

The Kids Friendly Advisor's verbal report at the Synod AGM 2013 was a



very visual one as Cheryl showed many photos from around the region of ministry with children. The experience is that there is generally a 'wide open door' for ministry with families when the church loves and serves children.

The message was **OPEN THE DOOR!** as we considered Jesus words " Let the children come to me and do not hinder them..."

So we looked IN and OUT asking the question ***In what ways do we welcome children into our churches and in what ways do we go out through our church doors to help children and families of our community come to Jesus?***

Firstly LOOKING IN there are many examples of churches intentionally welcoming children with bright and welcoming signs, places where children can get a name tag or sticker and be greeted.



Highgate,

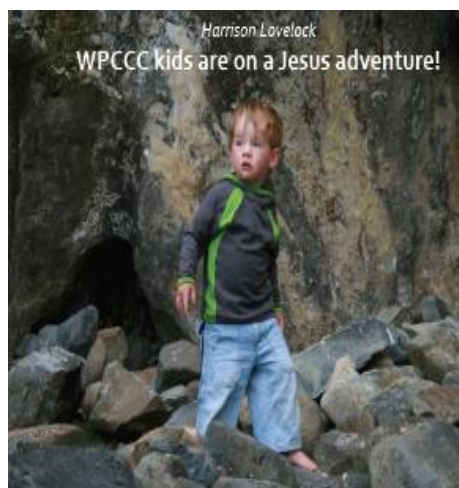


Flagstaff



Leith valley

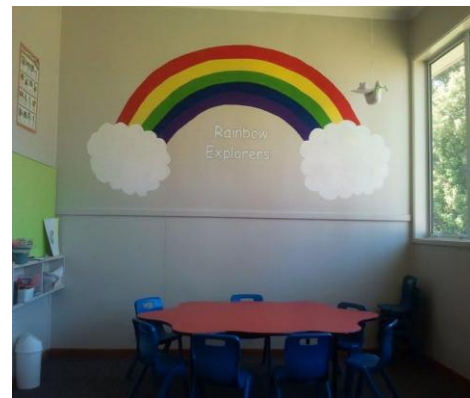
Greeting children by name is important and possible whether you have 1 child or 51 children



Orders of service can also reflect that children are welcome and important. E.g Wanaka Presbyterian Community Church has a new church building, a new service sheet- including this picture and wording "WPCCC children are on a Jesus adventure!"



And in Te Anau there is a low table, brightly covered and someone to greet chn as they get their sticker. Young chn can go out to uncluttered, bright and colourful rooms.



During the service the minister takes time to talk with the children and their achievements are celebrated. Children are invited to the front where they can see and be encouraged to be involved/participate.



They love to be actively involved and will often happily participate in acting out Biblical stories- e.g. Palm Sunday this year at Te Anau

Also at Lawrence Waitahuna where chn make a tower of stones to illustrate Jesus temptation in the wilderness or cut feet out during a Maundy Thursday service







Children don't always have to participate by making things or moving- they are also capable of and can be encouraged to be quiet and reflective when they are invited to do so with clear explanations.

Some seasons of the church year lend themselves to more participation and who can resist a band of beautiful angels at Christmas! (Lawrence Waitahuna)



Easter and Christmas in particular are times to give children the opportunity to act out, learn and love the stories that are central to our faith. In Weston, Oamaru the children have been re enacting the Christmas story for years.

But in 2012 the older youth joined the children and it was a wonderful time of shared fun and learning- the older youth offering role models, leadership with great relationships developing between young and old.



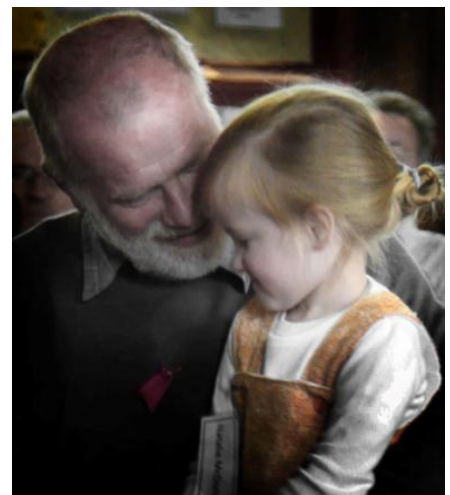


Older children can use their gifts to minister (not entertain) the congregation, e.g. a ribbon dance by an 11yr old girl to 'Indescribable' with ppt put together by 12 yr old boy – very moving (Flagstaff, Dunedin)

and the drama, the multi sensory experience of Communion is a time where many churches are intentionally thinking about how to include and welcome children.



Most Sunday morning churches offer a separate children's programme during the latter part of the service but there are some that intentionally have all ages together. (B@tch)



There is no one right way but it is important to provide opportunities for children to learn to worship and respond while participating with the whole worshipping community. (B@tch)





The traditional Sunday School model of instruction is being challenged as churches consider what the future may look like. Whatever evolves it is clear that children need a place to belong, grow and 'practice' Christian faith. Parents need a church that supports and encourages them as primary nurturers of their children's faith. All working together with the end goal of helping children to become lifelong followers of Jesus.... 'Let the children come' ( a whole family being baptised at St Pauls Oamaru)



**LOOKING OUT.** What is happening outside of Sunday morning worship and during the rest of the week?

For many years there has been a strong relationship between church and school – especially through volunteers teaching CRE. An amazing ministry this is changing as schools and churches respond to the challenges of a shrinking volunteer base, some active opposition in an increasingly secular NZ. Change from individual class lessons to large assembly style presentations.



Also in some schools churches are offering lunchtime or afterschool 'SUPAKidz' clubs (Flagstaff, Dunedin) or providing school chaplains. There is openness in many schools to welcome a partnership with the local church in new ways.



When a church asks a local school 'How can we help you? The answer can be surprising! Nit busting for 6 years now at Wakari School and a one off opportunity to give practical help at Halfway Bush school's tremendous makeover last weekend (both eggs from Flagstaff, Dn)

Reading tutors in schools- a wonderful ministry. St Margaret's, Frankton



were inspired after hearing St Andrews Invercargill's story. An approach to their brand new local school has resulted in 18 volunteers over 3 days, 3 community awards in 2012 and the opportunity to present a Christmas play to the whole school for the last 2 years.

Great relationships as 'The lovely ladies' are recognised down the street by children from the school.







**Preschool music and movement** groups are offered in more than 25 churches in our region – some mainly music, others home grown- all serving children and parents and seeking to grow relationships and offer other connecting points for these families with Christian faith.

At Clutha Valley mainly music who invited families to an interactive walk through Easter event- from the Passover meal and explanation.... to the 'bubbles of joy' of the resurrection- it was a wonderful event.



Cromwell Rhythm and Dance has been operating for a number of years with huge community attendance. For their Christmas 2012 party they had the normal music session then...





moved to the church foyer for a retelling of the Christmas story followed by a lunch provided by the church. Hospitality with food is becoming a big part of how churches can show welcome to the community.



Cromwell's Children and families' worker (and trained music teacher) Cath Forsythe also offers an afternoon music group where children learn a mixture of secular and Christian songs. This may lead to children's participation in church later.

Benita Barton of Pinehill, Dunedin has been offering free piano lessons to community children for years and some of these children play at the church when the 2 local schools come to the church 3 x a year for special services- Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. The children prepare their parts and enjoy the drama, participation and individual packs the church provides.



There is great excitement at the Pentecost service when children write their prayers on helium balloons then let them go!







Churches are also developing relationships with local preschools or in some cases, after lots of prayer and planning, building and providing their own early childhood centres with a strong Christian foundation and oversight.

Eg Kidsway at Tapanui just celebrated their 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



Many churches offer holiday programmes in 1 or more of the term holidays. Special mention and Yay for you! To Mary Somerville of Coastal Unity, Dunedin who leads a team that has offered a weeklong, WHOLE day programme every holiday including Christmas for the past 6 years. Parents appreciate the low cost option and many relationships developing with community families.



Similarly in Brockville, parents know that the after school 'Fish' club is a safe fun place for their children.



Brockville community church are reaching out to their community with community meals and finding other ways to help families play together and explore faith together



After 9 years of mainly music, Mosgiel asked 'what might church look like for the families we are building relationships with? Started Family T in 2008 early Sunday eve with a meal and activities around a theme. Continuing strong 2x a month





Similarly, relationships formed through offering a Monday afternoon Kids Club for 5 years has now led Flagstaff to offer an interactive, all age Sunday evening service 1x month including a catered meal for community families. This Hill Top Family church is into its second year with good attendance and appreciation. It is considered as a growing new congregation.



These new initiatives take a LOT of energy and time so sometimes pooling resources can be a good idea- like 3 churches in the South Dunedin area who have offered Christmas and Easter '**Messy Church**' on a Saturday for families in their combined community.





Together Everyone Achieves More is also the experience of churches that combine to offer **BIG community events** at Christmas Angels and Heroes in Gore or like Children's Day in Dunedin in this picture- beginning with an outdoor church service



followed by gala activities for children - all the fun of the fair and an event for families where the church is actively demonstrating that children are important and welcome.

Yes! Many churches in the Synod are opening their doors to children and families – on Sundays and throughout the week in intentional, creative and missional ways.



As I finish I want to acknowledge that ALL these examples I have shared, take commitment, energy and time and so I would like to honour ALL those in the Synod who give their time, gifts and passion to serve in children and families ministry in Otago Southland.

You know who these key people are in your parish so please support them, pray for them, and offer to help, take them a cup of tea on Sundays, and help them tidy up! Take them out for a drink during the week, listen to their passion and make sure they know about the support and resources of Kids Friendly!



But also remember that being Kids Friendly is not a children's programme for a few. It is a way of thinking and being for the WHOLE church as we consider Jesus command "Let the children come"

**OPEN THE DOOR!**

Finally I would like to share with you one more example of what it may look like when we OPEN THE DOOR for children so they can come to Jesus and not be hindered. I hope it will also be a reminder to us that..

**children can minister to us and be our teachers** – encouraging us to grow a childlike faith and trust.



I would like you to meet a 6 year old boy called Elliot, who knows God loves him and answers his prayers.

Elliot lives in Auckland and World Vision have used this video of him all around the world to minister to MANY people of all ages. May he

minister to you as he leads us in prayer now. Let us pray.

(Show video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCQj\\_20vXh0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCQj_20vXh0) )