



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

# hands on

Stories, ideas & news from Kids Friendly | ISSUE 22 | September 2012



## Children in the way

Recently I spent a very indulgent 8 weeks on sabbatical at Cambridge University in England. The Cheshunt Scholarship entitled me to live on campus at Westminster Theological College and explore topics of interest. I LOVE studying, so this was a real treat.

Something I have long been grappling with is how we help faith “stick” in young people.

According to renowned U.S. researcher George Barna, six out of 10 young people leave the church permanently or for an extended period, starting at age 15. Our denomination’s statistics suggest a more severe reality with the majority of young people leaving churches between the ages of 10 and 13, with little hope of them returning.

And so I headed to the Cambridge University Library with a very long reading list and a determination to gain some insight into how to help children become lifelong disciples of Christ.

Westerhoff in his book “Will our children have faith?” stresses the importance of children belonging to a community of faith that invites them to participate in all aspects of its life. “Children learn most significantly through nurture in a worshipping witnessing community of faith,” says Westerhoff. “Explicit instruction in the Sunday school is only a small part of Christian education.”

The need to intentionally create opportunities for children to develop their faith by experiencing Christian rituals and practicing Christian

disciplines in the faith community was stressed by many.

“Developing Christians (people who love God and desire to live in the way of Jesus) is not primarily a cognitive endeavour,” says Ivy Beckwith, “the act of becoming Christian involves practicing being Christian over and over and over again.”

Belonging to a community of faith that intentionally encourages and creates opportunities for all ages to share, learn, worship and practise Christianity is paramount.

Key to growing faith is relationships with other Christians. Children need older and wiser friends to learn from. Despite our congregations promising to help parents fulfil their baptism promises to raise their children as Christian, still very few honour this.

Our eighth ‘Transformers – Raising up young leaders’ camp once again attracted much interest from churches, but still too many said they were unable to send children as they couldn’t find any adult mentors for the children (a condition of participation in Transformers camps.)

Ministry with children cannot be absolved to one or two people in our congregations. We are called to share our faith with children. Until our churches grasp this “whole church approach” to children’s ministry advocated by Kids Friendly, our children will continue to be in the way, rather than, in THE WAY.

**Blessings. Jill**

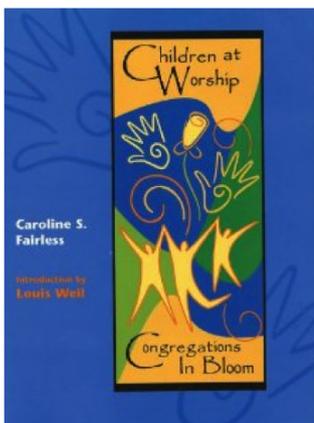


# Children in Worship

**"It's the community that educates" said Plato, suggesting that there are formal and informal forces that influence people. If we want our children to be "educated" (and enculturated) in Christianity then we need to ensure that they are exposed to the faith community and its unique rituals and practices.**

**In most of our churches children are present in the all age worshipping community for a considerable amount of time before they are sent out to the children's programme. Research suggests that this important, but it can be detrimental if children are expected to be seen but not heard. Kids Friendly churches are asked to review how inclusive and participatory worship is for children. Many ideas and suggestions can be found in our resource "A Kids Friendly Sunday". We love to hear from our ministers how they are developing ways to engage and involve children in worship.**

## Children at Worship Congregations in Bloom



I read this book during the Kids Friendly pilot (2004) and it still claims top position in my favourite books list. Author and practitioner Rev. Caroline Fairless' shares her vision and her experience in this inspiring book.

"Imagine creating an environment right there in your worship service, in which the children

of God dare to respond to the awe and wonder and the mystery of God and God's gifts with a full range of expression, from joy and delight, to wordlessness and silence, from bodily stillness to expressive movement of rhythm and dance, from laughter to sorrow to tears and back to laughter again.

Imagine children streaming into the church. They are bringing their friends; their friends are bringing their parents. The entire congregation is writing prayers, writing music, telling the great stories of the Bible, developing art for the sanctuary. The energy is palpable; the excitement,

celebratory... the transformation unbelievable!

This is exactly what happened when the Holy Family Church in Half Moon Bay, California, embarked on a program which included their children and youth in their Sunday worship services starting back in 1994. As a result, the Congregation bloomed! "

In her very readable style, Caroline shares her personal experiences and stories to inspire and provide us with the tools to create vital and inclusive worship in our own community. It is not in any way prescriptive, but rather invites the reader to commit to a vision that facilitates congregations to prosper and bloom.

There is also a website, [www.childrenatworship.org](http://www.childrenatworship.org), that creates an "accessible meeting place to open up the conversations among congregations all over the world committed to including children in worship."

Caroline invites us to: "explore the ideas presented in this website, to open yourself and your community to the possibilities of transformation through full inclusion of your children and youth in your worship services. Embark on the journey and watch your congregation bloom!"

# Children in Worship

## Kids Friendly "Call to Worship"

Mary-Jane Konings, minister of Timaru Presbyterian Parish, writes a weekly child friendly call to worship by adapting the lectionary Psalm. "I started writing them because I wanted to include the Psalm themes in the service in a way that engaged children. I like thinking about different ways to help children and adults get to grips with some important ideas – that God loves them very much, that God is awesome, and that listening to God is important. I also like making the Psalms a little bit Kiwi, and a little bit South Canterbury. I think these calls help our older congregation hear their familiar Psalms with fresh ears, and they love hearing the children call out their parts." Says Mary-Jane.

At Timaru Presbyterian's Wai-iti Road church, the children are involved in bringing in the Bible, lighting the Christ candle, and leading the call to worship before one of them leads us in a prayer of adoration. My hope is to see children start writing their own call to worship soon."

Mary-Jane's "call to worship" can be accessed from [calltoworship.blogspot.com](http://calltoworship.blogspot.com) or [textweek.com](http://textweek.com).

## Child Worship Assistant



One way Pauline and Stan Stewart, ministers at St Heliers Presbyterian, like to involve and value children, is to have a child help them lead worship each week.

"The culture of our church has always been to have an adult assist the minister lead

worship, so when I was called here I thought 'why not have a child help with this important task too?,' says Pauline.

Pauline phones a child to invite her (him) to be the worship assistant and check her availability with her parents. She then emails the "Thought for the day" (a Kids Friendly responsive reflection) for her to practise. On Sunday the child worship assistant is asked to arrive 10 minutes early so she can join the worship team for prayer.

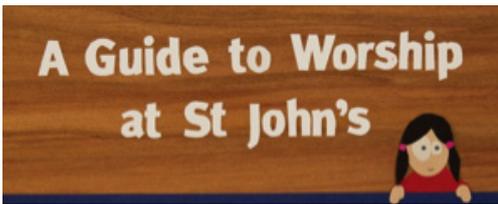
The child worship assistant enters church

carrying the children's bible beside the minister and assisting adult. She also gets to choose a stole of her choice, as the tradition at St Heliers is for the minister to wear a stole. The child worship assistant sits up front with the minister, leads the congregation in the "thought for the day", helps a child light the Christ candle and then leads the children out to "Godzone" (their programme) just before the sermon starts.

"Children love to lead," says Pauline, "and take it very seriously. Our hope is that this little ritual will help them grow in faith and leadership and know they are truly valued by their church."



# A Kids Friendly Guide to Worship



Sometimes people ask us to recommend a Kids Friendly church for

them to visit so they can see what "one" looks like. We're quick to point out that there is no one stereotypical Kids Friendly church. Each church develops and practises their Kids Friendly vision and mission according to their context and culture.

St John's in the City, Wellington is a Kids Friendly church that takes seriously its commitment to nurture and disciple children.

"Children are valued members of our congregation," says Rev Allister Lane, "and we want to ensure that they are welcomed and included in our time of worshipping together."

"Our worship is typically described as 'traditional' and we want to help our congregation, including children, understand and appreciate our traditions."

To help worshipping members understand why St John's do what they do, the ministry team developed a Kids Friendly 'Guide to Worship'. The aesthetically appealing brochure sits in the pews alongside the hymn books and bibles (including children's bibles!) for people to pick up and refer to.

"We find it is helpful to people who are new to St John's in the City or the Reformed tradition, but most importantly, we love seeing children using it."

The design and written content was a team effort including the minister and children's leaders Anna Davis and Heather Walker and graphic designer Shane Fairhall.

This Kids Friendly resource is indigenous to St John's in the City, with strong reflections of their buildings and traditions. However they have kindly offered the design template for other churches wishing to develop a similar resource for their context.

Anyone interested in accessing the template can contact minister Allister Lane.

## A special ministry

When children leave Small Miracles, the preschool of St Heliers Presbyterian Church, for school, a small graduation ceremony is held for them. They are presented with their portfolios, a CD of photos and a children's bible. Teacher Ingrid De Villiers decided she wanted to add a more personal symbol of God's love, so put her crafty skills to work to produce a cross-stitched "Cross in a Pocket". Now every child's farewell is blessed by one of these hand crafted gifts and the accompanying poem. "It's something timeless that I hope they will keep forever to remind them of the love they experienced at Small Miracles," says Ingrid. "I try to personalize it by getting the children to choose their favourite colour. I know the children treasure their crosses and when I meet them or their parents in the community they often comment on how special the cross is. One little boy even took it to school for news. One of our "non-believing" families didn't want us to pray for their child at his farewell ceremony, but I decided to make the child a cross so he wouldn't feel left out. The Dad asked me what it was and seemed satisfied with my reply that it was a reminder of God's and our love for his and all children. His sister is leaving next week and I asked her Mum if I could make a cross for her and she said "of course! Our son treasures his and tells everyone that God loves him."

There are times, when we have five children leaving at once and I am sewing into the wee hours of the morning, that I question why I ever started doing this? I remind myself of how special it makes the children feel and how much they treasure their crosses, and that keeps me going."



## Our Kids Friendly Team

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