

July 2022 invitation
to all churches



The question that congregations are asking is:
"Why do we have so few children coming to church?"

The answer takes the form of another question:
"Have you prayed for them to come?"

So the invitation is to everyone connected to the church:
Pray like Hannah.

The story of Hannah is found in 1 Samuel. Hannah is the loved wife of Elkanah, but is unable to bear a child. In her culture this was a terrible thing – a curse, the judgement of God, shameful. Children were vital to secure the future of the family, the tribe, the nation. It is desperation that drives Hannah to prayer. Her prayer is so passionate that Eli thinks she is drunk! Hannah prayed with devotion, fervour, intensity.

So the first invitation is to pray passionately for children to know they are part of God's family. It's as simple as that. It is borne out of a deep longing and love for children and a sense of loss that they are absent from our midst.

The prayer is answered: the child Samuel is born. Before even the child was in her arms, Hannah was preparing to let him go, as she had promised to give the child back to God. Hannah takes him to the temple and leaves him in the care of Eli. Samuel grows up serving God, hearing God speak, sharing God's word with Eli and others, becoming a leader of God's people – probably not what Hannah was expecting!

So the second invitation is be ready for answered prayer that is different from your expectations. We may want children in church on Sunday mornings, but it may be that something completely different comes into being.

But when we pray for children, we must recognise that God may have different directions, different plans for them – we may be asked, as parents are, to let them go to grow and flourish elsewhere, in another place. Children may be part of the life of the church across the week rather than on Sunday in a wide variety of activities and areas of ministry.

As always, prayer does not change God, but prayer changes us.

A church community that prays like Hannah will find itself more open, more receptive, more aware of the children in their locality, whatever their relationship with the church. This new attitude of awareness may impact how the church relates to children. If children are important to the church, this will show in the whole ethos – and children may respond to this by arriving and staying.

We can be confident that, even if God places those children in a different context for their growth and nurture, our prayer will change things.

But first things first ... all you have to do is pray.

We are inviting all URC churches to use **Pray like Hannah** during **July 2022** as we launch URC Children at General Assembly and ask the church to reconfirm its commitment to children.

Please use this prayer in your church each week – and ask people to pray every day throughout July. There will be daily prayer prompts on URC Children's and Youth Work Facebook and Twitter.



Listening God,
you hear us
when we pour out our souls before you;
hear our prayer for all your children.
Give us faith like Hannah,
to pray to you for the life of our church
that we may be a place and a people
where your children are present,
welcome and valued.
Prepare us to hear you through them
and to be led by children closer to you.
Meet us in our prayers,
in Jesus' name. **Amen**

(Adapted from material developed for Gloucestershire Diocese with kind permission of Revd Dr Sandra Millar.)