

Christ Church Westbourne

Aims and principles in children's and youth work

Our aim is to see our young members come to trust Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and be built up in Him for a lifetime of faithful service. In setting about this aim, we have four key principles.

1. Partnership

Parents and church are in this together! The teaching of children in church has a noble history: twice in Paul's letters, children are addressed directly (Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20), which suggests that children were present in the church meetings when his letters were read out, and certainly were considered part of the church. That had been true since the days of Moses, who said "*Assemble the people - men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns - so that they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.*" (Deuteronomy 31:12) At church on a Sunday we have the advantage of Bible teaching aimed at specific age groups, and also the presence of other children who give our children a Christian peer group, as well as having the children in with the adults for some of the time. The children are very much part of church, and the group leaders take much time and trouble in preparing and leading the sessions.

But God has given to parents the final responsibility for the upbringing of children. In the same passage in Ephesians, Paul says, *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4) It was the same in the Old Testament church: as Moses told the people, *Impress [these commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* (Deuteronomy 6:7) That last quote is also a reminder of all the casual opportunities for contact we have with our children: they are around home a lot more than they are at church!

Therefore please do not leave your children's Bible teaching to church. God's way is for you to do it yourself, too. You may not think of yourself as a Bible teacher, but God says you are! And dads should note that it is to us that the command is issued. It may be that you find this a daunting prospect, so this booklet aims to help by suggesting some resources for family Bible time. If you feel you need to brush up on the basics of the Christian faith, why not take a Christianity Explored course for your own benefit?

Alternatively, do ask Richard or me for suggestions / training opportunities. If we are reading the Bible regularly ourselves, we'll obviously be much better at explaining it to our children. They ask good questions - and we owe it to them to be ready with good answers!

Please also do your very best to support the groups by bringing your children regularly. This is a help to the leaders, who plan the activities (sometimes with a certain number in mind) and to other families, whose children benefit from the presence of yours. It is a kindness to the leaders if you are able to let them know in advance if you need to be away on a particular Sunday, for they are perspiring to produce material for your children! (If we treat church as an optional extra which we go to when we can, our children may grow up taking the same view. Help!)

As partners with the junior church and youth leaders, please do discuss your children with them, and encourage them and value them in their work. Try to take an active interest in what they are doing in church. And please pray for them!

2. Bible

In their excellent book on Christian youth work *No Guts, No Glory*, Alan Stewart and co say "The most important ingredient in youth ministry is the word of God. No matter what else happens, we must make sure that the Bible is well taught." We agree! When the Apostle Paul, towards the end of his life, wrote to his younger colleague Timothy about ministry, he urged him to keep the Scriptures central to his work:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather

around them a great number of teachers to tell them what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Timothy 3:14-4:3, NIV)

Ever since childhood, Timothy had been versed in the Scriptures; Paul now reminds him of their power and usefulness, and that he is to preach them.

Thus in Junior Church, Pathfinders and CYFA, as in church, the staple of our Sunday meetings is always a Bible talk or presentation. This does not mean a great long heavy thing: our programmes are tailored to what is best for each age group and we have lots of fun as we learn! But we do long to lay a solid foundation of Bible knowledge and understanding. We long for the children and young people to come to know the Lord Jesus as He really is, that they may serve Him as they really should. Please do make sure your child has a Bible, in a version appropriate to their age.

3. Prayer

In the same letter to Timothy, Paul says *I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.* Paul really prayed for Timothy - who became a fine Christian leader. Our God is a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God, who invites us to pray, and loves to delight us with His answers! As you pray for your children, consider praying Bible prayers for them (such as Colossians 1:9-12). And as you pray for them, please also pray for their groups and leaders, even encouraging them to pray for their group leaders, too. Our system of "prayer grannies / grandpas" exists as a way of encouraging more senior members of the congregation to pray specifically for children. Do get linked up if you aren't already. At every monthly church prayer meeting, we pray for the groups and their leaders: do come and join us if you possibly can (second Monday of each month).

4. Friendship

We long that each group should be a safe and happy environment in which the members make friends with each other, and to which they are easily able to welcome friends they have brought. Hebrews 10:24-25 speaks of the value of mutual encouragement, and we long that as they grow up, the young people encourage each other in this way. We aim to have fun, friendship-building activities.

A vital part of this is our link with the Pathfinder and CYFA ventures at Stanbridge Earls and Bredon each summer. These are built around

Bible teaching in the context of personal friendship and fun. There is nothing quite like hearing a talk in the evening meeting from someone you've just been building a raft or playing air guitars with earlier in the day! Do consider sending your children to one of these and encouraging them to take their friends, too. If the cost is prohibitive, please have a confidential word with me.

So we thank God for our children, their parents and our great team of leaders and helpers.

Alasdair Paine
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