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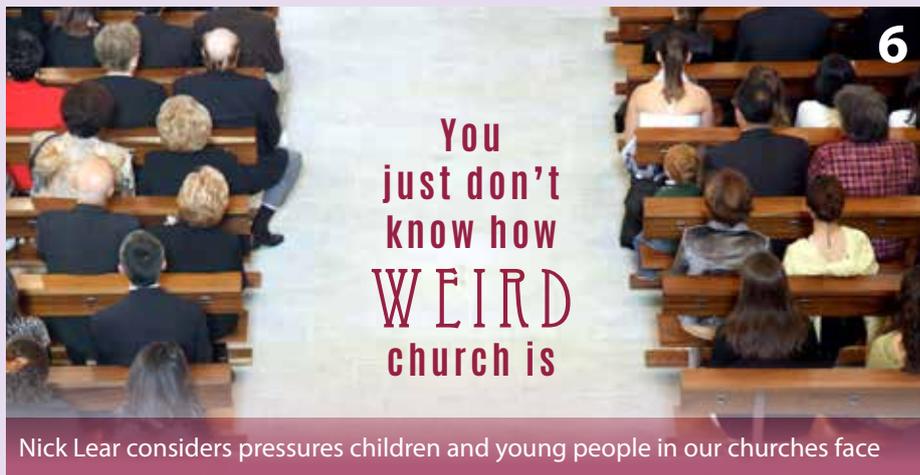
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Church for Everyone



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This edition of *Baptists Together* magazine is themed around children, young people and families (CYF) – and how exciting to be able to share so many examples of commendable practice and enlightened thinking across the country. In the pages that follow we are confident you will find a rich mix of articles and resources.

Amid the variety, a distinct theme emerges. Raising children and young people in the faith is a wonderful but difficult privilege, not one simply to be delegated to a leader, however

gifted. Everyone potentially has a role, from supporting parents, mentoring, participating in Messy Church or youth groups, to anything else that helps them respond to and understand the invitation to follow Jesus.

This echoes the findings of the Evangelical Alliance when it looked into the exodus of children and concluded 'It takes a whole church to raise a child!'¹

¹ www.eauk.org/church/campaigns/whole-church

Bob Morris offers another explanation in his piece about the growth of the Fusion youth club (p14). 'My definition of teamwork', he writes, 'is to get people around me who are not like me.'

Children's, youth and families worker? We all are. May there be something in the stories and ideas in this edition of *Baptists Together* to encourage and challenge you, and those around you.

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You just don't know how WEIRD church is

Photo: Freepik.com

Playing sports, going shopping – or sitting in a pew?
Staying in bed, watching Youtube – or singing hymns?
Living a distinctive life as a follower of Jesus; but still wanting to fit in with your peers.
We really shouldn't underestimate the pressures the children and young people
in our churches face. By **Nick Lear**

The BBC TV programme Top Gear has been immensely popular, attracting some of the top viewing figures for BBC1. Despite the well-publicised issues with the presenters the show remains popular and its return was eagerly awaited. Cars are driven to places and in ways that cars have never been driven before. They are driven around a track at maximum possible speeds. Cars are used unconventionally: as darts; converted into amphibious vehicles; and so much more. The show does things with cars that the vast majority of us will never do, but the big kid inside me would love to do. Yet all I ever get to do in my car is pootle around on the roads within the speed limits.

I wonder if many children in our churches look at what their friends do on Sundays with the same amount of envy. Their friends get to stay in bed / play games / enjoy sports / go shopping / watch YouTube / and so much more. Church-attending children get up early, go to a service, sing songs and hymns, sit through a lesson, hear about events that happened thousands of years ago and drink over-diluted

orange squash. Their friends are living the Top Gear experience while they are Sunday drivers. Be honest, which would you rather do? Can you imagine trying to 'sell' church to your school friends the next day? Most adults in churches have grown so used to what we do that we don't realise just how weird church is for the vast majority of people in our country, even more so for children and young people.

at an early stage in their life
many children and young people in church
are being asked to make the sort of decision
that many of us adults don't have to face
– choosing between their friends or their faith

Ten years ago I became aware of statistics that showed that children were disappearing from our churches at a faster rate than ever before – 25,000 in ten years! It prompted a national prayer day named *On Our Knees*. Drawing upon feedback from participating churches about the answers they'd received to their prayers, a strategic response emerged. But ten years on the difficulties of raising children and young people in the faith are still present, even if churches have made changes. Their experience of church is alien to their friends and potentially alienating them from church.



At an early stage in their life many children and young people in church are being asked to make the sort of decision that many of us adults don't have to face – choosing between their friends or their faith; a choice that may make the difference between popularity and mockery. And the

pressure they are under should not be underestimated – pressure from parents to attend church (and perhaps to make a commitment to Jesus); pressure from their church leaders to live a distinctive life as a follower of Jesus; pressure from their peers outside church to conform to their values and lifestyle; pressure from within not to upset anyone and not to stick out from the crowd. Is it any wonder that some of them adopt a chameleon lifestyle where they change how they are (and who they are) to blend in with their surroundings? Is it any wonder many parents have a struggle to get their children to go with them to church?



the heart of the problem, it seems to me, is that we have forgotten that in the Bible the stories of faith were to be talked about in everyday life



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It might be difficult to believe but recent surveys show that knowledge of the Christmas story is fading.* Among 5-7 year olds, 36% don't know whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas and 72% don't know Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Among adults, less than 12% know the full nativity story and 51% say that the birth of Jesus is irrelevant to their Christmas. This is a tipping point.

*Survey findings from ComRes 2007, 2010, 2012.

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Sunday Schools began as a philanthropic education movement and evolved as Governments took over the provision of education for all. They have morphed into becoming the primary way in which Christians pass on their faith to the succeeding generations. Many churches still operate this model today – albeit with enticing midweek programmes – but we have delegated and abdicated responsibility for the spiritual well-being of our children and young people to our churches. The heart of the problem, it seems to me, is that we have forgotten that in the Bible the stories of faith were to be talked about in everyday life.

I'm not blaming parents here because it's a cultural shift we have all bought into and churches may not equip parents to disciple their children. In my last church we created some laminated place mats for families to use at meal times. They had three colourful pictures on them that represented 'Thank you, sorry and please' and were intended to be used at meal times as a reminder to help families pray together more naturally: before praying the family could talk about what they wanted to pray about – the whole family, not just the children. To my shame this was the first tangible thing I had done in ministry that was specifically designed to help families 'normalise' faith. To my delight they proved very popular. The experience spoke loudly to me. It spoke of how we can do small things to make a big difference.

So what can we do? Helping our families to disciple their children is a good step in the right direction. While I am asking awkward questions I might as well ask some more: how honest are we about our faith? Do adults present an image of having it all sorted for fear that our doubts and questions might be contagious? Do we equip them to ask hard questions of the Bible or to accept it unquestioningly? Do we do them any favours if we teach them to believe that with Jesus all our problems disappear

their experience of church is alien to their friends and potentially alienating them from church

(when they know full well from their home experience that this is not true)? If their faith is merely an unquestioning imitation of the faith of those who teach them we should not be surprised if the seeds

we have delegated and abdicated responsibility for the spiritual well-being of our children and young people to our churches

we have sown have fallen on the path, among weeds or stony ground rather than fertile soil.

Don't get me wrong. I am not knocking groups and programmes and activities for children and young people. They need to be included in the life and activity of the local church.

If, however, that is supplemental to our faith and discipleship being a natural part of family life, we may well help our children and young people to normalise their faith. If we help them to discover a robust, honest, realistic faith in Jesus they will be better able to 'stand their ground, and after they have done everything, to stand.' (Eph 6:13)

Nick Lear is a Regional Minister in the **Eastern Baptist Association**



Nick's blog 'Nukelear Fishing' contains his weekday musings as he tries to be a free sample of Jesus and look for God in the ordinary. See: <https://nukelear.me.uk>

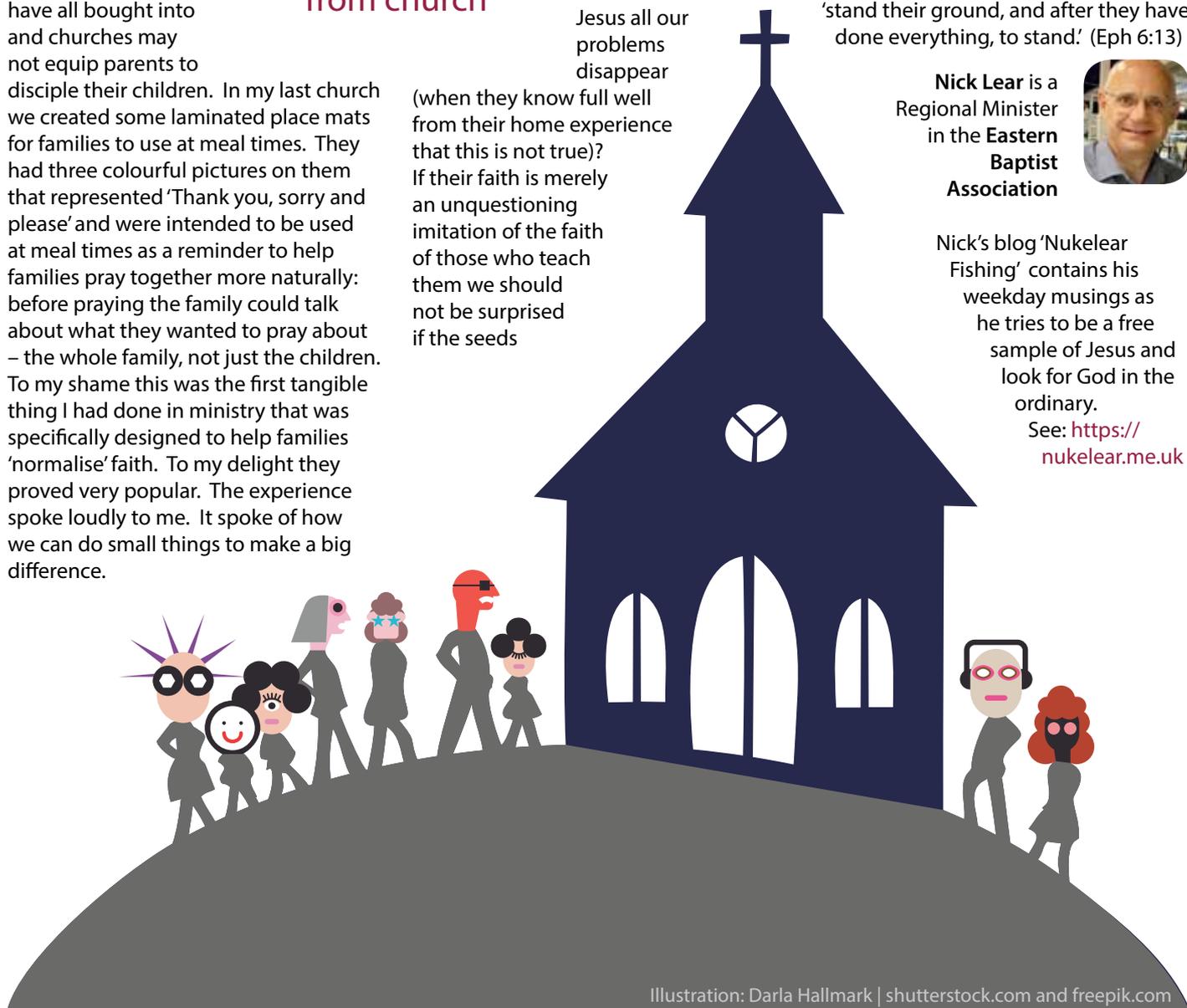


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The crucial role of pastoral friendship

A small but hugely significant privilege of being General Secretary is taking part in the 'In Memoriam' at the Baptist Assembly. This year was particularly moving for me because I read the name of the minister who had welcomed me to faith and baptised me - Peter Robert Mitson. Not attending church but having read a Gideon Bible as a teenager, I encountered the Lord and then read in Scripture that I should be baptised. This resulted in the 14-year-old me phoning Peter and asking if I could be baptised! I look back now and am deeply grateful for all the welcome, encouragement, love and teaching that Peter and Beth offered me through their pastoral friendship.

this is not something that is reserved for trained, professional specialists; we can all play our part in offering welcome, friendship and gentle discipleship in appropriate ways to children and young people

Two things in particular stand out. The first is their warm hospitality; cups of tea, roast chicken meals, baptism classes and lots of conversation. I was welcome in their home and in their lives. In this lovely natural way they disciplined me in those early years.

The second was that they were 'for me' even if I didn't quite fit into their Christian 'world view'. You see, they were from a Brethren background and I had this sense that God was calling me to ministry... Even though, in one way, they didn't know what to do with me, in another they loved and encouraged me nevertheless. I know that I am by no means alone in this experience – many, many of us have been loved,

encouraged, supported and disciplined as children and/or young people by other followers of Jesus in our church communities. This is not something that is reserved for trained, professional specialists; we can all play our part in offering welcome, friendship and gentle discipleship in appropriate ways to children and young people.

What is wonderful, is that smaller churches have a distinct advantage here. You may not be able to offer 'all singing, all dancing' youth programmes (although you can often access this in connection with the wider church) but you can offer real and authentic relationships. Gavin Calver shared recently that a 15 year old in the UK today is more likely to have a smart phone than a dad at home. There are so many children and young people who are longing for a few people to be 'for them'. We need to be wise and accountable in how we do that, but don't let's lose sight of the simple power of pastoral friendship.

One practical way we can express this is through taking the time to listen to children and young people and seeking to understand their 'world'. A few years ago I had a go at facilitating this with a local church. First of all I asked people to create a 'decadal rainbow'. Everyone in their 10s, then 20s, 30s and so on. I figured that asking people to line themselves up in decade order would not be too pastorally insensitive... The first thing that happened was that we experienced a moment of revelation: there were less than 10 under 30 and an awful lot of people who were in their 70s and 80s. Now it is not a sin to be in your 70s and 80s of course! But this begs the question of what the church will look like in 30 years' time. Next we got into decade groups and each group looked at the same set of questions; things like 'what was/is school like?', 'how do you find out information?' 'What will/does/did employment look like for you?' Later each group shared their answers, and much mutual understanding and insight was gained from this simple exercise – why don't you try it in your church?

Peter and Beth Mitson with Lynn and Stuart Green, at their wedding in 1986



Photo: Sarah Pendreigh

I am so thankful to Peter and Beth Mitson for all they invested in me. Who will be thankful for your encouragement and pastoral friendship when you come to the end of your days?



Lynn Green is General Secretary of our Baptist Union

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ORGANISING CHAOS

Photo: Andrew Ginn

Andrew Ginn realised that age shouldn't be the most important factor when it comes to structuring youth ministry

If there was one thing that made me want to quit working with young people, it's the moment when you're sitting with a group, mid-testimony about the life-changing power of our resurrected Jesus and the love he has for each of us... and a 12 year-old stops you mid-sentence to say "how much longer till we can play football?"

Or when an 18 year old does exactly what you've been telling them for years, and they bring a friend to their Bible study group. The normal buzzing, intriguing discipleship discussion suddenly becomes a lot of awkward shuffling, as the group are torn between making the new person feel welcome, and wanting to get stuck in to some deep conversation about the Bible stories they've been contemplating for years.

It's a horrible feeling when expectations and experience don't match up. It seems that all too often there's a gap between what young people expect from a youth group, and what youth ministry delivers. The mismatch begs the question as to whether some of our assumptions as leaders are the problem.

why shouldn't young people encounter the Gospel for the first time, aged 18?

When we stepped back and thought about it, we realised that the structure of our youth ministry suggested our assumption was that as young people got older, they got holier; that all 18 year olds would be best served by an intense discipleship discussion group, and all 11 year olds were best served by football with a God-slot. In hindsight, sorting youth ministry by age seems arbitrary.

Why shouldn't young people encounter the Gospel for the first time, aged 18? Why shouldn't

a 12 year old want to sit and share stories about their saviour for an hour?

The aim of our youth ministry is to help people grow in faith, irrespective of age. It's been observed that there are patterns to the ways people grow in faith¹, and yet none of these patterns regimentally adhere to school years.

why shouldn't a 12 year old want to sit and share stories about their saviour for an hour?

The alternative, inspired by models of faith development, was to structure our church's youth ministry according to the beliefs of current or potential attendees, rather than our assumptions about would-be attendees, based on their age.

The first step in changing our approach was to improve our communication, so that all our flyers, posters and language about the church's youth ministry would give a crystal clear picture of what attendees could expect. All our groups are open to 11-18s, and young people have the choice as to which group would suit them best either for a specific topic, or for their general participation.

Our base line assumption for people opting into our church's youth ministry was that they could be wondering "Is God even real?" If people don't want to discuss that question, they'd be welcome to keep coming

along; at least they'd have fair warning that that's the sort of thing they might get asked.

¹ eg *Reveal: Where are you*: Hawkins and Parkinson, or *Stages of Faith*: Fowler, or works by Westerhoff

If they'd say "God's probably real, but I don't know about Jesus", it might be that they'd enjoy our group that explores Christianity. This weekly group uses only a few Bible passages per get-together, with a bunch of other contemporary references and ideas thrown in, as well as lots of food.

The next step for those growing in their faith would be to say "Jesus was probably real, but I don't really know what that means for me yet". In our model, this became the assumed position behind our Sunday morning gatherings. Often children were brought by parents and would agree that Jesus was probably real, but they hadn't connected the consequences of the incarnation with their life or values.

Our other group is for those who are proactively nurturing their faith in Jesus. They'd say "I want to work out how to live and practise my faith in Jesus in every decision". This would be a group that mostly draws on the Bible for discussion, comparing one scripture against another, and praying it through.

The model is still being tweaked: we're currently exploring how we can better integrate mentoring, and more of a 'learning-by-doing' approach.



Photo: Andrew Ginn

Since we've transitioned to this model, we've not had flocks of people attend (that was never the idea)... But there have been some wonderful, very welcome changes:

We've seen individual participation increase; young people who put themselves on the fringe now tend to join in more fully. We're seeing more newcomers stay on, as people find more of what they expect.

On top of that, young people have shown they feel more able to invite their friends, with the flyers and publicity all being really clear about what to expect.

We've seen the leaders feeling more confident in their roles, knowing where to pitch their sessions. It's been easier to manage differences in expectations when the purpose of the group is clearly out in the open.

All in all, it's been a very worthwhile adventure so far. The thought process is even leading us to ask some broader questions: maybe adult house groups don't have to be organised by geography?

Andrew Ginn is the Associate Minister (Youth and Community) at Bunyan Baptist Church, Stevenage



Share your thoughts at www.baptist.org.uk/organisingchaos

STUFF FOR YOUNG PEOPLE Autumn Term 2016

At Bunyan, there are three main weekly groups, as well as termly events. All the groups are held in the Lounge, at Bunyan Baptist Church, Basis Road. For more details about the group which would be best for you, have a look at these posters, talk to someone in the Youth Work team, check our website (www.bunyan.org.uk) or just turn up!

GROUP TIME: Sunday Morning Service

PURPOSE: With a whole heap of fun and games, the group looks at the same topics that the adults will be exploring the Sunday Service, as we all try to get to know Jesus personally.

WHAT HAPPENS: The group lasts about an hour, as we look through a few different Bible passages, as well as playing some games and having a bit of a laugh!

WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS TERM?

Date	Session Theme
11 th Sept	Decision Making God's way
18 th Sept	God and Jesus; Dad and Lad?
25 th Sept	Whole Church Service
2 nd Oct	Who is the Holy Spirit
9 th Oct	Going on a faith journey
16 th Oct	Coming back from a faith journey
23 rd Oct	Whole Church Service



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Bunyan Baptist Youth Activities

STUFF FOR YOUNG PEOPLE Autumn Term 2016

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GROUP TIME: Monday Evening 7:30pm

PURPOSE: If you reckon Jesus was probably a real live human being, and want to chat with others about what that means, you'll love this group!

WHAT HAPPENS: When we meet, we'll have about 45 mins for some games and food, followed by a chance to discover a bit more about Jesus.

WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS TERM?

Date	Session Theme
12 th Sept	What is a Christian?
19 th Sept	What is God like?
26 th Sept	Is Jesus still here?
3 rd Oct	Who and what is Church?
10 th Oct	Why would anyone read the Bible?
17 th Oct	What is prayer all about?
24 th Oct	Half Term - No Group!



CONTACT: andrew@bunyan.org.uk / 07825 330 830

Bunyan Baptist Youth Activities

Bunyan Baptist Church's youth ministry publicity gives a clear picture of what attendees can expect



Photo: Bob Morris

FAITH, teamwork and prayer

How a youth club, open to all, has grown numerically and spiritually. By **Bob Morris**

Have you ever started or inherited something in youth and children's ministry that you've felt is a bit like a runaway train? Welcome to FUSION, Cirencester Baptist Church's open youth club which now regularly attracts 100 young people each week.

When I arrived in 2004 this small outreach youth club was running every other week and mainly attracted children in Year 6 at a local primary school because their teacher helped to run the club. As part of my interview process I was asked to do the 'God Slot' (remember, this was 12 years ago) and 20 fresh faced youngsters were made to wait for the tuck shop to open until I'd finished. Twelve years on we've come a long way, faced some crazy issues and grown both numerically and spiritually.

This is not the story of hundreds of kids being saved and finding Jesus – we pray that this is still to come – but one of slow and steady growth showing the benefits of being in it for the long haul. It's a story of faithfulness and loyalty of volunteers and of years of hard work and excellence paying off in so many different ways.

If we had a secret it's 'teamwork'. My definition of teamwork is to get people around me who are not like me. This means we have volunteers between the ages of 15 and 80 from all sorts of work backgrounds, from students to lawyers, financial advisers, salesmen, music industry moguls and the unemployed. We also have a variety of activities going on around the building each week. After all, that's what FUSION means – the coming together of many different things. Our 80 year old is the 'tuck shop manager'. Brian used to trade all over the world when he was in business and getting paid for it. This has set him up nicely to fulfil his current role and if you want to know the price of a chocolate bar or J20 within a 30 mile radius of Cirencester, then he is your man. Of course every child knows him because they all visit the tuck shop.

They all know my colleague Naomi too as she registers them each week while I patrol the streets making sure

everyone gets in and out in a relatively orderly fashion without disturbing the neighbours too much. Our volunteers deserve so much credit as they turn up week in and week out to serve God by serving the youth of our town.

We run two sessions back to back each Thursday during term time. The first session unusually crosses the primary and secondary school sector and is for youth in years 6, 7 and 8 whilst the second session, called FUSION+, is for those in Years 9, 10 and 11. Each group has a good number of adult volunteers who love being a part of the FUSION family and

each wear a t shirt with our names on the front and our vision statement emblazoned on the back 'Sharing God's Love'.

It's important that each volunteer is able to share God's love and we recognise that this might be different for each individual. At a recent retreat (which we have annually for a whole weekend) we came up with a list of

my definition of teamwork is to get people around me who are not like me

about 20 ways we could share God's love – from a smile on the door to a nice welcome in the building to sharing your testimony or boosting a child's self-esteem. All of these things are Godly things to do – it's not just about talking all of the time.

All of our activities (pool, hockey, football, table tennis, craft, tuck shop and games consoles) give us the opportunity to get alongside and be Christ like. These things, coupled with 'Question of the week' which is posted on the walls, help us to be able to engage with the young people that God sends our way.

All of this is backed by a team of 20 or so pray-ers who each receive a prayer sheet every month and weekly feedback to let them know what's been going on. We wouldn't want to do this without them and their prayers are key to our ministry. Because of their faithfulness in prayer, often for certain individuals, we have seen the atmosphere and environment change over the years and young people are becoming more receptive to the God that we are trying to share with them.

More recently we have run *Alpha* courses and follow up courses that have been tailor-made to the needs of the young people. Showing short videos, eating pizza together and having interesting guest speakers who are able to share their lives with these youngsters have all served to help many young people with no or little church background realise that there is a journey of faith to make. One young person was heard to say recently "I think I am one step closer to being a Christian after hearing that guy's story". How good is that?

It's been a long journey so far and one that the FUSION team are prepared to keep taking because they can see progress and the benefit of offering stability to young people who live in such an unstable world. In the early years it was tough, but as we grew together and went through various circumstances together the unity came and we began to be more committed to prayer, to one another and to excellence in youth ministry.

a story of slow and steady growth showing the benefits of being in it for the long haul

Now we have one of the biggest youth clubs in the Cotswolds and everyone knows what we are trying to achieve. The good favour built up across the town among parents and schools is tangible, and our relationship in the local

community is a positive one. We have been hampered by lack of space in our current building but by early 2017 our new building will be ready: we hope to be able to expand activities there and especially make space for those who want to hang around with us once they've left school and FUSION+. Our vision is for 'FUSION Infinity' to take off!

Faith, teamwork and prayer – this is what it boils down to. If we continue to demonstrate these things then we will continue to see God at work.

'I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.' Psalm 27: 13

Bob Morris is the Youth and Children's Pastor at Cirencester Baptist Church



Photo: Bob Morris

Share stories of your youth group at www.baptist.org.uk/youthclub - what's worked for you?

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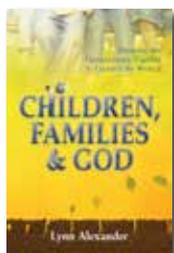
Photo: Monkey Business Images | shutterstock.com

With children and young people

In what ways are Baptists exploring new ways of nurturing their children and young people?

Family Tree, Glasgow

It's no surprise that children and young people are central to life at the *Family Tree* – team leader Lynn Alexander is practising what she has preached. In 2012 Lynn quit her job at a large Scottish Baptist church to write a book called *Children, Families and God*.



With a subtitle *Drawing the Generations Together*, the book

advocates whole family discipleship. It calls for an end to 'continual partitioning or excluding of

children from the key events in the life of the church', such as worship, prayer, baptism, communion, and housegroups. There is also a strong mission thread: Lynn wants to see families discipled in their relationship with God and each other, so they might be equipped to reach out to other families and see God's kingdom grow in their community. Through waiting on God over a period of time, Lynn received a strong sense that children and their extended families will begin to present themselves in our churches in great numbers, and from backgrounds with little knowledge of Jesus. There is, she wrote, 'a re-visiting of what it means to be generations together praising Jesus, learning from him and impacting the world significantly'.



Fast forward to 2016 and Lynn is living this out in a way she didn't imagine when she wrote *Children, Families and God*. Lynn is the team leader of *Family Tree*, a pioneering, fresh expression of church in Pollokshaws, an urban priority area of Glasgow.

The core value of *Family Tree* is demonstrated in the logo; it exists to provide a place for people to belong. Just like the connecting grid that genealogists draw out, everyone has a place in *Family Tree*. Our strapline is: 'Belonging, believing'. *Family Tree* meets on Sunday afternoons in the community hall of Pollokshaws Methodist Church. There is interactive Bible teaching, songs, prayer, chat - and time for questions. Simple food is shared at the end of the time together.

Once a month they get out of the building, either for prayer walking or the kind of creative street evangelism former Baptist Union President Chris Duffett is known for. Sometimes

they simply gather in the open air in the local park. This week is called 'Branching Out'.

Children and young people participate in everything that happens. "Some people's experience of church is of somewhere where children leave the room to go out to another group – we're not wanting to do that," says Lynn. "It's one of our core values."

Between 10 and 20 minutes are allocated to expositional, verse by verse Bible teaching. *Family Tree* is currently working through the book of Mark and an Old Testament theme once a month. It has to be highly visual, but it's not traditional 'Sunday School' teaching.

Family Tree's monthly outdoor time



Photo: Lynn Alexander

There is also a slot called 'Take 10' – 10 minutes for questions for young people in particular. "We are very keen to make space for questions, to explore together," says Lynn. The children and young people are also involved in missional activities of the church. "We disciple the young as we reach out," she adds. "It's evangelism in service. In the doing, you are growing."

The people who have come to faith are from all sorts of backgrounds, many are single. Aside from the families Lynn describes as 'scaffold families', those around whom the gathering is

built, they have little prior knowledge of Christianity. Numbers have grown steadily to around 25 people on a busy week (children and adults together). People have brought their friends. Partnerships are beginning to form as they try to be more visible in the community, such as with the Home-Start charity to offer support to families, and the Libraries service to use the building for summer holiday activities that serve the local community.

It's "quite unusual", but while experimental, it's "certainly baptistic", Lynn says. Another local church leader

has described it as a prototype for what church might begin to look like. At the moment Lynn stresses *Family Tree* is small but it is at the beginnings of expansion and growth. The team are committed to regular prayer walking and know every inch of the patch they minister in.

"We want to welcome people and their kids in a unique way," Lynn says. "We are discipling young people and those new to faith... And we are seeing people come to faith. We feel as if we are getting ready for more, whenever that happens."

D-Caf, Medway Christian Fellowship (MCF), Huntingdon

D-Caf is a café style multimedia expression of church for people aged 16-25, which emerged from work initiated by Adrian Woodbridge, then a pastor at **Godmanchester Baptist Church**, in a local homeless hostel in Huntingdon. After a time of going into the hostel, chatting and taking games and refreshments, the church invited the hostel's residents to an *Alpha* course.

In order to connect with the group, the evening's format consisted of a meal, a very short multimedia presentation, and a table-based discussion. Nine years on and, long after that initial *Alpha*, it's still happening.

"We kind of stumbled into forming *D-Caf* as it is now known," explains MCF pastor Adrian Woodbridge, who still heads up the ministry. "After *Alpha* we found that people had discovered community and didn't want it to finish, so here we are, still meeting together in the same format looking at life issues."



Photo: Adrian Woodbridge

One of our challenges is being a people of the book in a non-book culture

D-Caf seeks to be community together, and this shows itself in different ways.

"Our key theme is that we share not only the Gospel but our lives as well (1 Thess 2:8); we celebrate life's milestones like birthdays, new babies, weddings and engagements as many

of them would not celebrate those things if we didn't," continues Adrian. "All are welcome: faith or no faith. Each evening we take contemporary issues from a biblical perspective, and all opinions and questions are listened to. The evenings allow people to be honest in discovering and following God in new ways.

"And much of the work of *D-Caf* happens outside Wednesday evenings. It consists of advocacy work in areas of health, social care, housing and any other needs as they arise."

This mix is enabling the gospel to be shared in both an explorative and practical way with people unlikely to be found at a more traditional Sunday church service.

Adrian says, "One of our challenges is being a people of the book in a non-book culture, looking for ways to build community and telling the story as we do."



Photo: Adrian Woodbridge

D-Caf seeks to be community together - sharing life issues and celebrations



It's **Messy**
... but it's
Church

Is Messy Church just a bridge back to 'real' church? No, argues **Jacky Storey**

When we celebrate family – being together, deepening sacrificial love, growing in faithfulness – then somehow we can find ourselves in God-country

I live in the south. In my association, over 25 per cent of the churches have a 'messy congregation'. But it's happening all over the place! Lucy Moore who started it all off 10 years ago – with God of course – wrote towards the end of last year when the 3000th Messy Church had been registered:

"God is on the move in 3000 churches of all denominations in more than 24 countries. 3000 churches are delighted to offer hospitality and fun to 'outsiders'. 3000 teams of lay people are doing a fantastic job at bringing more families into a relationship with the Christ who meets them in their messy lives. 3000 ministers are seeing the joy of their churches turning to face outwards. People are being baptised as they discover through the fun, fellowship and food that God is good all the time."

BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship) conservatively estimates that of the 500,000 people who attend Messy Church each month, over half have had little or no previous connection with church. What began with a heart to include grownups as well as children has grown and grown.

Why? Is this God? Is it real church? What about discipleship? Of course, the same questions could be asked of 'traditional' church.



I wonder if there are some sociological as well as spiritual reasons for this growth of interest in family worship. The family as a main contributor to the stability of society has taken a hit. Geographical mobility, changing work patterns and roles, economic realities, unhelpful government policies, the breakdown and reconfiguration of families mean that families – all kinds of families (including single person families) – are looking for support. We can celebrate ventures such as debt advice, food banks and relationship courses. But there is something more we can offer as church... and that's intergenerational community. Every human being is looking for God, and Messy Churches help people who are looking by having a wide understanding of family and being radically hospitable.

Daphne Kirk writes of the Biblical understanding of family, *'no generation was excluded, no child left out, no older person put aside'*. God is family and when we practise family we touch deep stuff like being safe, belonging, being loved and being important. When we participate in family we somehow touch God and he touches us. It really is sacred ground. When we celebrate family – being together, deepening sacrificial love, growing in faithfulness – then somehow we can find ourselves in God-country. By enabling people of all ages to participate together in creativity, learning and the sharing of food, Messy Church can lead us here.



But is it church? And if so why?

Justin Welby thinks so. He said recently of Messy Church:

"This is not church for children. It's church for church. It's church for everyone... I want to encourage you to never be bound by the way we've always done it... it's a circle of all ages meeting together to engage in who God is in a way that works for them."

It's all about us all growing. It's all about stepping out in faith and being prepared to experiment in the spirit of adventure. George Lings¹ has offered encouragement too:

"Messy Church is about mission, worship and community; not just a bridge back to 'real' church... You [Messy Church] are still finding ways, but draw on the wisdom of the past and stretch yourselves out of present boundaries... you are part of reasserting that messy is normal in Christianity."

Perhaps that's the most important part of Messy Church, being more willing in the sharing of ordinary life (which is always extraordinary) to say "me too". If that's happening then I'm inclined to think that this *is* God, it *is* real church and we *might* be growing disciples as disciples.

¹ Author of *Messy Church Theology: Exploring the significance of Messy Church for the wider church* published by BRF (2013)



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Photos: Andrew Ginn

I recall a time when I'd just started attending church again with our baby son. I was an atheist, although I would have, at a push, admitted I was checking that out. As a teacher I'd been welcomed into being a helper in the children's group and one Sunday the pastor's wife made sugar sandwiches with the little ones; the text was *'Taste and see that the LORD is good'*. Thirty years later I still recall the impact and remember the invitation. I tell this story to illustrate that God is very creative. He works in different ways in different places with different people. Just now, Jesus seems to be helping people, families, meet him through Messy Church.

Whenever Christ is central, wherever there's life, whenever there's creativity, whenever anybody is made welcome and church is an expression of family – that's real church and it really changes people's lives. If that's what's happening in Thursday Messy Church or Saturday Church – we really don't have to get people to Sunday church.

Jacky Storey is a Regional minister in the Southern Counties Baptist Association



Bunyan Baptist Church is supporting families through 'Saturday Church'



In addition to Messy Church, there's a wealth of intergenerational church ideas springing up around the country. One such example is 'Saturday Church', which meets at Bunyan Baptist Church in Stevenage. Billed as 'a chance to engage with Christian stories and activities' the monthly gathering starts off with 45 minutes of craft based around the service theme (eg Jesus said "I am the good Shepherd"), followed by some intergenerational games, before an indoor picnic. After the shared food, there is a time of sung worship and a short talk, followed by more singing and a moment or two of quiet prayer.

Describing 'Saturday Church', Andrew Ginn, the Associate Minister (Youth and Community) said, "It's been incredible - overnight, we found we planted a new congregation in our building! 60 people from 25 families turned up at the first gathering, and it's grown every time since then. We've only done eight so far, but regular attenders who haven't attended any church are describing the gathering as 'their church'; we've got a dedication planned, conversations about adult baptism have started, and some of the parents are coming along to Alpha!

We've discovered a real depth of faith that is waiting to be expressed... the challenge now is to continue to support families to participate at a deeper level; to be a part of making 'Saturday Church' happen.



Illustration: Vecteezy.com

Faith
that
sticks

Are we still trying to simply educate children when they come on a Sunday? Jesus is a tangible presence journeying with us through life, not left on a page: it's time to let go of the idea of 'school' and see children in the Kingdom with us, writes **Sian Hancock**

The beginnings of Sunday School

The Sunday School Movement dates back to the late 1700s. Gloucester printer Robert Raikes is often credited with its formation. He is said to have looked out of his window one day at the children scavenging on the streets and was compelled to do something. A man of faith and a Victorian philanthropist in a community where there was great social deprivation, Raikes was looking to educate those children often referred to as street urchins or ragamuffins. Many were employed to work, some as young as seven, for as many as 16 hours a day. Religious instruction and social action were therefore key elements of Sunday School.

He hired four women in the neighbourhood to teach the children to read. With the help of the Revd Thomas Stock, Raikes was soon able to enroll one hundred children, from six years old to twelve or fourteen, in these Sunday Schools. The character of many of the youngsters was transformed.

As owner and printer of the Gloucester Journal, Raikes used his position to help raise awareness and the movement grew: within five years 300,000 unchurched children were reached. Raikes stepped back and an organised structure of authority (School Boards) began to emerge.

Discipleship

It is from these beginnings that our present practices of Sunday School have grown. So much has changed since then, but have our understandings of the purpose behind the way we still do things advanced enough? Are we still trying to simply educate children when they come on a Sunday? Is that enough to help them become life-long followers of Jesus?

'I fell quickly for the man with the lamb – dreamy Jesus. You know the one, with the long locks and the deep blue eyes. But he was not a three dimensional character in my life. He lived in a picture on my wall.'

Janell Anema,

Confessions of a Sunday School Superstar

I wonder what kind of Jesus you are following. How do the children in our churches interpret the Jesus we present to them?

Some people see children as empty vessels, waiting to be filled by the more knowledgeable adults. But is educating about Jesus enough? Many recognise that children seem to carry a sense of God within from a very young age and are open to experiences of God; they need encouragement, nurture and a language to share that. In other words, their personalities, their environment, their logic and their relationships when their church meets are all vital to their growing in discipleship.



Image: Wikimedia Commons



Jesus is a tangible presence journeying with us through life, not stuck on the wall (or left on the page). Discipleship needs to be life-giving so the spiritual being within the child is able to grow and mature into faith, and if it is caught rather than taught then the child needs to see faith in action in those that walk alongside them. This helps move beyond heads filled with knowledge to hearts responding to the invitation to follow Jesus.

Can you identify five people who have influenced and supported you in your faith journey? For faith to 'stick', it is said that there need to be at least five people around a child. They may all have a different relationship with that child but each should be committed to praying for them and sharing an interest in their life and wellbeing. Who might you already be one of the five for?

if it is caught rather than taught then the child needs to see faith in action in those that walk alongside them

It's not about what it is but what it can become

Sometimes our programmes are stuck in a rut at times. It's not always easy to let go of the 'we've always done it this way' mentality to make way for being different. It takes courage to change and to imagine things another way. 'A Church which welcomes children (and young people), accepts their gifts and ministries, meets their needs, advocates justice, seeks new life, challenges evil with love and truth, and continues to learn the values of the Kingdom by living them, is a Church which is good news not only for its members but for the world.' (*Going for Growth Report*, Church of England).

for faith to 'stick', it is said that there need to be at least five people around the child



Photo: Rawpixel.com

It is often said that children and young people are not the church of tomorrow but the church today. So can we let go of the idea of 'school' and see them in the Kingdom with us? A change of name is a good starting place, but what happens next could help all of us to find our freedom to be children of God who can address our doubts, fears and questions as well as our certainties.

Sian Hancock is Coordinator: Children, Youth and Mission (CYM) and Director of the Centre for Family and Childhood Studies at **Bristol Baptist College**



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Further reading:

- Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* by David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, 2013 published by Intervarsity Press
- Children's Spirituality, what is it and why does it matter?* by Rebecca Nye, 2009 published by Church House Publishing
- Going for Growth: Transformation for children, young people and the Church* by the Archbishops' Council Education Division, 2010 published by the Church of England National Society
- One Generation from Extinction: how the church connects with the unchurched child* by Mark Griffiths, 2009 published by Monarch Books
- Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives* by Karen Marie Yust, 2014 published by Jossey-Bass
- Sticky Faith* <http://stickyfaith.org> or via Scripture Union www.scriptureunion.org.uk/3626513.id
- Today not Tomorrow* - an intergenerational ministry that aims to disciple children and young people in a way which is integrated into the context of the wider church. www.baptist.org.uk/tnt

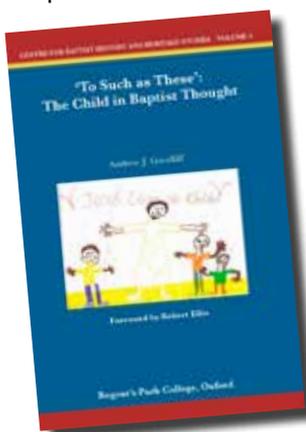
Baptists, children and communion

Six years ago **Andy Goodliff** wrote about the place of the child among Baptists, suggesting, where faith was discerned, some could be baptised and welcomed to share the Lord's Supper. Now a minister and father of two, he reflects on what he has learned in the intervening years



Photo: Hannah Goodliff

My little book '*To Such as These: The Child in Baptist Thought*' (originally an MTh thesis) was an attempt to think through the place of the child amongst Baptists. It was done because I felt that



here was an area that Baptists had not given enough attention to. A Baptist Union report in 1966 called *The Child and the Church* had found

a dead end in Council. David Tennant (not the actor!) and Anne Phillips had at various times sought to push the subject into the foreground, but largely without much success¹.

My argument in the book was that the service of infant presentation was the place for us to say something about children. The book ends with a revised version of the service that is found in *Gathering For Worship*. I argued that we should see children as:

- » a gift to both parents and the church;
- » full persons made in God's image; and as such active participants,
- » those whom the church should welcome, listen and receive.

The more controversial sections of the book argued that we should be open to baptising children where faith was discerned and welcoming them to share in the Lord's Supper. The book hopefully sets out the areas of discussion and offers some possible ways forward. I ended the book with an attempt at answering the question 'so what?' and here I suggested that Baptists take more interest in the practice of Godly Play and in encouraging and enabling faith to flourish at home.

Since writing the book, I have become the father to two children and a minister in my first church.² It might be asked what difference has my thinking had on my own parenting and my being a minister?

So here are some learnings from six years as a dad and minister.

My aim is to give the children of the church a rich experience of the Christian faith, one that does not pander, but creates wonder and participation, that is constantly telling the story in as many ways as possible.

Stanley Hauerwas says: "God has entrusted us, God's church, with the best story in the world. With great ingenuity we have managed to make that story... boring as hell." How can we make the story live and engage?

this is not an old story, stuck in the past, but one that has been lived and is living

I wonder if part of this is finding ways to tell how the story has been lived and engaged in the lives of the saints. This is not an old story, stuck in the past, but one that has been lived and is living.

² Previously, before training for ministry, I had been a church youthworker

¹ David F Tennant, *Children in the Church: A Baptist View* (Baptist Union, 1978); Anne Dunkley [Phillips], *Seen and Heard: Reflections on Children and Baptist Tradition* (Whitley, 1999). See also Morris West, 'The Child and the Church' in William Brackney et al, *Pilgrim Pathways* (Mercer, 1999).

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We've found at home that Advent and Lent are great opportunities to tell the story. My wife Hannah has been great at building in something for each day. We've not yet sought to share that with other families in the church. At the same time, during the rest of the year, if I'm honest, faith at home is more muted. I still believe encouraging and nurturing faith at home is vital, but putting it into practice is hard, because it presses on us who are adults to not hide our faith under a lamp, as it were.

For various reasons, we've found families don't come to church every week. This is probably stating the obvious. This makes it difficult for those leading children's groups and for children to get into a routine. We have had to think differently about our groups and, I guess, also accept what is. I wrestle with how best to oversee, to encourage and shape those who lead as volunteers. Churches cannot afford to lose its volunteers; at the same time, I'm not convinced our 'Sunday schools' are always intentional enough in their aims.



Photo: Hannah Goodliff

I've ended up in a place I didn't think I would with children and communion. We have two services a month with communion, at one of which children are present. On these occasions they receive biscuits and grapes. I definitely believe they should be present, and whereas in my church we have not felt it right for them to receive bread and wine, with a parent hat on, it becomes very difficult when mum or dad are having bread and the child can't. I don't think biscuits and grapes are all that meaningful, but the aim is to make the context of the meal a Jesus-centred moment.

When is the right age to baptise I'm less sure on. It's not that I've changed my mind on whether children have faith, but it's finding ways to enable faith to deepen. I wonder if we need to develop more rites before and after baptism. In some cases this might mean baptism is delayed and in other cases it means baptism can be continually confirmed. There is a sense we are always growing into the implications of baptism. And we need to get better at discipling, which is not just an issue with regard to children. How do we help habits of prayer, bible reading, fasting develop? The Church of England has created *Emmaus* and more recently the *Pilgrim* teaching and discipleship course. I wonder what a Baptist equivalent (catechumenate) might look like?

I still think we need to centre on infant presentation as the place where we display our theology of children and allow that then to shape how we welcome, listen, nurture children in, and towards, faith. As there is an opportunity in every baptism to remember our own baptism, so there is an opportunity in every service of infant presentation to remember our promise to be a community that seeks to draw children into the life, worship and mission of the church.

My final observation, again an obvious one, is children are a long lesson in patience. They bring great joy and delight, but they are equally infuriating, exhausting, and always asking why, which is perhaps why Jesus said 'to welcome children is to welcome me'. For one of the gifts of children is that they remind us that following Jesus can be infuriating and exhausting as well as enjoyable and delightful... and that he never stops asking us 'why?'

Andy Goodliff is
the minister of
Belle Vue Baptist Church,
Southend



Photo: derejeb | istockphoto.com

Stuck at home

nowhere to go?

Photo: freepik.com

How a family with children on the autism spectrum found a home in a Baptist church – and created a ministry to serve others in the same situation

“People with autism can demonstrate behaviour that seems inappropriate, such as flapping their arms or screaming” says **Adekunle Ogunleye**. “Without training and awareness, it can be difficult for both churches and the families.”

Adekunle has first-hand experience. Two of his three children have autism, and there was a time when his family were ‘stuck at home, with nowhere to go’.

Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how a person experiences, understands and responds to their environment. They may be very sensitive to a wide variety of aspects of life - for example, noise, colours, crowds, textures, flavours, smells, spaces, etc - and this can create for them a growing sense of stress throughout the day. Ordinary life

for a person on the autistic spectrum has been described by John Richer, a consultant paediatrician, as ‘living constantly on the edge of a precipice’. As a result, Adekunle and wife Ronke tried a number of churches, but struggled to find one that could accommodate them.

However, 15 years ago the Lord led the family to **Romford Baptist Church** in Romford, Essex, and there they found a place receptive to their children’s, and their own, needs. Training was set up for the Sunday school teachers, Adekunle and Ronke were asked to be part of the programme and the other young people were made aware of their needs. Church members were able to give Adekunle and Ronke time to themselves.

Over the years their children have become an integral part of life at the church, involved in the welcome and worship teams, and are ‘passionate’ about life there, says Adekunle.

As the couple’s, and the church’s, awareness has grown, so has the provision. A sensory room has been created at the church to allow those with autism a place to escape to. The couple founded **RomaKey International Education Empowerment Services** charity (RIEES), whose mission is to improve the quality of life of individuals with autism and learning disabilities. Through the church, the charity facilitates a youth club for those aged 14-25 with autism or learning difficulties to help bridge the often difficult transitional period into adulthood. It aims to teach life skills, boost confidence, and does so using a buddy, or mentoring approach. Other church youth are invited to pair-up on a



Adekunle with parents and young people with autism

Photo: RIEES

one-on-one basis. These young people run the club, which includes activities such as bowling, sport, art, cooking and drama. There are also volunteers from the local secondary school (The Frances Bardsley Academy for Girls). There is a graduation party each year.

“You can see them gain confidence, try new things, and really look up to the young people who are leading them,” says Adekunle.

Alongside this, the charity runs a coffee morning for parents and carers of children with autism. Through this they can provide networking support, training and advice, activities and just simply a break and listening ear.

The work of RIEES is growing: it was mentioned in a Parliamentary debate ahead of Autism Sunday in February (Romford MP Andrew Rosindell is a patron of the charity); it is now looking at creating an autism centre to operate throughout the week, which will look at developing employment skills and generally take the youth club to ‘another level’. Adekunle recently travelled to his native Nigeria, where the country’s Vice-President invited him to set up a programme of autism training for teachers. In recognising the welcome his family has received from Romford Baptist Church, he also wants to help other churches.

“I’m so grateful to God. The church has been a tremendous blessing to us, a wonderful experience for my family,” he says. “Now part of my passion is to support church families looking at ways of helping families who have children with autism.”

Church tips from Adekunle

The church as a body of Christ must be willing and ready to welcome all members of the community regardless of their physical, emotional, social or psychological challenges - our doors must be opened to all

Speak to parents and carers of children with special needs; discover their needs

Raise awareness of what autism is and how it affects people: the National Autistic Society has lots of information <http://www.autism.org.uk>

Recognise that many people with autism prefer to use alternative means of communication, such as visual symbols

If possible, develop a safe space where children and young people can escape to calm down

Provide pastoral care and, if possible, respite for the parents and carers. Befriend and encourage the families.



Volunteers and young people with autism

Photo: RIEES

Contact Adekunle

Through Romakey International Education Empowerment Services charity (RIEES)
www.romakey.co.uk

Incluzy is a non-profit website, which helps individuals with disabilities obtain a job. It has a number of articles about the benefits of employing someone with autism.
<https://incluzy.com/blog>



A home for every child who needs one

How whole churches are being encouraged and equipped to respond to the needs of children in the care system.

By Kirsty McIntyre

Photo: iStock.com/dblight

Thirty-five thousand children enter the care system every year. Many are removed from traumatic, chaotic, abusive or neglectful situations. Some will need a home for a few nights, some for a few years, while some will not be able to return to their birth families and will become one of the thousands of children who are currently waiting for a permanent adoptive family.

In 2011, the shortage of adoptive parents and foster carers hit the UK headlines; several Christian leaders, who were also adopters or foster carers, committed to working together to raise the profile of adoption and fostering across the Church in the UK. **Home for Good** was launched as an initiative of the Evangelical Alliance, Care for the Family and The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service in March 2013 after a period of consulting with adopters, foster carers, church leaders and social work professionals.

The campaign to see adoption and fostering become a significant part of the life and ministry of the UK

Church grew over the next year, and in September 2014, *Home for Good* became a registered charity with a vision to find a home for every child who needs one by inspiring, encouraging and equipping the Church to respond to the need.



Photo: iStock.com/PIKSEL

Since then, *Home for Good* has been so encouraged to see churches up and down the country playing their part in caring for vulnerable children and the families who welcome them into their homes. Some families are called to adopt or foster, others are an essential part of the communities that support them through prayer and practical acts of service. Some churches have re-shaped how they run services to make sure they cater to the needs of looked after children, others have adapted their language to include 'carers' when sharing notices from the front to ensure every family feels included. Over 300 churches took part in **Adoption Sunday** last year; some of these prayed for children in the care system, others celebrated our adoption into God's family in their preaching and worship.

Home for Good believes that the Church in the UK can be part of solution for the 4,000 children waiting to be adopted, and to meet the need for an additional 9,000 foster carers required this year.



Hear from two Baptist churches where fostering and adoption is a key part of church life:

Chrissie is a foster carer who is a member of **Gold Hill Baptist Church**. She says: "I have found that, as a church, we are very good at providing emotional, spiritual and practical support. It's part of our DNA. As a *Home for Good* church we are learning how to embrace vulnerable children, and adapting our ways to wrap our arms around them and the families they are in. For our church, this often looks like providing respite care, cooking meals when new placements arrive, looking out for birth children and throwing adoptive showers!" and that when her family comes to say goodbye to a placement, "I know we will be dependent on each other as well as my church community, family and friends."

Sarah is also a foster carer who attends **Slough Baptist Church**. She says: "We have had so much support from members of our church family – from being referees for our application, finding a cot for us from the loft at 11pm and clothes, DBS-checked babysitting support, providing meals when children arrive or during the transition time to a new family, prayer support, a listening ear, cleaning, giving us toys, letting their children become friends with the foster children even though they might not be here for long, loaning of a car during the week of transition when ours broke down and then someone paid towards the cost, treating the foster children as part of

our family and church family – presents, cards, inviting us over, practical and emotional help for our birth children, paying for us to go to Spring Harvest as they thought we needed a holiday and building up spiritually after we moved a child on. Not everyone can foster but lots of people can be a support network around a fostering family – even if that means understanding there may be some different behaviours in children and being a welcoming church."

Kirsty McIntyre is the Head of Engagement at *Home for Good*



Could your church play a part in the lives of vulnerable children by taking part in **Adoption Sunday on 6 November**? Find out more and sign up at homeforgood.org.uk/adoptionsunday2016

Could your church stand with the vision to find a home for every child who needs one by becoming a *Home for Good* church? Find out more and sign up at homeforgood.org.uk/church



Photo: iStock.com/Christopher Fletcher



FAMILY TIME



Spending time talking and especially taking time to listen to our family is rarely easy, but it's a vital investment for the future, says **Rob Parsons**

The Bible has a lot to say about communication – and the sheer power of the words we speak. The book of Proverbs talks about the tongue having ‘the power of life and death’. (Prov 18:21).

Most families go through times when communication is difficult for a while. It's common, for example, for teenagers to go through a stage when you're lucky if you get a grunt, let alone a more verbal response. Normally with teenagers the problem passes, but sometimes in families lack of communication is much more serious.

None of us enters family life intending to be distant with each other, and in most families, lack of communication does not show itself quickly. It's more common that month by month and year by year family members grow apart. One couple described this to me as ‘a creeping separateness’.

I've made some bad mistakes in this area. I've spent much of my life communicating with others but I remember well, in the early years of my family life, having little time for communication with those I loved most. Thankfully I learned some lessons just in time. I don't think Dianne and I would have made it had I not realised that our love was dying for lack of communication. I remember cancelling many commitments I had outside work and suddenly we had evenings in which we had time for each other. This wasn't a quick fix – one particular winter we spent night after night just talking.

The antidote to ‘a creeping separateness’ and rediscovering communication with our partner and children is not usually found in expensive holidays - what some call ‘quality time’ - but in quite a lot of ‘ordinary time’ spent doing everyday things together – especially talking.

I think now of a couple who had three children, led busy lives, and who had somehow grown apart. They agreed that each Tuesday night they would spend some time together on their own. Sometimes they went to the cinema, sometimes just for a walk, and occasionally, a meal out. It's true they could afford baby-sitters, but they were not wealthy by any means. It is simply that they made time with each other a priority and they planned it into their lives.

They had those Tuesday evenings together until after their kids had left home. Did that evening every week save their marriage? Who knows. But I do know this: it became important to them. It wasn't fancy, it wasn't expensive, but it did give to each of them the dignity of time.

In the same way that we need to spend time with our partner, we need to give time to our children. This doesn't have to be complicated. It could be just chatting as we do ordinary things together – clearing out the garage, helping with homework. Research has shown that parental involvement has a huge effect on children's performance at school and one of the most powerful elements of this is the time



READ TIME **5** SECONDS



EAT A MEAL BY CANDLELIGHT OCCASIONALLY.

32

THE REALLY REALLY BUSY PERSON'S...

READ TIME **5** SECONDS



...BOOK ON MARRIAGE

33

Cartoons: David McNeill

parents give to conversations about everyday events and activities. When those conversations did not take place, it led not only to a lack of knowledge in the children but to a lack of confidence.

Spending time talking and especially taking time to listen is rarely easy, but it's an investment in the future. If we listen to our children when they are five, six and seven as they're helping us wash the car, there's just a chance they'll listen to us when they are fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen.



Photo: Monkey Business Images | shutterstock.com

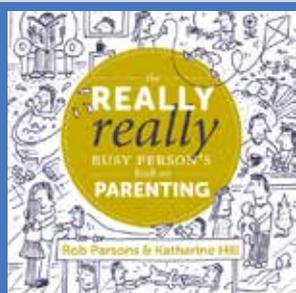
Tips for family communication

- » Take the chance to talk while you're doing things such as going for walks, washing up, or tidying a room.
- » Ask each other's opinion - few things please children (or anybody else) more than being asked for their view. It doesn't have to be about important issues all the time.
- » Make sure you really listen, even if you think you know what the other person is going to say.
- » Never interrupt or finish someone's sentence for them.
- » Wherever possible, try to eat a 'proper' family meal together.
- » Plan regular one-to-one times with each member of your family.
- » Don't answer the phone if it gives the impression it is more important than the conversation you're having.

Rob Parsons is an international speaker and best-selling author. He is the founder and chairman of *Care for the Family*, a national charity which aims to strengthen family life and help those hurting because of family difficulties.



Share your thoughts on Rob's article at www.baptist.org.uk/familytime



Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill's new gift books, *The Really Really Busy Person's Book on Marriage* and *The Really Really Busy Person's Book on Parenting*, are published by Muddy Pearl and available from CLC bookshops and www.muddypearl.com.

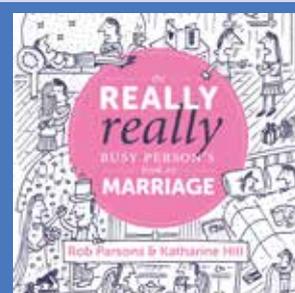




Photo: Amy Wearing

And what does the Lord require of **YOU**?

Millennials are overwhelmingly dedicated to social justice, a generation inspired to make the world more just and equitable. **Amy Wearing** reflects on harnessing their passion

Last year our young people encountered first-hand the struggles of those living in challenging circumstances when they served in local projects like the night shelter, care homes and a hostel as part of a city-wide youth mission. It had a huge impact on them, and out of it emerged a real heart for reaching people who are homeless within our city. Consequently, when they became aware of the possible launch of a FareShare food distribution scheme, they saw an opportunity.

Our church building sits right next to a Tesco Superstore with food galore. Following a pilot scheme last year, Tesco announced a new partnership to be rolled out in all its stores with FareShare, which takes good food destined for waste and instead sends it to community groups who transform it into meals for vulnerable people.

Our young people, with infectious enthusiasm and a sincere heart to help those they had met locally who were hungry, asked to set up a food distribution depot in their Youth Room.

This very real sense of injustice is not a new phenomenon. In the latter part of the Old Testament, there was an increasing expectation that God would send the Messiah who would bring fairness, justice and equality. Isaiah 65:20-23 foretells such a messianic age. This theme of fairness and justice for all then continues in the New Testament. Luke is in no doubt that Jesus is the fulfilment of the messianic expectation. Right from the onset of his gospel Mary sings how he has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:46-55). In Jesus' first sermon he announces that he has come to preach good news to the poor, with this message continuing throughout the beatitudes (Luke 6:20-21).

There is absolutely no doubt that as followers of Jesus we are called to care for and seek to improve the lives of the poor and hungry in our society. It's a call that involves thinking how best to go about it. The Children's Society warns 'long-term processes of transformation are often undermined by the clamour for immediate action'. The young people's desire to address a need through food distribution was Christ-like, but was it the most fitting response? The immediate response to take the food and give it to those in need would literally feed the hungry, but could it hinder the long-term processes of transformation so desperately needed? More broadly, how can we harness our millennials' passion to bring about long-term sustainable change?

As I reflected, I wondered if we are in fact often responsible for teaching a sacrificial style of living to young people while continuing to practise a lifestyle of consumerism? Have we encouraged young people to live generously and bless others without the challenge to consider how our consumeristic culture shapes us, shapes society's structures and ultimately contributes to injustices such as food poverty? Do millennials feel challenged, enabled and equipped to tackle the underlying causes of food poverty in their communities and wider society? I concluded that one of the most important roles, when considering faith and justice issues in youth ministry, is to help young people develop the critical thinking, collaboration and self-reflection skills necessary to foster a better community.

The bottom line is that an occasional Sunday session focussing on 'justice' isn't going to foster the Micah 6:8 faith we desire in our young people. Instead justice needs to be a value that is integrated through the commitment from youth leaders to work for the well-being of all. We need to create a space that respects the unique value and dignity of each and every human being and that nurtures the active involvement of young people in real issues that affect their lives.

So when young people's hearts break for the hungry in your community, cheer them on for wanting to roll up



Matt and Ellie from the youth group

Photo: Amy Wearing

their sleeves and get stuck into practical service, but also encourage them to consider the bigger picture:

- » Who is making decisions about the left over food?
- » Who is left out of decision making?
- » Who benefits from the current practice and who suffers?
- » Why is a food distribution scheme fair? Why is it unfair?
- » What is required to create long term change?
- » What alternatives can we dare to imagine?



Photo: Amy Wearing

So did we set up a food distribution depot in our Youth Room?

So did we set up a distribution depot?

Well, we came to a decision with the young people that bringing the food to church was neither practical nor necessary. Instead, we identified local organisations who could use the food effectively to help those who needed it most and made sure they were aware of the scheme.

We also enabled young people to serve in practical ways like at the soup kitchen on Friday evenings and preparing meals in the local hostel. For food poverty, like all issues of justice, needs a both-and response.

Enable opportunities for young people to serve practically and make a difference in the lives of those in need, but also encourage them to explore the organisational and cultural issues that are causing the injustice in the first place.

Tackling injustice needs **both** responses.

Amy Wearing is a Youth Minister at **St Peter's Baptist Church Worcester**, a CYM graduate with a background in Family Support.



This article was adapted from an academic paper submitted for a module on Faith and Justice.

Read more from Amy on faith and justice at www.baptist.org.uk/amywearing - join the conversation





Photo: BMS Action Team

“IT’S NOT AN OPTION NOT TO HELP”

The unfair conditions of a juvenile centre in Uganda left a BMS Action Team resolved to act – and more certain of the Jesus they follow

From working with the homeless in Asia, to teaching street kids in South America: the Action Team programme offered by *BMS World Mission* places 17-23 year old Christians in situations where they can share the love of Jesus in practical ways, and leave them with a deeper understanding of God’s heart for the marginalised. This was especially evident for the 2015-16 Uganda Action Team of Charis, Thomas, Mim and Laura.

The team visited the Gulu Remand Home, a youth detention facility, three times a week. The youngsters there were awaiting trials for crimes ranging from petty theft to manslaughter, all aged between 12 and 18.

Many were far from home, and didn’t receive any visits from family. Those who lived closer would occasionally get a visitor, but it was sporadic at best.

The team would organise football, craft, guitar lessons and Bible study. They led a youth *Alpha*, which saw 11 people give their lives to Christ.

As the Action Team became more acquainted with life at the centre, they began to notice the haphazard and unjust nature of the system holding the Ugandan youngsters.

“It was really disorganised who got the trials. Some would wait months, others just weeks,” says Thomas. “One guy who we got to know was in for 11 months – and he was innocent.

“The same with the sentencing – some would get off, some would get a couple of years for lesser offences. There was no rhyme or reason to it. You could never tell. This was how it was – they just lived it and hoped they’d get a court date. They got used to it.”

As well as the trials and sentencing, there were more general issues. At times there was no food. On one occasion a boy collapsed during a football match as he had not been given anything to eat. “The conditions there were pretty basic, and you could tell they were the lowest priority. It made us angry, frustrated,” says Laura.

Their ministry in the juvenile centre has been the most talked about topic in their subsequent tour of eight UK churches (the UK tour is an integral part of the Action Team programme). Their general experience of the church in Uganda has clearly impacted their faith.

“It gave me a greater understanding of just how radical Jesus was, the people he was hanging out with,” explains Mim.

“It was hard seeing people live in those conditions. Nicky at IMC told us “Just don’t lose that anger” – because it makes people act. Justice is massively important to my faith.”

Thomas adds: “The church in Uganda doesn’t separate justice and faith – the pastor was getting involved in a sanitation project, then leading a Bible study. I want to keep going with mission. I think about the bad situation at the detention centre, but how much worse if we had not been there. I want to make a difference where I can. As one person you can do your bit.

“It’s not an option not to help.”

The Uganda team’s placement in the Remand Home was arranged by BMS long-term worker Linda Darby, through her work with the Uganda Christian Lawyers’ Fraternity.



The BMS Action Team programme is a chance to get involved in what God is doing across the world.

For more, visit www.bmsworldmission.org/actionteams

 **Peacemaking Sunday**
Sunday 18 September
www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking/peacemaking-sunday

 **Faith and Thought**
Open Symposium: What Survives Death?
Saturday 8 October
 Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
www.faithandthought.org.uk

 **Prisons Week**
9-15 October
www.prisonsworld.org

 **Baptist Union Council**
13-14 October
 Swanwick

 **Sam Sharpe Lecture**
Tuesday 18 October
www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe

 **Anti-slavery day**
Tuesday 18 October
www.antislaveryday.com

Events

 **One World Week**
23-30 October
www.oneworldweek.org

 **Bible Sunday**
Sunday 23 October
www.biblesunday.org

 **What kind of church changes a nation?**
28-30 October
 King's Park, Northampton
www.ruralministries.org.uk/annual-conference

 **Adoption Sunday**
Sunday 6 November
www.homeforgood.org.uk/get-involved/adoption-sunday

 **Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer**
Monday 7 November
www.bwawd.org/day-of-prayer

 **Remembrance Sunday**
Sunday 13 November

 **Catalyst Live**
16-17 November
www.bmscatalystlive.com

 **Interfaith week**
13-20 November
www.interfaithweek.org

 **Advent Sunday**
Sunday 27 November

 **World Aids day**
Thursday 1 December
www.worldaidsday.org

 **Human Rights day**
Saturday 10 December
www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday

 **International Migrants day**
Sunday 18 December
www.un.org/en/events/migrantsday

For more visit www.baptist.org.uk/events

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Resources focus

Excellent, all-inclusive resources exist to help people of all ages explore their relationship with God. Here are four that have worked in Baptist settings, but there are many more. Please follow the links and share what has worked for you: www.baptist.org.uk/resourcing



Explore Together, Scripture Union

Explore Together is a practical tool from Scripture Union to help people engage with the Bible. It uses natural learning preferences and preferred spiritual styles.

An 'open question', based on a Bible passage and without one strict answer, will be posed for the community to explore. They will do this by participating in a range of exploratory activities. Scripture Union suggests six 'Explore' zones:

- » Colour Zone – learn by seeing;
- » Listening Zone – learn by hearing;
- » Chat Zone – learn by thinking aloud;
- » Word Zone – learn by reading;
- » Busy Zone – learn by doing;
- » Quiet Zone – learn by reflecting.

The community will then come together to share what they have discovered or made/drawn/written, a valuable time of learning. For more visit: www.exploretogogether.org



Miriam Biggs is the Youth and Children's worker at the United Church Ferndown (a Baptist/URC Local Ecumenical Partnership in Dorset).

She used *Explore Together* recently.

"It's a great opportunity to explore the Bible in a creative and diverse way," said Miriam. "We have a small group of children and youth but with a wide range of ages and abilities and this suits all of them. The dad who had come with baby and toddler was already sat at the 'Chat' table and appreciated being able to join in discussing the Bible passage. One of our six year olds with learning difficulties had no problems engaging; she took herself to busy zone and colouring zone, asking adults for help when necessary; I later noticed her in the 'quiet zone', just being still, looking at all the pictures on the wall. At the end it was really interesting to hear the different things that people got out of the one passage.

"What I love about *Explore Together* is the fact that the resource ideas are all given to you; you don't have to come up with additional creative ideas, which is certainly very helpful for a busy youth leader.

"Although part of me wants to have that perfect craft for someone to take home, I understand that that is not what busy zone is about. Although part of me wants to make sure my young people find and discover all the right answers, I know that that is not what *Explore Together* is about.

"We give people the resources to explore the Bible creatively, to receive from God individually and to take the next step on their Christian journey. It's not about what you make, draw or write, but what you discover as you create, colour and reflect on."



Photo: Fischy Music

Fischy Music

Fischy Music is a charity that supports the emotional, social and spiritual well-being of primary age children.

It has worked directly with children for many years and its resources are used in thousands of schools and churches across the UK and beyond. *Fischy* emphasises the uniqueness, creativity and worth of every child, and it produces memorable and easy to learn songs that any child can sing. Its resources are closely aligned with key curricular areas in schools.

The charity has its roots in the Christian faith, but its health and wellbeing songs and resources are inclusive and appropriate for all children regardless of outlook on life or religious belief. It works primarily in primary schools across the UK but also provides resources that are suitable for use in religious and moral education and in church settings.

For more visit: www.fischy.com



Craig Gardiner, Tutor in Doctrine at South Wales Baptist College, said: "*Fischy Music* are doing things that repeatedly connect worship with real life issues to young people (and adults) in their songs.

"They deserve to be better known in our Baptist family."

The All-In Thing, Big Ministries

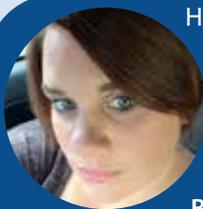
The All-In Thing is a resource designed to help people create worship experiences that actually work for times when the whole church is 'All-In' together in a service.

The premise is to take into consideration the massive variety of people in our churches (regardless of age) and facilitate their worship by making things accessible and inclusive for all. "All learning styles, all ages, all backgrounds, all stages on the journey of faith should be able to come together and worship together and pursue Jesus together," says Phil Knox, Church Resources Director at *Youth for Christ*.

"*The All-In Thing* is an amazing collection of activities, of things to do as a church, to get this right."

Created by BIG Ministries, which is part of Youth for Christ, *The All-in-Thing* launched in 2015.

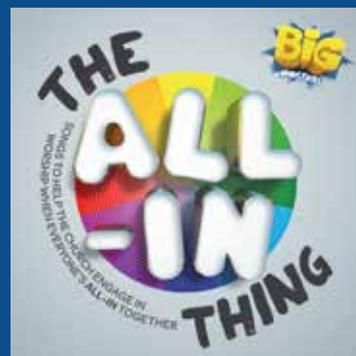
Lots of resources are on the website: www.bigministries.co.uk/theallinthing



Hannah Kerthaler is a former deacon and primary school children's coordinator at Lower Earley Baptist Church in Reading.

A recent Christmas she was asked to lead an all-age nativity service, and having spent time with Big Ministries, attempted an *All-In* type service.

"We started the church service together as our normal services with prayer, a few carols and lighting the advent candles, before splitting the congregation into three groups for the rotation time. Each group then took part in three activities in a rotation, while there was the option for an in-depth Bible study for those who preferred. The rotation sessions each lasted about 15mins. One involved a dressing up nativity using the Christmas story from Bob Hartman's *Storyteller Bible*. Another was a Godly Play activity which covered creation to Christmas, focussing on light and how Jesus was the light of the world.



After listening to the story there was a time to respond using various craft activities. The final rotation session was a craft activity, making loom band stars with some play dough, paper, pens and stickers to give space for people to respond in whatever way suited them. After the rotation time, we joined back together for final carols and prayer.

"Although by no means fully 'all-in', this service definitely went some way in giving opportunity for people of all ages, abilities and preferences to join in. It worked really well, and people really engaged across that different activities - regardless of their age."

Godly Play

Godly Play is a multi-sensory, creative approach to Christian nurture. Although originally devised for children, it is used in a variety of settings. There will be a story, told using objects or artefacts.

The story is followed by a time of wondering, with open questions and discussion. There will then be a time of responding, using a variety of materials: art, silence, play, writing. The session finishes with people gathering for a

time of sharing and thanksgiving. The role of the adult/teacher is much more about facilitating the session rather than teaching.

Visit www.godlyplay.uk



Sian Hancock is Godly Play trainer and Tutor at Bristol Baptist College "Godly Play places a higher emphasis on

discovering God, and starts from the preface that there is already a relationship between God and the child. It encourages a wider perception on sharing the Bible with children and it seeks to help children learn the religious language of symbolism, gesture and imagery. Altogether it fosters a deeper encounter with the living God."

What has helped you and your families? Please share your ideas and experiences: www.baptist.org.uk/resourcing





Vanessa Rye is a networker for the organisation behind **Prayer Spaces in Schools** in Oxfordshire. She shares some of its most popular ideas.

We all need time to stop, and reflect on life, and our relationship with God.
Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

'Prayer Spaces in Schools' use a four zone format for reflective activities which can be used with everyone from nursery age children through to adults. Some of the most popular ideas for zones are Thank you, Sorry, Please and the World. Sometimes we also incorporate the value the school is focussing on for the term or use a seasonal focus such as Advent. The activities can be used separately or all together for a longer reflective time. The ideas can be adapted depending on the style of the group and the age range. Soft lighting and quiet background music add to the atmosphere. Participants are encouraged to engage, quietly respecting others' needs to be quiet and have space to think.



Thank you

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

The creator God placed within us a desire to create too.

Using play dough or bread dough, make something or someone you want to thank God for. Dough is calming and therapeutic to work with. If you use bread dough it can be baked, and shared. For something more permanent, air dried clay can be used.

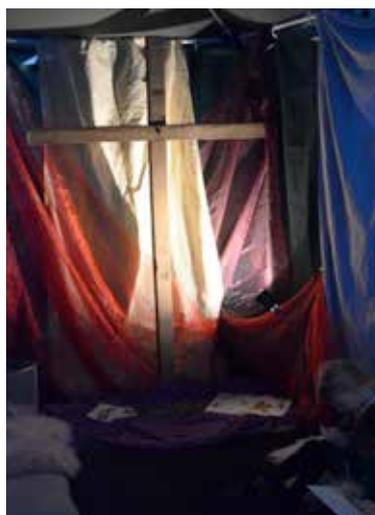
In a group you could name all the various aspects of God's creation. Have each person say why they have chosen to make their object. Keep the focus on thanking God for all that he has created.

In a Sunday youth or children's group, take photographs of all the items made and create a 'Thank You God' poster.

Sorry

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10



As Christians we believe that when we say sorry to God he forgives us and renews us.

Using pieces of acetate (the kind used for overhead projectors) and washable felt tip pens, write or draw your confession (that for which you want to say sorry) on the acetate. Dip the acetate in a bowl of water and wipe it clean,

symbolic of God cleansing us.

If you have a cross, then attach the clean acetates to the cross, a reminder of Christ's death for us. This could be a cross drawn on a large piece of card or paper if a wooden cross is not available.



Please

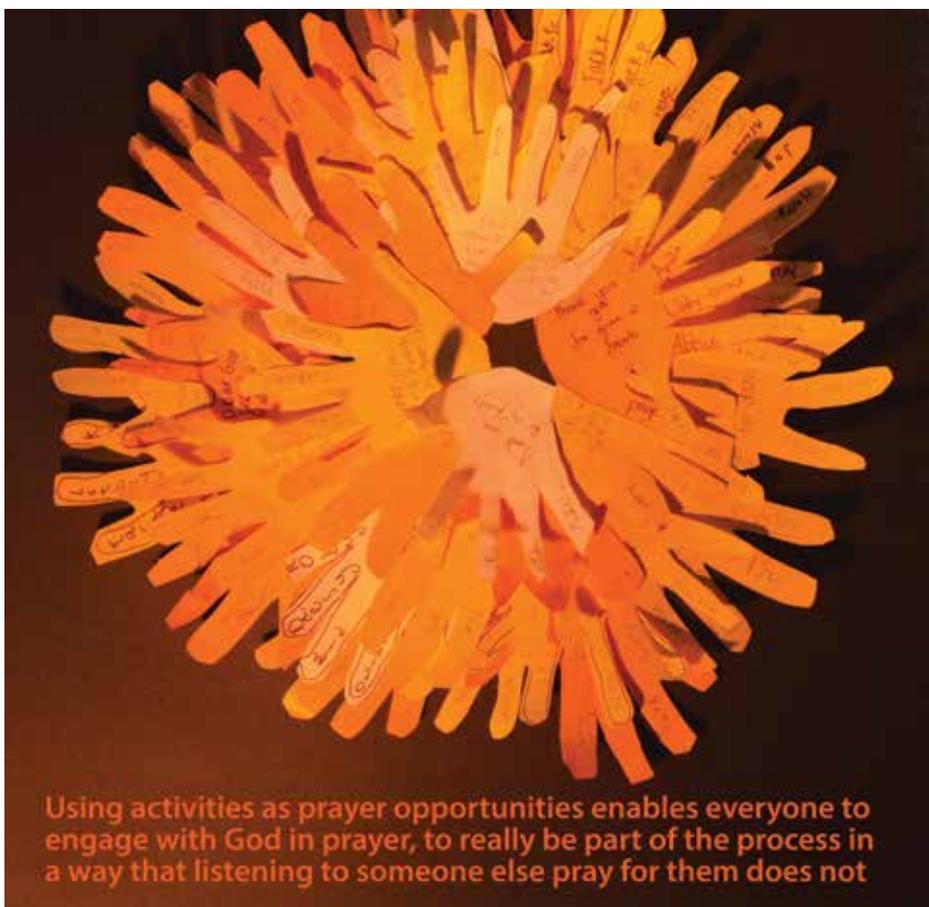
Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

Using brightly coloured paper (shades of yellow work well) draw around your hand and then on the digits write the names or draw the faces of friends and family, members of your church fellowship that you want to pray for. Then in the palm write or draw your prayer.

Cut the hands out and create a flower from them, sticking them onto black card or stiff paper. This can make a poster to be referred to in later meetings; answers to prayer can be added.

Alternatively, single hands can be stuck on to card and placed on the fridge at home as a prompt for ongoing prayer.



Using activities as prayer opportunities enables everyone to engage with God in prayer, to really be part of the process in a way that listening to someone else pray for them does not

World

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age".

Matthew 28:18-20

You will need a large world map and post-it notes.

Write or draw a prayer on a post-it note and stick it on the country concerned. This could be:

- » following a discussion about world issues, refugees, war, famine or terrorist activity.
- » focussing on world mission, identifying places where BMS personnel are serving.
- » thinking about families and friends living and serving abroad - particularly helpful for children whose parents are on overseas postings with the military.



For very young children, have a picture of a house drawn on a large sheet of paper. Talk to the children about the people who live in their family, some who live in their house and some who don't. The children can then draw pictures of their family members and stick them onto the house. Give them time to think about their family. Talk to them about being part of God's family, and that God loves them.

Bubble tube

The most popular piece of kit is the bubble tube which we use in different ways - sometimes in the 'Please' zone with post-it notes and as a reflective area. Just watching the bubbles rising to the top is calming and reminds us that our prayers are heard by God. This can be simply reproduced using a bottle of bubble mixture and blowing the bubbles out and up.



Photo: Vanessa Rye

Using activities as prayer opportunities enables everyone to engage with God in prayer, to really be part of the process in a way that listening to someone else pray for them does not. Children in particular benefit from the participative approach and learn from an early age that they matter to God and that prayer is something they can be involved in.

Vanessa Rye is the Associate Minister at **Didcot Baptist Church** and Networker in Didcot for *BeSpace*, the organisation behind Prayer Spaces in schools and other places in Oxfordshire



For more information, see: www.prayerspacesinschools.com



Unwrapped

Some years ago, a confectionery company caused a stir when children began to unwrap what they thought were Easter Bunnies. The company had clearly over-manufactured chocolate Father Christmases a few months before, and an enterprising employee had worked out that, once wrapped in the Easter Bunny foil, it was very hard to notice the difference. Consumers of course complained, but the manufacturer pointed out that they had been marketed as ‘chocolate novelties’ – and novelties they indeed were!

In this edition of *Baptists Together*, we have been particularly thinking about how we engage with children and young people. In many of our churches we will no doubt have youth programmes, children’s ministries and the like, all of which are to be celebrated and encouraged. But this may not be true for all of us.

I remember some years ago, one of the older members in the church I grew up in asked me how they could engage with the young people who hung around after the services. At the time I was quite involved in our church’s youth programme, and indeed am grateful for those who also invested in me when I was a teenager.

“Just talk to them” was my response, “ask them how they are, how things are at school, what they think about yesterday’s football – and then make sure you give time to listen.” It was a daunting reality, but one or two of those older members took the plunge and soon discovered they were perfectly capable and in fact quite at ease having a conversation with a teenager.

It strikes me that age is one of those wrappings that society places on us, which at times can leave others imagining that we are something we are not. This can be true for every generation – I remember above the stairs at my grandparents’ house was their wedding photograph. Very 1920s and, as far as I was concerned, very old. Then one day I really looked at it; and saw two young people. It was a revelation to properly realise that my grandparents had once been that age!

Sometimes we can reflect those wrappings in our church programmes too. We assume that people of particular age groups have particular needs and preferences – forgetting that there is as much diversity across the age-groups as there is between them. Children face grief and loss; some older people like pop music and hamburgers; middle-aged people have difficulty managing their money, and some teenagers don’t.

Underneath the wrapper we are all human beings, and perhaps the most important thing we can do as Christians is to remind each other of that, and build communities in which we can all enjoy a sense of belonging together in Christ.

Phil Jump is the Regional Minister Team Leader at the North Western Baptist Association (NWBA)



We are family

New findings on family and ministry

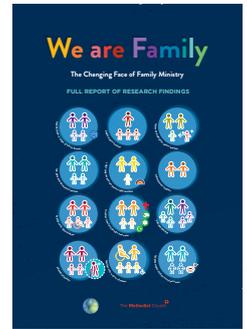
Significant research exploring current family life in the UK, and how churches can connect with and support families in their community, has been released.

Conducted by the Methodist Church, the study is called *We Are Family* and offers four key findings for churches to respond to.

- » *Deepening understanding* – family today is diverse and fluid. Language within the church needs to be more inclusive to reflect this.
- » *A spectrum of family ministry* – churches are engaging with families in a breadth of diverse ways.
- » *Issues faced* – there is a missing generation, mostly of the 25-40 age group, that often includes parents. Relationships across the generations need ways of coming together for them to be nurtured.
- » *Equipping family ministry* – often those working with children and their families feel isolated. Some are more actively integrated into the ministry and mission of the church and its leadership than others. Some feel under-qualified and recognise their need to develop how they reflect theologically on the work they do.

One of the report’s authors, Penny Fuller, said, “Family ministry across the UK is growing, with many new projects starting. It’s not just happening on a Sunday, but is taking place in a range of different contexts, engaging with a great diversity of families. In this growing area of ministry, it is essential that the Church provides suitable training and support. Our biggest challenge now is how we enable an intergenerational engagement in all areas of our ministries and not segregate them into silos.”

Baptist implications: visit www.baptist.org.uk/wearefamily for Baptist tutor Sian Hancock’s assessment of the *We Are Family* research.



National recognition for Baptist pioneers

A pathway that offers national recognition for Baptist pioneers has been officially approved.

‘Equipped to Pioneer’ has been available for a few years, but the details have recently been clarified, and in April the national Ministerial Recognition Committee officially approved it as a pathway to national recognition as a Baptist pioneer.

This part-time training consists of 12 modules and is for anyone in Baptist churches involved in pioneer ministry and church planting. Pioneers seek to go to where the church isn’t, do what Jesus does, and see what happens. They may be starting something completely new, or based in an existing church, but their intention is the same – to grow new and contextually relevant Christian communities.

Any pioneer wanting to pursue recognition should speak to their Regional Minister about being commended by their church to their regional Ministerial Recognition Committee.

For more information visit www.baptist.org.uk/etp

“How do we nurture faith in those children, young people and families whom God has put us next to?”

Meet a group of Baptists dedicated to answering just that

The CYF (Children, Young people, Families) Round Table is made up of 12-15 people from around our Baptist family, all of whom have experience, training and a passion for working with children, young people and families.

We have a variety of titles and roles (eg Youth Specialist, Minister, College Tutor, Children’s and Families Worker, Associate Minister, Regional Minister) but we all share a desire to engage in resourcing and equipping local churches.

When we gathered earlier this year it was a common question that brought us together... ‘how do we nurture faith in those children, young people and families whom God has put us next to?’ We felt John Westerhoff described the sort of faith or gift we would want to be part of giving: ‘a faith that is living, imaginative, curious, provocative, beautiful, seeking, peace-loving and healing’.

But how? What does that look like?

It’s early days! We’ve met three times as a group and our intention is to go on meeting twice a year with the possibility of hosting a larger gathering every two to three years.

Our aim and interest is around how we can be a part of nurturing faith – from a CYF perspective – inviting conversation, offering support, giving and receiving encouragement, networking, sign-posting of resources and making a place of theological reflection.



What has emerged so far? There seems to be a link between how we do stuff in the household of faith (the church) and how we reach out in mission to the many children, young people and families who are ‘not-yet-Christian’.

Some key pieces of research and writing and resources are emerging: about children’s spirituality, grubby faith, inter-generational (messy?) church, faith-full generation? and the changing face of family ministry - to name but a few.

Please look out for us on the Baptists Together website at www.baptist.org.uk/cyf.

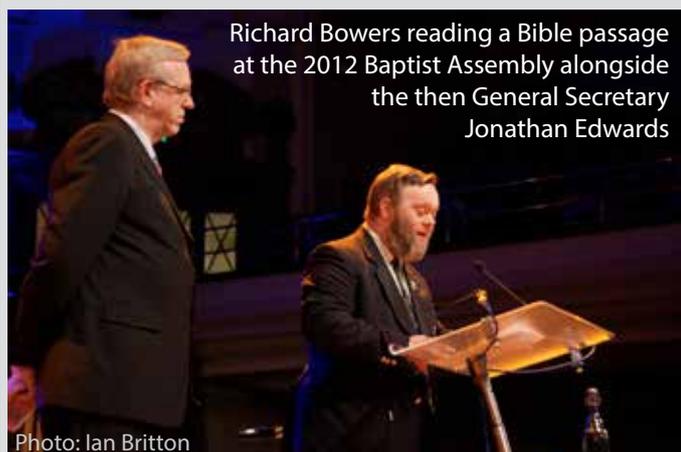
Jacky Storey, Regional Minister, **Southern Counties Baptist Association**

Bob Morris, Youth and Children’s Pastor at **Cirencester Baptist Church**

The end of BUild

The Baptist Union initiative with people with learning disabilities (BUild) is to finish this year.

BUild was started in 1983 by Baptists concerned about how their churches could make the love of Christ known to people with learning disabilities, and how to include them more fully in their life, worship and activities.



Richard Bowers reading a Bible passage at the 2012 Baptist Assembly alongside the then General Secretary Jonathan Edwards

Photo: Ian Britton

BUild was essentially ‘a pioneering movement’, said co-founder Faith Bowers, but with many churches now linked to national charities, it is no longer needed.

“Churches will continue to want encouragement and advice when dealing with the unfamiliar - with learning disabilities no one answer fits all. But this needs to be done in new ways, by younger people,” said Faith.

“We pray this will happen. Many churches are linked with Prospects, which is now merging with Liveability. Other churches work with Faith and Light.

“Social Services may also help: in our early days they were often suspicious of Christians but many have come to respect and value churches’ supportive friendship for those in local group homes.”

BUild has planned a final thanksgiving service and lunch, on Saturday, 24 September, at **Birmingham Central Baptist Church**.

More details at www.build-together.org.uk.

An interview with

Pauline Anderson

Family Worker at Loughborough Baptist Church since 2013

Can you talk a little about your role at Loughborough Baptist Church?

I was appointed in February 2013 and in February this year the role was made permanent. I work 25 hours per week on a flexible basis as different weeks have varying demands. Our church has a rich history in work with children and families and this needed to be brought to the forefront of our church community once more.

Many have come forward to offer practical help and prayer support. We now have weekly groups for all ages from Little Stars for parents and babies, Rising Stars for toddlers and pre-school with parents/carers, Super Stars for 5-8s, Super Stars EXTRA for 8-11s, and a fortnightly Film Club for 11-16 year olds.

I would say that 30 volunteers work with me to run these groups and the same number support me prayerfully through a prayer letter I regularly send.

What do you love about it?

I love the creativity that this exciting role brings. I have a background in Primary teaching and this new job allows me to use those years of experience to do all my favourite things. I love meeting new people, talking with them and hopefully making a difference in their lives. I really like messy craft activities and art work. I enjoy making links between people, drawing in people to our church community.

I love that we have had two dedication services for the first time in ten years. I love that we have new families coming to church and I love it that the church congregation have welcomed and befriended them.

What are the challenges?

Keeping a work life balance is hard when your work is your life. I have a very supportive team around me which helps me to cope with the challenges that occur. My minister, two supporters and spiritual advisor are invaluable, and getting regular positive feedback from members and friends is very helpful. Keeping everyone onside needs to be worked at and so keeping up-to-date with magazine articles, prayer requests, advertising groups on the net, volunteer rotas, registers, making links with other churches and secular groups, being encouraging and thanking people can become a bit of a scramble.



What brought you here?

I have been a member of this church since I was 17 and had always done church work in a voluntary basis. When I got this 'proper paid job' I think some people, including myself, were a bit surprised, but having finished full time work and just having a part time business allowed me to commit to this family work. I do feel that God had led me to this point; all my previous experiences giving me the skills needed to make this role successful.

How did you become a Christian?

I was fortunate to be born into a Christian family and so started going to church before I was born! My dad was a lay pastor and my mum has always been involved in church work. I went through Sunday School, youth groups etc and always believed in God. I made my public declaration with believer's baptism when I was 17 and have tried to follow Jesus all my life.

Is there a Bible verse that's particularly resonating with you now?

When I started this work I took as my text 'Shine like stars in the universe', Philippians 2, hence calling my groups 'Stars'. This is still at the forefront of my work; bringing the best out in people, showing Christian witness and gently challenging them to think about Christ in a Godless world.



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