

Children and Families Ministers Report 21 / 22

What I do:-

Sunday Kids – Bible Sessions for children aged 3 – 11 within the morning service.

COG – a fortnightly club on Sunday afternoons for children aged 8 – 11 who want to explore what their faith looks like through bible study and games.

Baptisms – linking with families, preparation sessions and assistance at the service

Tiddlypeeps (formerly Mothers and Toddlers) – a weekly support group for parents / grandparents and their little ones, with toys, chat, singing and refreshments.

Friday Club – a weekly club for primary aged children supported by a group of teenage young leaders, meeting each Friday in term time to learn about Jesus love for them through games, stories, crafts and prayer activities

Family Fridays – Regular (at least termly), events for the whole family

Holiday Club – a week of fun and mayhem teaching the gospel to primary aged children, held each year in August.

School Support – including RE lesson support, assemblies, regular meetings with the head and bible stories for reception and preschool

Spring – my favourite time of year – new life and growth, warmer, longer days, creation reawakening after its winter rest, and oh yes the report for the APCM!!

Where to begin? I will address each of the headings above in an attempt to fill you all in on this last year as far as what's been happening in our Children and Families' Ministry.

Sunday Kids –

Summer term 2021 saw us meeting in person again (Hooray)! Realising that the church doesn't have big enough spaces, we erected a large tent in the churchyard to enable us to meet with the children but have shelter and some warmth, whilst still sticking to the government covid guidelines. We have continued to use the "Energise" online resource which provides clear sessions and the ability to pick and mix on any chosen theme to suit your children and ages. It's easy to use and makes planning the sessions straightforward. Throughout the summer we met outside each week and had a lot of fun. I introduced the idea of "Outdoor Church", following the concept of Forest School and Forest Church. The plan is that once a month we move away from our regular programme of Bible - based learning and explore creation and learn to rest in it. Through the summer we watched two lots of painted ladies grow from caterpillars to cocoons to butterflies, which we released into the church

yard. We've explored the churchyard and walked to the arboretum. In early autumn we created altars from things around the churchyard following thinking about Old Testament characters who erected altars to God after different encounters with him. One session in late autumn we collected greenery and other natural treasure ready to make Advent Candle decorations. In early spring we painted sensory boxes (yet to be filled). A huge thanks to Joe Cram who put them together for us. Then in February we made birdboxes and a few families came and helped put them up one sunny Saturday morning, all around the churchyard. We are looking forward to seeing if they will be used this year!

My thanks to Vicky and Catherine for planning and leading with me and to the many other parents who have volunteered to help out on a regular basis.

COG – As with Sunday Kids we used the tent and churchyard for our sessions through the summer. Phoebe and Ava left us at the end of the summer, as they moved on from year 6, but over the year we have gained several children so numbers are good. We regularly have 8 children meeting to explore the Bible and faith in fun and creative ways. Our main goal of the past year has been trying to learn the books of the bible and their order within it. We have achieved this mainly through learning two fun songs. I think the highlight of the year for COG was leading the All-Age service in February. The children worked hard planning and preparing and nearly all of them took part in one way or another. It was a good service and everyone learnt a lot about leading services and worship.

Thank you to Julia for leading with me, and to the Weldons for offering their sitting room as a meeting place.

Baptisms – We've had lots of them! With the lifting of covid restrictions, families have been keen to have their baptisms which had to be put on hold for nearly 18 months, so through the autumn and spring we have had a flurry of baptism and dedication services. Our policy for the last 8 years, has been that baptisms are held within the All-Age Service on first of the month. In September this service moved to the Marcham Centre, and we discovered that most families really want hold their baptism service in the church building. This has meant that we have had to move baptisms to within our other services. Through the autumn and spring, we have experimented with all of the services and have found that some work much better than others. I think that we need to review our policy and think how we can best serve the families who come to us, most of whom are not part of the regular church family. Baptism is a huge opportunity to witness to the wider community.

Tiddlypeeps – Tiddlypeeps continues to thrive under the leadership of the amazing Lucy Stevens. We have a good team of volunteers who come each week to set up, make the drinks, serve snacks and chat with Mums, Dads, grandparents, and other carers who bring little ones. It is a lovely group with a very special feel, so well-done Lucy for creating such a warm and friendly

atmosphere! Most families are from Marcham but we do have some coming from further afield.

Friday Club – We restarted Friday Club in the summer term last year with a regular group of about 25 children. We met in the church yard and kept the children outside as much as possible. In September we moved to Marcham Centre and our numbers quickly increased, so that we regularly have between 48 and 53 children each week. Its crazy, but such an incredible opportunity and privilege to be able to teach these children about the love of Jesus every Friday. Autumn term the theme was Light, thinking from creation through to bringing light into the darkness of Halloween, and then culminating in the birth of Jesus the light of the world at Christmas. The Spring term theme was love in its biblical forms with the fun of Valentine's Day, a Jewish Purim Festival, celebrating family love and ultimately Gods greatest gift of love on Good Friday. This term the theme will be Life, to round off the alliteration!! We have a great team of young leaders aged 11 – 18 who come early to help set up, stay behind to clear away, lead small groups, and generally work very hard to help Friday club run as smoothly as possible. They are always full of enthusiasm and ideas too. Over the last year we have been blessed with an increase in adult volunteers, and there are usually 7 Or 8 of us each week, but with over 50 children we always feel we could do with more!

Family Friday – It has been so good to be able to hold Family Friday events again! We had a bonfire night celebration in the autumn and a pancake one in the spring. Both happened in the church and numbers were around 100 for both. It's great to be able to chat to parents but also encourage them to join their children with the family activities we provide.

Holiday Club – We did it! We managed to have a small but successful club once again, in August. We were restricted on numbers but had up to 30 children on each of the 3 days we ran it. The theme was "Anchored" and was planned and led by Becca Rowe. We had a great team of young leaders who ended the week with a fun session paddle boating on the Thames as our thank you to them all for their hard work.

School – this year has still been a challenge to support the school as much as I would have liked due to continued restrictions, but I've done my best to keep in regular contact with the head, Viv Hutchinson, and have been able to continue visiting the reception class on a weekly basis. In September I was able to return to year 1 and year 2 classes to help them with their RE lessons, but this hasn't been consistent through the year due to the school having to tighten their restrictions with various class outbreaks of covid. After February half term we were invited to start leading church assemblies again but this was stopped again after one appearance! Nick and I did manage to get in to support their Easter Service which, although not in church, was a lovely occasion with all classes involved and well led by Nick. The hope is that this term will see a more normal pattern of school involvement for me. Several church members have been baking cakes and homemade goodies for

the staff each week as a way of encouraging and strengthening them through this very challenging season. I think we shouldn't underestimate the impact that this has had, and I don't simply mean on waistlines!! They have been hugely appreciative.

Looking Ahead / Challenges

Looking ahead, we will be running a full holiday club in August, and after much discussion as to the venue, it has been decided to remain at church, rather than move it to the Marcham Centre.

I am aiming to lead a training session for Sunday Kids volunteers. It will also be an opportunity to thank them for their volunteering and encourage them in this vital role of helping and leading our children on a Sunday morning.

I hope to continue to develop and grow the Outdoor Church concept and seek ways to enable the church yard to become a more user-friendly space for children and the community as a whole.

If Friday Club continues to grow and thrive we will need more adult volunteers. We have a few more challenging children who really need one to one support each week to help them to get the best out of it, but also to enable the rest of the children to engage fully without too much distraction.

In the school context I (along with Nick, Viv, and the diocese), am in the process of exploring School Chaplaincy, as a way of formalising our long -standing relationship with the school and working out how we can best serve the school going forwards.

Jill Rowe – Children and Families Minister

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