

Kids Friendly Advisors AGM Address 2014

‘How are we going in our ‘kids friendliness’?

Kids Friendliness is really about having a HEART for CHILDREN which considers and nurtures THEIR faith development alongside everyone else in our church community.

Jesus said “Let the children come to me and do not stop them”

Children grow best when they can see Christianity in action and are encouraged to join in and practice it. It takes time and there are many ways of doing this. As one of the Kenyan evangelists who has just visited Dunedin said ‘Building souls takes time. It is more like a slow cooker than a microwave.’ I want to share 2 stories that illustrate this point:

They are stories of 2 real children and their families in the southern region but names have been changed. Perhaps you can think of a child like them in your church or community.

Anna lives in a small rural town. Going to church on Sundays with her Mum, Dad and younger brother has been part of her life for as long as she can remember. As a young child, the minister and door greeters knew her and welcomed her by name. She and a couple of school friends would always sit at the front of church. Anna liked it when they played instruments or got to help with the offering, or a reading. Then in Sunday school they would hear Bible stories and have fun with games, crafts and learning memory verses. She liked it when there was a church picnic or shared lunch or when there were chocolate biscuits for morning tea! Mum helped with Sunday school so Anna usually knew what the lesson was going to be about beforehand. Once she got a bit older Anna was able to help her Mum get things ready for Sunday and the crafts for the weekly preschool club at the church. Anna still has the Christmas scene in a shoe box she made when SHE was a pre-schooler !

When she finished Sunday school in year 8 she wondered what she would do but she was asked to help look after the little ones in crèche. That was Ok for a while but this year she has been asked to help with the Sunday school properly and goes out most weeks even though other adults take turns on a roster. They appreciate her help and ideas. She is good at games – she knows what kids like playing, and can run around with them and get down on the floor. She’s also good at technology – the older leaders appreciate that too!

Anna is 14 now and I met her at their Sunday school leaders meeting earlier this year. Although young, she was confident to share her ideas, and the other adults there spoke encouragingly of her gifts and strengths. After the meeting she told me she wanted to be an Early Childhood teacher, and could she please go on my mailing list so she could get all the ideas straight away. She wants to keep learning how to share God and the Bible with children and help make it fun for the ones who come to church now.

Do you have children like Anna who enjoy coming to church each week? What does it take to keep encouraging them to grow in faith? How are they given opportunities to serve especially as they grow through those tricky years of ages 10 – 13?

The second story is about Tom and his family –I have heard this story through the children and families worker of a suburban church in the city. Let’s call her Margaret.

Margaret first met Tom when he was 10. His step father had just tragically died leaving Mum with 4 boys to raise alone. Margaret went to the funeral and offered assistance. From there a relationship of trust slowly formed between Margaret and the mum, visiting the home, offering practical help and a listening ear. Tom and his younger brothers were invited to the church’s holiday programme which was fun, with good food and games. It was something to do for one week every school holidays.

They became regulars and even came to church on Sundays – when someone picked them up. Mum didn’t come. Tom listened to Margaret talk about God but more than that he watched how she and the other leaders lived it out. When his mother got breast cancer it was another really rocky time for the family and Tom would hang out at Margaret’s place where he always knew he was welcome and could talk things through with her and her husband. Youth group at their house on Friday nights is the highlight of his week and he hates to miss it. Now his younger brothers are coming too and last year Tom (now 14) took the next step of following Jesus by being confirmed. This year, Margaret has asked him to help her with Sunday School

and that is a bit scary as he doesn't think he knows that much yet about the Bible. But it is really cool that she thinks he can do it - so he is going to try his best. It's good to know that Margaret and others from the church are there for him and will keep helping him in this new journey of faith.

Do you have connections with community families like Tom's? What does it take to keep encouraging them to grow in faith? How are they welcomed and given space to explore, discover and grow in Christ?

Ministry with children and families is like a slow cooker not a microwave. It takes consistent encouragement and relationships whether these children and families are INSIDE or OUTSIDE the church at the start. While Anna's story and path may be more familiar to us historically, may I suggest, that given current statistics, there are many MORE children outside of the church than in it. We are called into God's Mission to the world. Let us include children in our missional thinking and plans. It will be my privilege to continue to walk alongside your church as you practise 'kidsfriendliness' in its many shapes and forms!

I move that my report is accepted