a formal or informal Grandparent or Godparent to, or have a special link with.

With a few others: commit to pray together regularly for the children in your hearts; find an organisation supporting children connected to a passion, issue or world context that is close to your hearts, then subscribe to their updates and pray for their work; use a book of prayers written by children.

As a whole church: how could these children be regularly included in the prayer life of the congregation. Use the intercessions; share updates in notices, newsletters, noticeboards; use mission giving; invite speakers; invite children to pray/use prayers written by children.

Prayer is priestly duty shared by all Christians (1 Peter 2) – a role representing God to people, and people to God, through offering and sacrifice. We can hold children in the presence of God by holding them in our hearts through prayer. We can offer our prayers for them and with them. We can be a channel for God's blessing, a prompt for God's intervention, and a provocation to the people of God (including ourselves!) to respond through loving action.



Serve: Consider how you could serve the children in your hearts, including:

Direct connection: where there are relationships. How might these be nurtured for the benefit of the children? What supportive contact could you offer. What practical support might be possible? Where there are shared passions, how might these be developed, and skills and experiences shared?

Sometimes serving children involves serving parents and carers, or whole families through neighbourliness.

Raise awareness of particular issues faced by children: how might you use your voice and spheres of influence to highlight the struggles and difficulties children are facing? How might you enable them to enjoy more of their childhood, to play, learn and grow? What could you do to put children at the heart of your congregation and wider community?

Children of the world: 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. How might you be part of the global movement to fight for the rights and needs of children around the world?

Audit your resources (time, energy, skills, gifts, money/possessions, faith): reflect on how you might spend some of these in line with your priorities for the children in your heart.

'On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.'
(1 Corinthians 12:22-27, NRSV)

Where are the children in your premises?

Seek: In all likelihood, your church premises are already used for community activities and clubs, most probably including clubs for babies, toddlers, children and families – sometimes faith-related, sometimes secular. You may have uniformed organisations meeting in your hall, playgroups or pre-school, toddlers, mums and babies, dance or drama schools, and you may even let your hall for parties. You may run a midweek children's club or Messy Church, holiday club or occasional community events. You may host a foodbank or advice centre. You may support your local school for school visits. For many children, this may be their main or only contact with the Church and a Christian community. What an opportunity for mission!

Pray: Take some time to find out about what goes on in your church premises.

- Pray for those people who organise and lead the children in their activities, that they may be loving and sensitive to the needs of the child and provide the support that is needed.
- Pray for the children, that they may grow and thrive through their activities and that God will have a hand in their lives.
- Pray for courage for the members of the church as they represent the welcoming arms of God through their hospitality, involvement and care.

As a church, could you produce a prayer diary or a spot in your notice sheet to highlight a different activity or group for prayer each week?



Serve: There are many practical ways in which the minister, elders and congregation of the church can build links and relationships. Remember, the important thing is that families and children begin to recognise the church as a place where they belong and are valued, are welcome and supported; a place where the love of God is demonstrated to them in tangible ways.

Think about the welcome they feel in the building. Are the toilets clean, light and kitted out with step stools/potties/child seats? Is the room a safe environment, free from sharp edges and splinters? Are the rooms clearly signposted so they can be found easily? Is the paintwork clean and bright? In short, are the rooms they use a nice place to be?

Noticeboards are often the face of the church for people visiting. Are they tidy and attractive to look at, showing your church in its best light? Are the notices up-to-date and colourful? Are the things you offer clearly advertised on attractive and enticing posters? And is there space for groups to have pictures and posters of their own up? It might also be a good idea to have friendly photos of key people in the church up on the wall.

Remember to talk to the users and ask them if there is any way that you could improve your premises or anything they need.

Think about the parents who often have to kill time while children are involved in clubs and activities. Can you offer a 'parent creche'? Serve teas and coffees and encourage people to talk to one another.

You could maybe host a parenting course, an introduction to Christianity course or invite groups such as NCT, Kids Matter or Citizens Advice to run advice surgeries (on topics such as managing debt or feeding your child on a budget).

Could you have toys available for younger siblings to keep them entertained while they wait? Maybe someone in your church is good at telling stories!

Think about supporting the groups themselves by volunteering occasionally or providing extra support. Perhaps they would appreciate help with snacks during the session, with cleaning toys, with making or gathering resources, or, if you feel confident and energetic enough, with supporting some of the children as they access the club or activity, especially for things like trips or camps, where an extra pair of hands is always useful.

See if it is possible to visit occasionally. Maybe you have a skill you could offer to share with the uniformed organisations, perhaps helping towards a badge.

A leader or member of your church congregation might offer to take on a chaplaincy role for the organisation, getting to know children, parents and leaders, and praying for them regularly.



Help the organisation to feel valued in your church family

This might include giving them a section on your website, in your church newsletter, or on your noticeboards. If they are putting on a show or concert of any type, advertise it in the church and encourage the congregation to go along.

Remember to invite the leaders and families to join you for any special events. These may be your regular events or something new, specifically aimed to develop relationships. Joining in a pancake party, submitting a tree for the Christmas tree festival, making decorations for a harvest festival, doing an item in a church concert – all these give groups a chance to contribute in a non-threatening way. Involve them in your fundraising for charity and make sure the church gets involved in supporting any fundraising that they are doing.

Your church could write letters or cards occasionally, thanking the leaders for the work they do with children and the positive influence they have on the lives of the families they serve. And is there the option of giving a gift to the groups – e.g. Easter eggs at Easter time? The Bible Society produces some lovely small booklets at Easter and Christmas which might make good gifts.

Most importantly, don't view these groups as merely numbers or steamroll them onto a church rota; don't preach at them but come alongside them.

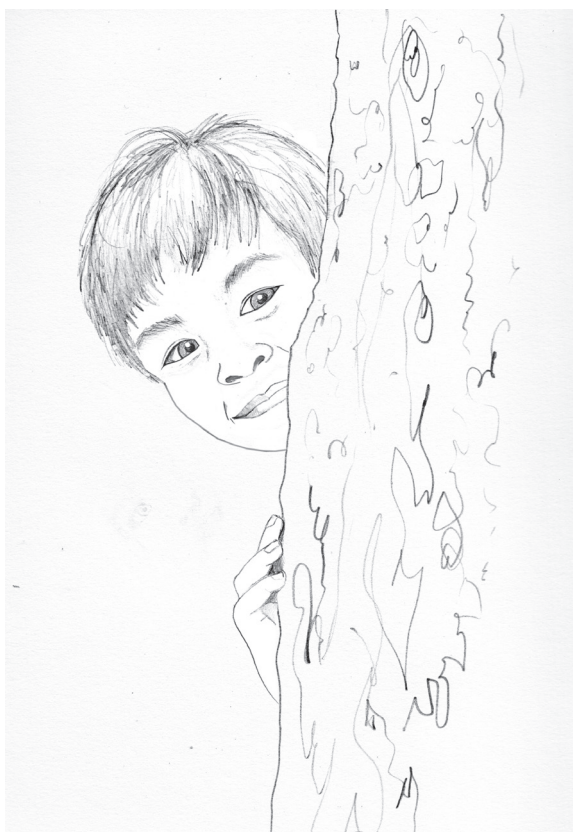
School visits: Have you invited your local school to do a school visit? Classes love getting out of the classroom and visiting somewhere new. Scripture Union produces some lovely resources for church visits while www.assemblies.org.uk has some good suggestions and The Hope Journey also equips churches for hosting schools.

Where are the children in your community?

Seek • Pray • Serve was first created (by Jess Poole, Synod of Scotland) to encourage and support churches to look at how they could meet and serve children and their families within the community, outside of the church building. The purpose of this ministry is not about how to bring children and families *into* the church building but rather, how to *take the church to them*.

This uses the talents and skills from all members of the congregation, for as long or as short a time as each member wishes to serve. For example, the local children's drama club is planning its Christmas play. They need costumes and there are a couple of people within the congregation that are very skilled in creating costumes. They can serve the drama club by helping to create the costumes and they only need to commit their time for a few weeks, once a year. It is a ministry the whole church can be involved in, creating positive relationships outside of the church building. It is about

demonstrating faith through service and love: 'I, by my works, will show you my faith.' (James 2:18, NRSV)



Seek: Spend some time thinking about the local community: where are the children? Where do they go and what do they do? What connections do you already have? What could you find out more about?

A good place to start would be the local primary school. Find out what's happening there. Are they doing any fundraising events? Going on any trips? Where else might the children be? How about the local dance club? Are there sports clubs? Gymnastics? Martial arts? Drama club? Local park play area?

What about babies and pre-schoolers? Are there health visitor sessions, play groups, library activities, support groups for parents? Does the local hospital have a maternity unit, children's ward, day clinics? Are there organisations providing care for children with particular needs (children in care, with disabilities, bereavement, young carers and so on)?

Have a look around, ask, and see where the children are. Create a map of the community and highlight these places and activities.

Pray: Commit together to pray for the children in your local community:

- Give thanks to God for the children in your community.
- Ask him to bless them, protect them and guide them in their lives.
- Pray for the teachers in the school and others who work with children. Ask that they will be loving and supportive of the children in their care. Pray that these people will feel encouraged and supported in their work with children.
- Ask God to provide opportunities to allow the church to connect and support the school and groups.

Pray together as a church but also pray together in groups and individually.

Serve: Consider your gifts, talents, and passions – how might these be of service to children in the local community? Think about your time and energy. Could you realistically offer any to support children in the local community? This might be directly or, just as valuably, indirectly – supporting those already working with children, giving behind-the-scenes help and encouragement. Service can be very small, one-off or occasional, right through to a regular commitment or taking on a big role like school governor.

Look for ways in which you can serve the local primary school. Perhaps you could use **Pray • Bake • Read**. Could a couple of people offer to be an extra pair of hands for a trip? Not only do you get to know the children and the teachers but you also go to the zoo, or the cinema or a museum! Would they like snacks for children (being mindful of any allergies) and teachers? Does the school have a gardening, cooking, knitting or craft club, or would it like to start one? Are there people who could pass on their knowledge and skills to the children? Are there particular needs you could challenge the church to help meet, for example breakfast club volunteers, new IT equipment or grants for uniforms.

Where else could you serve children? What about ensuring that the local play park is clean and tidy, with the equipment in a good state of repair? Can you serve parents tea and coffee while they wait for children to finish their dance classes?

Do you have existing church groups who could include children in the community in their focus? For example, knitters could make cuddlers for the local hospital, craft groups could make items for School story bags, choirs could support school concerts, flower arrangers could help children make Mother's Day posies.

Gather up your collective skills and watch how God will use them!

Organisations you might like to connect with:

- **Pray • Bake • Read** helps churches support local primary schools by praying, baking cakes for the staffroom, and providing volunteers to hear children read on a regular basis.
- **Share the Miracle** in an initiative to collect donated Easter eggs to give to a local group.
- **TLG Make Lunch** supports churches to provide lunches in the school holidays for children who normally receive free school meals.
- **TLG Early Intervention programme** trains volunteers to undertake one-to-one mentoring for individual children in school
- **Bible Society: Open the Book** facilitates local groups providing Christian assemblies for primary schools.
- **Action for Children** local centres and projects work with vulnerable children and support families with particular needs.
- **Scripture Union's 95 Campaign** is designed to reach out to the 95% of children in our communities who don't go to church. They have an emailed newsletter and their website offers ways to get involved, either directly or indirectly.
- **Kids Matter** equips local churches to deliver accessible and effective parenting programmes to parents in disadvantaged communities.
- **Baby Basics** provides much needed essentials and equipment to mothers and families who are unable to provide these items for themselves; including but not limited to teenage mums, people seeking asylum and women fleeing domestic abuse and trafficking.

Don't forget that many people in your congregation will already be working with children in their daily lives – the teachers and classroom assistants, nurses and doctors, social workers and those who support young offenders to name but a few. Think about how you can equip, support and pray for these people in a tangible way to encourage them in their calling.

Listen to the children – voices from the 2018 Review

Congregations were encouraged to talk to those under 11 about their experience of church and these children were then invited to share ‘two stars and a wish’ (two favourite things and one thing they would like). There was a very wide spread of responses including:

Stars: Going outside, singing and praying in church, meeting friends, the range of activities, leaders and church members are kind and friendly, songs, learning about stories from the Bible, being able to be part of the Nativity play, colouring and painting, we get to make things on our own and are taught how to do it, acting, fete every year, Boys Brigade, Bouncy Days, Communion, taking part in services, playing with toys and playdough, imaginary play, themed activities, joining in with singing, the church looks after people, church hall, pictures on the wall, drinks and biscuits after services.

‘I think the community is good’

‘Learning new things about Christianity’

‘I like eating the bread and grape juice’

‘I like learning about Jesus and Sunday School’

‘Church parades and the nice people’

‘I like it because we worship God respectfully’

‘We can share feelings’

‘We always get food and games related to the theme from the Bible’

‘Using the flags in church’

‘I always feel welcome and included in church’

‘They care for people who need it’



'I play my ukulele'

'Being involved in the service, taking the offering'

'I like sharing my feelings about God'

'It involves all ages and everyone can feel included'



Wishes: A common theme was wishing they did more outside, that groups/activities happened more often, that more children came. Others wished for a younger version of a specific church group, an Xbox or a games room, more plays, a book corner, a bigger garden, more use of technology. Some wishes were more imaginative: a bouncy castle, a swimming pool, a monthly party where we could bring our pets, a hot tub, a pony, more ice cream, poo emoji cushions!

'A quiet place to pray alone'

'I wish there were arts and crafts for all ages, not just the younger ones'

'I wish there was more aimed at children – singing, acting'

'I wish the church had Jesus' blood every day'

'I wish to go on trips to places to learn about God more'

'I wish we could watch about God'

'I wish that children had more of a voice'

'I wish that my school friends were here to enjoy the fun with me'

'I wish there were non-boring meetings'

'I wish this church could be part of Star Wars'

'I wish I could see and hug God'



How could *your* church invite children to share their thoughts and feelings about what the church does and how they experience church life?

How could you enable everyone to listen to them?

Where are the children in the life of your church?

Seek: Who counts as part of the church 'family'? Where do children fit in?

If it is through formal church membership, at what age may a child become a member? This is not stipulated by General Assembly. If it is through baptism, dedication or a similar celebration, how do you foster that connection? If based on attendance, what activities in the life of the church count? Sunday worship? Midweek worship (see pages 18 to 19)? Other church activities (coffee mornings, parade service, Bumps and Babies, holiday club)? How often/frequently do they need to attend? What about relationships with core members (such as visiting grandchildren)?

These are difficult questions to answer, whether applied to children or adults, but with children it is important to remember that their relationship with the church is not autonomous. They depend on adults to bring them and to recognise the importance in their lives of being part of church.

Perhaps the most important question is: does the child feel they belong?

Pray:

- Pray for all who bring children along to church and church activities, that they may value the family they find here.
- Thank God for all who welcome children and their carers; those who prepare for the presence of children, who draw them into the life of the church.
- Pray for the children, that they know themselves valued and warmly welcomed, that they encounter God's love in the activities and relationships available through the life of the church.
- Pray that the whole church may enjoy the gift of each child as they grow together in fellowship.

Serve: 'Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a real blessing.'
(Psalm 127:3, GNB)

If children are welcome as full participants in the life of the church, then they and their families and carers need to know this! Make sure you show it on your website, noticeboards, newsletters, choice of images, use of language, toilet facilities and so on.

Next, make sure that the welcome you give children on *any* occasion is warm and inclusive. You want them to enjoy the experience and want to come again! Show you have already thought about their needs and interests, so they feel valued and precious to God and the people of God.

Think about how children can be part of all aspects of the life of the church: the church meeting, social activities, mission projects, the church's giving, social action, choosing themes/hymns/prayers/preachers, celebrations, and so on. What times of day might work best? What length and style of gathering enables them to participate? The United Reformed Church Charter for Children in the Church states 'As a church community we must learn to do only those things in separate age groups which we cannot in all conscience do together.' Which aspects of church life does this challenge? The Child Friendly Church Award offers a process to explore this with support.

Children find faith through belonging to a faith community, and children grow a lasting faith when surrounded by a web of supportive, intergenerational relationships of fun, friendship and fellowship.



Small is beautiful – ‘For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’ (Matthew 18:20, NRSV)

Some churches may be teeming with children, but many only have two or three children, often none. For those look at the positives:

- Each child can be known by name – you can celebrate birthdays, milestones and achievements.
- Small numbers with diverse ages is more like a family setting, less like school.
- Activities and resources can be personalised.

Creative storytelling can be intergenerational. Visual images can help the youngest, spoken word will help others. Godly Play, drama and story bags invite children into the in story in different ways.

It is good to think of everything as play; cooperative, creative, musical, worshipful play! This builds relationships through fun, gives space and time for reflection and encourages awe and wonder.

‘We are made in the image of God and God is the great creator. As we create and play together, we echo God’s playful creativity.’
(Moore, L, 2006 Messy Church Abingdon: Barnabas)

Planning can be challenging if you are not sure who will be there. Have materials ready that can just be brought out from the cupboards as needed. Scripture Union, ROOTS, and Flame: Creative Children’s Ministry provide various materials you could use. Have a variety of craft materials available for children to explore and create, and a range of Bibles for different ages. For small numbers, maybe have a comfy area where the children can stay with a volunteer, within sight of other adults.

Cherish every contact that your church has with children. Being welcomed, loved and given an experience of the presence of God is something that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Where are the children in your worship?

Seek: There are all sorts of different types of church and congregation throughout the country – some teeming with children and some without; some where children leave for a Junior Church or Sunday School, some where they stay in throughout the service, and some which work intergenerationally. However you describe your church, it is important, essential, that you consider the children who regularly attend or who just might turn up to your worship.

Value the worship of your children – don't 'send them out' to Junior Church/Sunday School but acknowledge that they are worshipping too in their activities there. Remember, that midweek activities such as Messy Church, Pilots or Toddler Praise can and should equally be classed as worship!

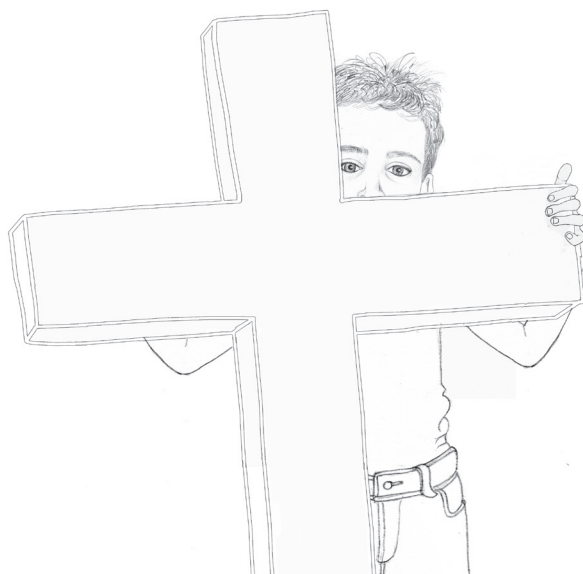
Jesus said 'Let the children come to me,' when the disciples tried to sideline them as Jesus was preaching to the crowd. The same is as true now as it ever was. And just because you never usually have a single child turn up to your Sunday service, that doesn't mean that one won't be there this week. What welcome will they and their family receive? What will their experience be? Are you ready for them?

Pray:

- Pray for the children who come to any midweek worship activities in your church or neighbouring churches, their families and the volunteers who minister to them.
- Pray for families who fear their children will not be welcome due to additional needs, behavioural issues, or just for being children.
- Pray for your church as you seek to become a more welcoming home for all.

Serve: Think about the occasional visitor who is under 11. How can you ensure that they find a welcome in your midst and the opportunity to be a valued part of your worship from the moment they enter through the door until the moment they leave – and beyond?

The family should be given a warm welcome (not invited to join the coffee rota straight away!), with special attention given to talking to the child rather than just to the grown ups. If possible, get to the child's eye level to



talk to them and show an interest in what they have to say. *Remember* their name! Don't apologise for having no other children there, if that is the case, but don't pounce on them as though they are gold dust and heap all your expectations of regular attendance on them either. Just welcome them.

Perhaps you could prepare a bag of things to keep them focused, including liturgical things to handle if appropriate, a page to explain in simple terms how the service progresses (especially Communion service). You might include some appropriate colouring or drawing and coloured pencils, jigsaws or puzzles. This might prove useful if children are unused to being in church or need something to fiddle with while they listen. Think too about how they can be involved in the service. Is your language accessible and your content intergenerational and inclusive, regardless of the make up of your

usual congregation? Remember, often the bits of your service which are more specifically aimed at children can end up being the most memorable and meaningful bits for all!

Give children opportunities to take a 'proper' role in the service – not just distributing hymn books but actually contributing to worship. Could they read the Bible reading or write a prayer that they could say during the worship? They could even help set the table for Communion or lead some liturgy, especially if the wording is adapted to make it accessible to all.

Think about where your children sit during worship and what message this gives them. Should they be at the front where everything is happening or at the back with a sea of adults between them and the action? Which makes them feel more included? Do they need chairs or would they prefer cushions or beanbags? They may prefer to sit with their parents.

Are they old enough to take Communion? If we all waited until we understand the mystery of the Lord's Supper, we'd be waiting forever. If a child wants to join in the family meal of God's children, should we tell them they are not welcome at God's table? The Charter for Children affirms that 'the full diet of Christian worship is for children as well as adults.'

While many children long for more of their peers in church, do not underestimate the value of being in an intergenerational setting and part of the congregation. Children benefit immensely from an older person taking an interest in them, caring about them, sharing faith and growing together. Something as simple as remembering their name and greeting them by it, asking how their week has gone and really listening when they reply, can create a sense of belonging.

Worship beyond Sunday

Perhaps your church runs a Messy Church or Toddler Praise or a family service of some type during the week. This is worship too. Likewise Pilots, Boys' Brigade or Girls' Brigade. Do you include these on the list of 'worship times' on your church website or newsletter? They could just as fittingly be there as under the heading of 'children and youth'.

If you haven't been before, pop along. It may not be worship as you normally experience it, but if you approach it with an open heart, God will speak to you through the worship and praise of the children. Again, these are perfect opportunities for you to make contact with and support the children in their faith formation, as well as a chance to talk to parents and support them. It is worth remembering that the church may be a strange and alien place for them too. Just a smile and a word of encouragement may be all they need to feel welcome and at home. It is amazing how some Sunday congregations may mutter about never seeing the Messy Church families coming to the Sunday service, and yet are not willing to go and join them in their worship during the week!

No Messy Church or Pilots group? Perhaps there is opportunity to start one. If not in your church, maybe ecumenically in partnership with the other churches in the locality – working together to provide opportunities for families to learn, pray and worship together in a Christian environment. In 2020 the URC is launching a new children's work programme, Friends on Faith Adventures, especially for churches looking to start something new.



Suggestions for using this booklet

We hope this booklet will stimulate thought, prayer and action!

You could:

Reflect on it: Listen to God's call to you personally with regard to children, adjust your prayer life accordingly, and find a practical way to express your call that serves children.

Share it: Read it with others in a small group; discuss the questions together, pray together and encourage one another to follow through in action. You could even agree to share stories of how you are getting on in prayer and action, in mutual support to persevere.

'So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.' (Galatians 6:9, NRSV)

Make it a focus for your church: Give a series of sessions, or sermon slots, to work through the sections. Use creative methods to capture people's responses. Allow time for prayers to be created and used. Commission people into a whole variety of ministries, large and small, long-term and occasional. Update noticeboards, the website and newsletters to include regular features on how as a congregation you are seeking, praying for and serving children. Find ways to reflect this in your meetings and times of worship, Remember to celebrate the riches these connections with young lives add to your church!

*I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.
They are ever giving liberally and lending,
and their children become a blessing.*
(Psalm 37:25-26, NRSV)

Prayer

Lord God, **thank you for the gift of children.**

Help us to seek, pray and serve.

Jesus, who instructed his disciples 'Let the children come to me',

We bring you our prayers for the children and for our church
as we seek to pave the way for the children to come to you.

We pray for the children in our hearts, naming them before you now,
That they might know themselves loved and valued

And that we might nurture the growing seeds of faith

Through our words, our actions, our listening and our witness.

We pray for the children in our premises, naming them before you now,

That they may find a welcome here and relationships may blossom.

We pray for the children in our community, thinking especially of those
Who feel lost or alone, anxious or afraid, or in need of a mentor
or support.

May we reach out to them, directly or indirectly, with your love and
compassion.

We pray especially for the schools and clubs in our neighbourhood

And ask for your strength and guidance for all who work with children in
any capacity.

We pray for the children in our church life, naming them before you now,

That they may find a voice and a purpose and feel a valued part of the
family,

And that we may all be open to learn from each other and play together.

And we pray for the children in our worship, naming them before you now,
that we may not prove a stumbling block

But truly let the children come to you.

Lord God, **thank you for the gift of children.**

Help us to seek, pray and serve.

Amen

Where next?

Remember, the Child Friendly Church award is not just for churches where children participate in worship on a Sunday. Can your church demonstrate that you have a heart for children and families in the life of your congregation? If you don't already have the award, talk to your United Reformed Church Synod Children's and Youth Development Officer (CYDO) or equivalent.



Written for Grandparents, Godparents and anyone with a similar relationship with a particular child, our companion booklet *The Gift* would make a perfect presentation gift at a Baptism or to give to older members of your congregation who have that nurturing role. Available from the URC online shop www.urcshop.co.uk

Thanks

This booklet has been compiled by the Children's and Youth Work team of the United Reformed Church with contributions from Nicola Grieves, Jessica Poole, Sam Richards, and Lorraine Webb. Illustrations are by Samara Andrews. Edited by Michelle Howard and Lorraine Webb. Design by Sara Foyle.

Contact us

If this booklet has inspired you to do something new, or if you already do something that we may not know about, please do get in touch. We would love to celebrate the work you are doing and share it to encourage others.

On our good news page on the United Reformed Church website: **www.urc.org.uk/good-news-stories**, we are able to share stories of all the ways that our congregations support children and young people playing their part in the mission of God. We also have pages of resources and news of events for children and young people.

‘Jesus says that children are important. So does the United Reformed Church. This booklet is for local churches and for the people in them. It aims to help us to help children. It’s full of ideas, encouragement and realism. Here are things to try, hopes to hold on to, and wisdom to work with. I commend it warmly.’

The Revd John Proctor
General Secretary of the United Reformed Church

More copies are available from the Children’s and Youth
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