

Worship Services for little children

For a really good article by Alison Dayer (Scripture Union) on 'Worshipping the Under Fives Way', see this link:

http://light.scriptureunion.org.uk/light/secure/downloads/080401_042157.pdf

In addition to running parent toddler groups around the UK, there are also lots of churches offering simple services for young families with little children.

A generic term used to be 'pram services' (the big 'Silver Cross prams come to mind!). The more imaginative churches gave these services a special name that pointed towards their vision... 'Tots Praise', 'Toddler Worship' service, 'Little Angels' to name but a few.

This type of mini service continues today, worshipping God and helping children and adults to experience 'Church'. New names locally include 'let the Children Sing', 'Pray and Play', 'ABC Sunday' and 'Pippins Praise'.

They run either weekly or monthly or at end of term celebrations or festivals - Christmas and Easter and other significant times and offer a short, simple children friendly service with simple structure, creative ways of prayer and storytelling and singing, noisy times and quieter reflection, simple rhythms and rituals, opportunities for movement, variety and spontaneity.

A pattern for the service is important incorporating movement, prayer, singing and music and opportunities for participation.

Of course, the needs of parents and carers bringing these little children along must be included in the planning. How comfortable and welcomed do they feel? Are they having their needs met in the same way as the diagram below refers to young children? Are we showing God's love through attending to the needs of those who come and helping them to belong?

The context of these services is very important. Are the practical considerations taken into account? Somewhere for baby changing if required, somewhere for discreet/private breast feeding? toilets? refreshments?

A very important factor is the concentration span of little children (they say 1 minute for each year of their age and that's on a good day!) Keep things moving, change the pace, encourage participation, music with actions, repetitive refrains for children to join in, changing the pace.

It is important to honour the spirituality and self expression of little children rather than expecting them to perform on demand, banging drums or singing for

the congregation, rewarded by an appreciative applause. Worshipping alongside little children is a powerful lesson. They teach us so much in their simple trust - glimpses of the kingdom.

Prayerful planning and sensitivity is an essential foundation to avoid services becoming excessively 'kiddified' rather than child centred. Are there opportunities for them to be a worship experience for all ages attending?

One church locally is supported by a group of people in their 60's and 70's and beyond, who value the opportunity to welcome the little children and who delight in the music and choruses - old traditional and modern stomping, marching songs from contemporary songwriters.

If you are thinking of starting a service for under fives and their grown ups, do some research. Visit existing services in your area. If you are already established, do some visiting as well. You may find renewed or fresh ideas and inspiration to encourage you.

Some references:

'Children CAN worship' Nick Harding (Pub Kevin Mayhew 1999)

'Pretty Much Everything You Need to Know about Working with Under Fives'
Judith Wigley (Pub. SU 2005)

'New Ideas for Creative Prayer' Judith Merrell (Pub. SU 2001)

'Pray & Play' Kathy Cannon (Pub. SU 2-002)