



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

hands on

Stories, ideas & news from Kids Friendly | ISSUE 15 | Jan 2010



Living the Questions

I've been thinking (again!) of how we embed faith in our children so that it sustains them all their lives. Too often we hear adults say: "we used to go to church when we were young but then outgrew it." (just like the tooth fairy) or "Christianity just doesn't have any relevance for us anymore."

Why do some people keep their faith and others lose it? My gut tells me there is not one simple answer to this. But two important goals (and challenges) for me in my ministry with the children of St Heliers Presbyterian are: How do we create a safe and nurturing environment where children can ask the big questions? and..... How do we facilitate children to live their faith?

Nurturing the curiosity of children and encouraging them to ask life's difficult questions are, I believe, essential to the spiritual journey and developing a faith that will grow with children. Children want answers from people they trust. Parents have the greatest influence on a child's faith, but the children's leader can also impact a child's faith for better or worse.

When we ignore children's natural religious inquisitiveness, we do them a grave disservice and we lose the

privilege of being guides and companions on their faith journey.

I suspect we avoid their questions because we are not always sure of the answers. But children are not afraid of mystery and if we let them, they will invite us along on an exciting spiritual journey.

I think honesty is still the best policy and theological dishonesty (if you are good God will look after you), causes youngsters to discredit in adulthood much of what they learned in Sunday School as childish fantasy.

And what about facilitating a living faith? I am encouraged by the many churches who involve children in local and overseas mission (see St J's Kids story on page 3). Advent particularly lends itself to this with the many opportunities created by overseas mission agents. But maybe we should aim to link every lesson we teach with a faith-in-action challenge? As Confucius said: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

May your ministry help children "live the questions" that build firm foundations of faith.

Blessings, Jill

A Kids Friendly Boost

Are you entering another year of ministry feeling energised, equipped and valued? One of the 10 Kids Friendly Church ideals is to value and equip the people who work with children. Unfortunately still too many of our churches abdicate their children's ministry to a few (often worn out), time poor volunteers and then wonder why the children don't come. For children's ministry to be successful, a church needs a vision and a strategy and plan for realising that vision. If you feel you and your leaders need a boost then Kids Friendly has some options for you. "Kids Friendly Connections" is a regional training and networking event of learning, fellowship and reflection to refresh and inspire leaders. The weekend programme is designed to respond directly to expressed needs, but much of the learning results from the sharing that happens when space and time is created for like-minded people to work, learn and play together. A trademark of these events is hospitality including comfortable and well located accommodation and lots of nurture and delicious food. There is also time for recreation, rest and worship. If this sounds like something the leaders of your region deserve and could benefit from, contact Kids Friendly to book your Kids Friendly Connections event.

Kids Friendly also offers training workshops on a range of topics (see www.presbyterian.org.nz/kids-friendly/training) including children's leaders training days to help you strategise your ministry and equip you with skills needed to deliver it.



Otago leaders recharging in Wanaka



Contact us

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly Coach
Email: jill@kidsfriendly.org.nz
09-5850959/027-2103784

Lorraine Morgan, Kids Friendly Co-ordinator
Email: lorraine@kidsfriendly.co.nz
03-6938248/027-4038126

Cheryl Harray, Kids Friendly Coach Otago
Email: cheryl@kidsfriendly.org.nz
03-4767402/027-4896153

Kids Friendly Ministers

I was thrilled to share the Kids Friendly vision and introduce our training workshops and resources to the Knox ministry interns recently. Churches working to become Kids Friendly, review themselves against 10 ideals, the last, but not least, being "A Kids Friendly Minister". While the minister cannot and must not accept sole responsibility for the way churches embrace and value children, he or she is crucial to cultivating a Kids Friendly culture. Following this beneficial time with the interns, Rev Mark Johnston of Knox asked me to provide some characteristics of a Kids Friendly minister. I consulted with Kids Friendly colleagues and drafted an initial but ever evolving wish list. Let us know what you would like to add.

A KIDS FRIENDLY MINISTER.....

Understands children's ministry as ministry with, to and by children of the church and community.

- Sees children's ministry as the responsibility of the whole church not just a few (often tired) volunteers.
- Works with leaders to develop a vision, strategy and budget for children's ministry.
- Reminds the congregation of the importance and blessing of children in a worshipping community and encourages them to "minister" to children.
- Models "best practice" children's ministry.
- Intentionally builds relationships with children and their families.
- Recognises and promotes the importance of the parents' role in growing children's faith.
- Gets to know children by name.
- Talks to children, phones them, invites them to assist with worship.
- Participates in children's and family events. (Rev Andrew Norton is the car park greeter clown at St Columba's light party).
- Participates in children's programmes every now and then. (Rev Ian Guy spent two weeks with the children at Kaikorai to teach them about communion and baptism.)
- Encourages children to contribute to worship and develop leadership.
- Listens to children and is interested in what they have to say.
- Has a Kids Friendly office (Rev Pauline Stewart's St Heliers office has a lolly jar, toys and a friendly puppet for visiting children).
- Is a patron of children's creations displaying their work on noticeboards, on the front page of the bulletin, as a powerpoint backdrop to songs.
- Appreciates, values and thanks children for their contributions.
- Shares children's sermons that relate to their worlds using symbols and characters they understand and love. (Rev Martin Baker captured adults and kids attention for years with his Ken and Barbie



- Has a relationship with local groups serving children eg schools, plunkets, kindergartens.
- Is accessible to children and families of the church and community.
- Asks their children's leaders for advice on how to be a better Kids Friendly minister.
 - Reads books and articles on children's ministry.
 - Lives Jesus' words: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."
 - Values and appreciates the people who work with children and tells them so.
 - Schedules time to regularly meet with children's ministry leaders (Rev Ian Hyslop of St Andrew's Geraldine meets with children and youth leaders weekly to discuss

challenges, celebrate successes, brainstorm ideas and pray together.)

- Shares all information that comes across his/her desk that has anything to do with children's ministry.
- Encourages and budgets for children's leaders to have supervision and professional development.
- Plans the children's ministry and Christian education programme with leaders.
- Advocates for children's leaders ensuring they are invited to sit on session or at least share with session regularly.
- Promotes the children's ministry work and leaders to the congregation eg invites them to share successes of their minister.
- Has an open door policy for leaders/children's ministers and listens to their concerns.
- Works as a team.
- Involves children ministry leaders in all decisions that impact or affect children.



Rev Henry Mbambo minister of Dunedin South Presbyterian Church was sharing the concept of prayer with the children of his church. "When you pray you are talking to God and you can do that in any position" he said. "You can pray standing, lying down, kneeling or sitting. So how would you like to pray today?" A preschooler piped up "Lying down!" So Henry lay down at the front of the church with children lying around him as he prayed for God's blessing on them.

Kids in Mission

St J's kids collect a mountain of food for downtown food bank

"Last winter St J's Kids leaders (St John's-in-the-City, Wellington) discussed the crisis in local food bank stocks. The recession had resulted in the greatest demand for food ever. The global economic crisis, rising unemployment and a very cold winter had resulted in hundreds of hungry families. We decided to present this problem to the children of our church and ask them for ideas about what we could do to help the food bank. We also consulted the Downtown Community Mission to make sure what we did was actually useful. They provided us with a list of preferred food (which surprisingly did not include Baked Beans!) and here is what happened next.

"We introduced the idea to St J's Kids with a question: 'Are you hungry this winter? You may not be, but some people are...'. Each group brainstormed ideas and put into action a plan to collect food and/or raise money for the Food bank.



The Puss-in-Boots group (ages 3-5yrs) brought cans of food to church each week for four weeks to build a massive 'food pyramid' by the communion table in the church.

The Dragons (ages 5-6yrs) had an idea of selling fudge. Not many had made fudge before but they had all tasted it, so it seemed like a good idea. So they all made Russian Fudge one Sunday morning during their small group time. The kids rotated the stirring, beating, testing and tasting, with colourful sign production for their sales table after church. They raised \$88.00 from the sale of their sweet treats!

The Blind Mice (ages 7-8 yrs) decided to sell handmade bookmarks and bunches of spring flowers on the sales day. They carefully made bookmarks in the shape of footprints and decorated them ready to sell. A couple in our church were planning a visit to India and Nepal so many of the congregation bought these bookmarks (52 in fact!) to take to the children. This group raised \$172.30 for the food bank!

The Gingerbread Men (ages 9-11 yrs) organised the Great Pantry Raid! The children (supported by their leaders and friends) turned up suitably attired in black beanies and blackened faces to raid parishioners' houses on a designated Saturday afternoon. The visits were lots of fun and very memorable. One house owner provided "hot and cold" clues for the kids; another hid all the food so the cupboard was bare and another family was armed with water guns to deter the raiders.

The children (and leaders) were stunned by the generosity of the pantry owners. They came back to the church clutching dozens of boxes and bags of groceries.

On the final Sunday, people arrived to see a towering pyramid of food stacked around the communion table. We had a special blessing on the food and prayers of thanks for the generosity of our people. After church, children dragged and carried boxes and boxes of food to load into a van to take to the DCM Food bank. Stephanie, McIntyre, Director of DCM, especially opened the food bank for our group and told us about how the food was used, where it went and who would need it.

St J's Kids left that experience with a sense of pride and a greater awareness of need in our community. Oliver's words perhaps sum it up: "Mum, the food that we brought was more than double what they had on the shelves. What would they have fed the people on Monday without us?"

Reaping more than we sowed

Some special things happened as a result of our food bank project.

- Our theme for 2009 of building community and belonging was inadvertently realised as St J's Kids connected with people in the church that they didn't know.
- The cheeky pantry raid resulted in intergenerational relationships.
- The visit to the food bank opened the children's hearts and minds to the needs of their community.
- Hearing how their bookmarks were received by the street kids of Kathmandu and India expanded their understanding of children in need and established connection with a very different world.



A Family Easter Encounter

Easter is central to our faith, but we often struggle to share the cruel and violent parts of the story with children. Sue Ellis, children's minister at St Columba Botany for three years, shares one of her creative ideas for telling the Easter story:

"I had no sooner recovered from holiday programme and writing our annual plan for children's ministry, when I realised that Easter was just about upon us. I wondered how I could bring the Easter story alive for the children of our church.

I realised I only had a very limited time with children before school broke up and with Easter falling in the school holidays, many of the children would not hear the Easter story at SuperKids (our children's church).

We also acknowledge that parents are the most important influence on children's faith, so we wanted to come up with an idea that would engage and involve the whole family. And so we created an Easter Encounter to help our families journey through holy week.

A week before holy week, each family was presented with a gold wrapped Easter box full of ideas, conversation starters and craft activities to engage the whole family. We suggested mealtimes were good for parents

to talk to their children about Easter and we provided readings, conversation starters and activities to facilitate this discussion. Each Easter Encounter box was prepared for specific families taking into account the number and age of children.

We recruited our team of volunteers and made 75 boxes each labelled for families with one child, two children etc. So every child had something to do.

The boxes contained coins, stars, a tea light candle, a transparency cut into a tear shape, crackers for family communion, Easter crafts, and Easter eggs (one per child) instructions to make palm branches, readings and prayers plus hand out sheets with readings for the families to reflect on. The response of families was amazing. So many said how special it was to sit together and share this time. Most surprising to me were the many families with young children who found this a great time to explain a difficult story.

I believe parents are the primary Christian educators of their children and that my job as children's pastor is to support and offer resources to help them in this important task. I was thrilled that our Easter Encounter encouraged family conversations and questions around such an important event."



Synod invests in children and families



I'm excited to welcome **Cheryl Harray** as Kids Friendly Coach for the churches in the Synod of Otago and Southland. Cheryl has worked as part-time Kids Friendly Coach for Dunedin Presbytery for the last two years and Synod's appointment of her is a credit to her work. Dunedin/North Otago still has more Kids Friendly churches (9) than any other Presbytery due to their ongoing commitment to and investment in Kids Friendly. Cheryl will be working full-time for the Synod. Says Cheryl: "It will be great to be able to invest more time into this exciting initiative of our Presbyterian Church. I am looking forward to meeting, and helping to resource, more churches in the South as they minister to children and families in their communities."

If your church would like to know more about Kids Friendly or commit to review and improve your ministry to children and families contact Kids Friendly.

Proud to be Kids Friendly



Becoming a Kids Friendly church takes time and commitment. First the vision is shared with the session or parish council and the Kids Friendly pledge signed. Then a "dream team" commits to meet regularly to review their children's ministry and work towards Kids Friendly goals. When the review team believes their church is meeting most the Kids Friendly ideals, they submit their review documentation and supporting documents for assessment by the Kids Friendly Coach. They are then sent a congratulatory letter, certificate, posters and artwork to help them promote their Kids Friendly status to their congregation and community. Some ways churches do this include: erecting a sign outside their church, displaying their Kids Friendly certificate and statement of intent,

including a statement in their order of service, using the Kids Friendly logo on their website as a link to their children's ministry activities and in the case of St John's Papatoetoe as a link to the Kids Friendly website! We encourage churches to use the Kids Friendly logo liberally especially in communications aimed at children and families. St Alban's even have Kids Friendly stickers on all their glass doors - a very creative way to ensure safety and promote their commitment to children. And telling your community you are a Kids Friendly church doesn't have to cost too much. The Kids Friendly logo is now available in a range of cost effective weather proof decals that you can stick on existing signs or doors. For more information on this see the website or contact our office.