



# hands on

Stories, ideas & news from Kids Friendly | ISSUE 18 | Jan 2011



## Let the children come

"Why don't the children come?" is a common lament in many of our churches. We still too often operate as if we were in an age of Christendom, with a "come to us mentality". The reality is that many people in New Zealand (including children) have "no residue of Christian faith at all. It's not just dormant, it's non-existent. So we have to go back to basics, we are in a critical missionary situation." (Gordon Bates, Bishop of Whitby, UK). But don't be disheartened. The early Christians faced the same issues, but that didn't stop them sharing the good news. Their passionate mission is one we would do well to learn from. Even "successful" Kids Friendly churches recognise that much of their mission is outside Sundays and the church buildings. Cheryl Harray, Kids Friendly Advisor for the Synod of Otago and Southland reminds us that 85% of children will never walk through our church doors, so she and the team at Flagstaff Union have found ways to walk through theirs. Read her inspirational story on page 4.

As missionaries of Christ we have so many opportunities to touch children with His love. Renowned children's minister, writer and researcher Mark Griffiths reminds us that everyone in the church ministers to children by the very way they are with children. When we love, welcome and include them, we can positively impact their faith and when we ignore, exclude or reprimand them, we can immunise them against Jesus for life. Rev Pauline Stewart of St Heliers Presbyterian wrote a children's song:

"When you tell me Jesus loves me let me feel it, cos it's your face that I'm looking into. When you tell me Jesus loves me let me feel it, as the only way I see Him is through you". How do the children in your church know of Jesus' love and how are they valued and welcomed as equal members?

Cate Burton of St Paul's Katikati shares her ideas for welcoming children and Rev Carol Grant of Otaki Waikanae Parish introduces her church mice renowned for their Kids Friendly welcome.

In this issue we also share some thoughts on welcoming children to the sacraments. I participated in a panel on children and communion at a Council for World Mission conference in Malaysia in November. I was shocked to discover that for most participants the concept of including children in communion is totally alien. Fortunately in our context it is more unusual to exclude children.

An email from Kaila Pettigrove, children's minister at Somervell Presbyterian in Auckland, currently on sabbatical in the states, inspired me to share her experience of including children in baptism with Judy and Jason Goroncy. You can read how they and their minister designed Samuel's Kids Friendly baptism at Highgate.

May these and other stories from our churches inspire you in your ministry and challenge you to keep finding ways to "Let the children come".

**Blessings, Jill**



### A Kids Friendly Welcome

We are told that people form their first impressions within a minute of arriving at a place, event or meeting someone. If this is true then how do we welcome children so they know our church values them and celebrates their presence. Kids Friendly churches are urged to have a children's welcome table visible from the door where children can be welcomed by name. Many churches ask me to send sample welcome packs so I have recently written a resource "A Kids Friendly Welcome" that gives you ideas and samples for effectively welcoming children to your church. This and all 24 Kids Friendly resources can be downloaded from our web pages: [presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/kids-friendly/-kids-friendly-resources/resources-log-in](http://presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/kids-friendly/-kids-friendly-resources/resources-log-in).

# Welcome children,

## A mice life

When Rev Carol Grant told me her Otaki Waikanae Presbyterian Parish had five resident church mice I wasn't quite sure what to expect, so was slightly relieved to meet the two cute knitted mice living on the Waikanae church communion table in their little basket home (sometimes they hibernate under the table if the weather is very cold.) The three mice at Otaki have their home at the front of the church on an old piano stool. They like to see all the action!

The first two mice came to live at Otaki church three years ago after minister, Carol rescued them from a car boot sale. They looked very lonely so she took them on their first trip to Melbourne before introducing them to everyone in church. They wrote about their Australian holiday in a special mouse book including photos of course. Word got out about the mice's life and soon two more mice arrived to join the Waikanae congregation and another joined the Otaki couple.

Now all the mice get to travel all around the world with members of the church family and return with amazing tales of adventure and photos to share. Sometimes their adventures are published in the monthly magazine or read in church by the children.

Carol gets emails and postcards from the mice visiting exotic places to share with everyone on Sunday. Even the local postie has asked to meet the famous church mice!



Sometimes the mice squeak loudly during the service so the children will read them a story or give them a cuddle.

"Our mice are very Kids (and adult) Friendly," says Carol, "and great at welcoming visitors, visiting folk in hospital and helping shy children meet each other. They have even been known to escape to join in Mainly Music or Girls' Brigade, or visit church and community groups. They have been photographed at family weddings and celebrations, cuddling new grandchildren, cruising on ships, on tramping trips and even at the Rugby World Cup in

South Africa. They especially love the children at our Kiribati service but have to hum the hymns because the Kiribati words are a bit hard to learn. Last Christmas at Waikanae they kept a constant eye on baby Jesus in the Christmas crib. When we become a Kids Friendly Parish they will send pictures of our celebration party to Jill and the team."

## Doing Life and Faith Together

by Cate Burton, St Paul's Katikati



One Sunday Supriti (7) and her brother Babu (4) asked if they could sit with me in church rather than their normal practise of sitting with their parents. That day I was privileged to share with Supriti and Babu what it means for me to worship with the family of God. When we prayed I whispered to them that we were talking to God. When we sang, I told them that the words were important for me. When someone spoke I showed them that it was courteous to listen and pay attention. But I also allowed Babu to crawl under the seats and lie across the chairs, because that is what four year olds do.

As children come to learn about faith and life, it is important to have mentors and role models in their lives apart from their parents. That Sunday was so cool because we were 'doing' life and faith together.

During a song, Babu stood on his chair, leaned across, and tapped me on the shoulder. I expected him to say, "When can we go out?" or "I'm hungry," but instead he whispered: "Jesus loves you."

God spoke to Babu that day, and he spoke to me through Babu. I feel so blessed to be a mentor to these kids as they wrestle with who God is, and how he is a part of our lives and our world. Jesus said: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We are called not to be childish but childlike, with humble and open hearts open to learning (especially from children!) and to sharing God's love.

We want our kids fully included in the family of God. We want to help them understand who Jesus is. We want to 'do life together' with all the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Arohanui. Cate

# Welcome Jesus

## Children and the sacraments

by Jill Kayser



I recently shared the Kids Friendly's vision and mission with 35 participants from 22 countries at a Mission with Children conference organised by Council for World Mission in Malaysia. In one of my workshops "Welcome Children, Welcome Jesus" we explored ways churches can help children

belong. I suggested that belonging is the "breeding ground" for belief and action and one way we invite children to belong is to include them in communion. Hearing this was a real challenge for many of the participants.

"Let the children come" said Jesus, so why do so many churches exclude children from the communion table? There is no theological reason for excluding children and the too often cited "they don't understand" excuse is unfounded. Communion is a meal of grace for which none of us needs to qualify. It stems from the Jewish Passover meal which couldn't take place without children as the youngest has the key task of asking: "why do we do this?" Fortunately in our context previously churches that included children in communion had to explain their reason for doing so, now it is the reverse. If any of our Kids Friendly churches preclude children from communion we ask them to explain their reasons for doing so.

We only have two sacraments in the Presbyterian Church so it should be relatively simple to find effective ways to include children in them.

I recently had an email from a Kids Friendly colleague on sabbatical in the States. Kaila wrote: "Our time in the States has been great for grabbing new ideas from churches we've attended. At a recent baptism, after the parents had made their vows, the minister asked all the children (who were already up

front so they could see everything that was happening) to stand. The minister asked them: "Do you, the children of this church, promise to be Matthew's brothers and sisters in our church family? Will you remember his name and greet him when you see him. Will you play with him and help him learn about Jesus?" After the children, the rest of the congregation were asked to make their vows."

In the Kids Friendly self-review, churches are asked to consider how they involve children in, and help them understand, the sacraments. As many of our churches still practise infant baptism, the example of this church could easily be adopted. So inspired and excited was I by receiving this email, that I sent it straight to my friends Judy and Jason Goroncy due to baptise their new baby son Samuel the following weekend.

A week later Judy wrote: "I spoke to our minister as soon as I received your email and he agreed to involve the children more intentionally. We moved the font to the aisle at the back of the church and had people gather around with the children sitting at the foot of the font. This created a wonderful sense of community and of our family being welcomed, rather than being on show. It also captured Samuel's 'entering into the church' as the font was close to the entrance. The children's response was beautiful. Of course some of the younger kids didn't quite get it but I'm sure they felt included and the older children responded with much enthusiasm."



### Cate's suggestions for welcoming children:

- Welcome them by name. Say 'hello' / 'kia ora'.
- Be interested in them. Ask them about their lives.
- Let them sit with you during the service if they want a break from their parents.
- In church, watch them, and let them watch you. Explore together who God is, and how He shapes our lives.
- Let them be kids. Let them fidget and giggle and explain what's happening and why we do the things that we do.
- During morning tea, let them sit at your table and dunk their biscuit in your tea. Ask what they remember from their lesson.
- Build a relationship with them. The first day I met Babu, he probably would never have told me that Jesus loves me. But as he came to know and trust me he was able to open up and share his heart with me.

# "That God Thing"

by Cheryl Harray

The Year 4 boy burst into the school office one Monday lunchtime in October, 2010, looked around eagerly and blurted out "Where's that God thing happening 'cause I want to go!" After being told that the SUPAKidz programme didn't start until next week, he left - a little more subdued.

This story was very encouraging for the team from Flagstaff Parish when we collected the permission slips later that week. There were 14 slips in the box and we knew that at least one child was already VERY excited about 'that God thing' starting in his school - a school that had stopped Bible in Schools over 12 years before.

Flagstaff Union Parish had been seeking ways to build links with Wakari School for some years and many in the parish can remember a time when there was a real openness to the church and the Christian message. Could this happen again? What might that look like now?

When Carolyn Sims, the church's Community Outreach Worker began in 2006, she approached local schools to ask what the church could do for them. Wakari School's response was a bit of a surprise: "We have a problem with head lice!" In response, a small team from church went each Monday morning to systematically check and treat children's hair. 'Nit Busters' is still faithfully operating 4 years down the track and is an example of the church serving the community. We kept asking 'What else could we do as a church?'

Two years ago Carolyn approached the school about beginning CRE classes again in the junior classes.

The Board of Trustees agreed, with the requirement of an 80% 'buy in' from a parent survey but non-returns would be counted as 'No.' Understandably, total returns did not come anywhere near this figure and so nothing happened. Meanwhile Nit Busters continued and we kept praying. Then Carolyn heard about

SUPAKidz while at Way2Go training and was sent the information pack. It was a possibility.

In 2010 there was a team of volunteers willing to give this a go. We prayed and approached the school again. The new Principal had been impressed by what he had heard of the church's work in the community and suggested we write a proposal to the Board, for a SUPAKidz lunchtime club.

They agreed to a 2 term trial so we sent off our application forms, did some training with SU regional coordinator, Nigel Winder, and began on 1 November, 2010!

How is it going? By the 5th week, we had 24 eager children finishing their lunches quickly so they could come. Feedback from a parent survey has been 100% positive and all children are keen to come back next year. We expect the numbers will grow quickly to our limit of 40. The team prepares well so that the 30 minutes runs smoothly and we can maximize relationship time and the opportunities to share God's good news with these children. It is fun, fast, faith building for children and leaders!

We look forward to going back in Term One, 2011. We keep on praying for healthy church/school relationships and that we will get permission to continue 'that God thing' EVERY term of next year and beyond!



**If you want to know more about SUPAKidz check out the website: [www.scriptureunion.org.nz](http://www.scriptureunion.org.nz)**

- SUPAKidz (Scripture Union Primary Adventures) can meet in a lunchtime or after school.
- SUPAKidz provides a warm, friendly environment in which children can have fun and explore Christian values.
- Attendance is voluntary and requires parental permission.
- Scripture Union provides the 6 week programmes which are linked to values in the NZ Curriculum. These include ideas for games, music, Bible stories, prayer and crafts.
- SU staff also offer training and support.



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