

ISSUE 24/ MAR 2015

Equip.

Will our faith have children?

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- » Australian society to be characterised by greater truth, justice, love, respect especially for the marginalised and indigenous Australians
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Calendar of Kids Ministry Training 2015

- 28 February** Ministry to Children Conference, Crossway Church, 2 Vision Drive, E.Burwood
- 12–14 March** Godly Play Core Training, East Melbourne
- 28 April—1 May** Leaders to Go, Stanwell Tops (NSW) Held every two years, Leaders to Go is the only national conference dedicated to equipping 'leaders of leaders' in Childrens and Families ministry. Put together by an experienced team of ministry practitioners and with excellent presenters, it is a unique opportunity for peer-to-peer networking and learning.
- 30 May** Stories of Childhood Playgroup/Preschool Conference, Centre for Theology & Ministry, Parkville
- 25-27 November & 30 November - 2 December**
 DA/DS2/3/9019S.15 The Nurture and Spiritual Guidance of Children, Stirling Theological College, Mulgrave - Wednesday - Friday, 26-28 November, and Monday - Wednesday, 1-3 December, 9.30am to 4.30pm daily.

Semester-long or online study units offered in 2015

- 2015 P7210 - Children's Ministry, Australian College of Ministries (Online)
- 23 February - 12 June MN-231/MN-402 - Children's Ministry 1, Harvest Bible College (Online Higher Education)
- 4 May - 19 June MNd-101.11 - Children's Ministry 1, Harvest Bible College (Online VET)
- 20 July - 6 November MN-207/MN-403 - Children's Ministry 2, Harvest Bible College (Online Higher Education)
- 28 September - 13 November MNd-107.11 - Children's Ministry 2, Harvest Bible College (Online VET)

Will our faith have children?

The theme of our first Equip for 2015, maintains our meta-theme for the last two years, 'the hopes and fears of all the years'. Here we focus on children, often, as our first two writers remind us, expected to be seen and not heard in church, leaving the adults alone for AO church, as a rehearsal for later leaving the church, as recent research shows.

We twist the theme of John H. Westerhoff's classic 1976 book (rev. 2000) *Will our Children Have Faith?* Christian education, to Westerhoff, modelled itself on the instructional paradigm of secular schools. Instead of faith formation occurring in various contexts -- the family, church, school, and church school -- religious education is relegated entirely to Sunday morning classes. There children learn biblical facts, but will they learn or experience faith? If 'it takes a village to raise a child' how can we be parishes or communities of faith and character that nourish and nurture children's faith, instead of only teaching them facts or morals?

Despite our sentimentality, that children are to be passively cared for, caring is devalued in our society, by association with women. Someone warned me not to stereotypically have all women-writers on this topic, but I could only avoid it thanks to Justin Denholm, a volunteer apprentice children's minister, and Philip Hughes providing reviews. Thankfully we have three of six male Sunday Club teachers at Spotswood Anglican. And thankfully, we have outstanding women writers and children's education practitioners in this edition.

Alison Sampson kicks off with a heart-felt and well worked out apologia for children staying in church and actively learning with and from adults in a liturgical and musical context conducive to active learning, remembering, and Christ-like character formation. Beth Barnett seeks to go behind the stereotypes of children as 'trouble or trophies' to tap into their potential as part of God's people, active, living limbs and hearts of the body of Christ. She rightly sees this as a matter of generational justice, restoring children to

their rightful place with Jesus in the heart of our life, as his apprentices, not mere appendices to our church growth, heady teaching, adolescent entertainment agendas. She warns us against moral prophylaxis and parental self-justification, being justified by the moral behaviour and exemplary family values of our kids. The cartoon she includes is a magnificent warning against collapsing the riveting multi-coloured and layered meanings of scriptural stories into the black and white moral of the story.

..Barnett also warns against 'educational paralysis as a substitute for discipleship'. A kind of Sunday School Naplan with performance markers and painting by numbers can divert spiritual desire and deflate the daring adventure of discipleship. I'm reminded of Harry Chapin's wonderful song-line 'roses are red young man and green tree are green' with the teacher incriminating the child's playful, colourful imagination. Finally, Beth warns against 'Putting all our eggs in the Sunday basket', forgetting that the awe is in the ordinary, the weekday worship of everyday life (Rom 12:1,2).

Our resource section is rich in models for putting these warning and positive proposals into practice. Denise Cooper-Clarke describes the highly effective Mainly Music model for reaching out to the unchurched. Colleen Arnold-Moore critically affirms the imaginative and tactile Godly Play model and how to adapt it to an Australian, not U.S. context. Reviews by Justin Denholm, Bp.Philip Huggins and Philip Hughes of recent Australian research and Dorothy Hughes's (no relation) calendar of coming training events show the resurgence in the sense of importance of children's ministry.

Three other books worth mentioning regarding children are Fiona Stanley et al's challenging *Children of the Lucky Country?: How Australian society has turned it back on children and why children matter*, Patrick McKinley Brennan's brilliant collection *The Vocation of the Child*, especially Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore's measured resurrection of the role of chores in children's lives in a consumerist society; and Mary Anne



Gordon Preece

Phemister's biography of Wilberforce's unjustly forgotten Clapham Sect member, playwright, poet and Sunday School founder *Hannah More: the Artist as Reformer*, is a reminder of what Sunday Schools meant for the general and biblical literacy of the poor. At a time of grave educational inequality and biblical illiteracy within and without the Church our female writers imitate her and challenge the men amongst us also to educate our, and where possible others' children also, in the scriptural texts that give substance to our life, young or old.

Gordon Preece is Director of Ethos and Minister of Spotswood Anglican

Also many thanks to Gina Denholm for her excellent copy-editing



Welcome the children

Time and again in the school playground, someone will wander over and say, laughing, ‘I know what you’re doing for Easter/Christmas/Hallowe’en!’ I have three primary-school-aged children, and they let the whole school know – friends, parents and teachers – when it’s a special time of year. ‘We’re going to church,’ they will say, ‘and we’ll have a really long service, and then a midnight feast!’

At a glance, children’s ministry at our church looks like a disaster. There are no exciting programs with carefully constructed age-appropriate activities; no passionate teachers who devote their lives to the children; no Sunday school; not even a children’s talk. But at one time or another, most of the children at our little church have thrown a tantrum when they couldn’t go to church, or when it was time to go home; and many visiting children have enthused to their parents and begged to come back. Given we have no special children’s program, what is it that draws children in?

It’s very simple, really: we expect our children to participate fully in the worship service, and we write them into its performance.

We didn’t always do it this way. But as a tiny congregation struggling to cope with an influx of children, we were forced to consider how to care for them. We read about children’s faith development and learned that Christian thinkers and educators have long recognised that people come to faith primarily by engaging in the practices of faith. So we began to think about faith as a gift from God, encouraged and nurtured by exposure to the ways of faith as expressed by the gathered community. As such, we began to understand faith as a culture that children would absorb when they copied the adults around them.

Therefore, we came to the conclusion that our children needed to be alongside adult practitioners of the faith as much as possible. Setting up a program which formed teacher–student or entertainer–audience relationships would not achieve this, particularly if it ran concurrently with the worship service. Instead, we invited our children to be present at the primary place we gather as a congregation, to stand alongside the adults and build the intergenerational relationships that would ignite their faith.

As we reflected further, we also began to realise that having our children present during the service would help us more

completely embody the priesthood of all believers. While few churches dispute that children are members of the body of Christ, not many make room for children to exercise their priestly gifts during worship. But when children are excluded from participating in and contributing to the service, we all lose out. The children learn that their gifts are not needed or important, the adults miss out on the gifts that children bring, and the worshipping community no longer reflects the full body of Christ as constituted by that congregation. And so we began to keep our children in.

Once we had decided to keep our children in, we had to interrogate our service. We weren’t interested in dumbing things down. We were, however, interested in finding ways to add movement and symbolic actions that would be interesting to children.

Our church uses a formal liturgical style, and we began to realise that it is well-suited to children. We repeat many songs and prayers each week, which makes it easy to memorise. Every regular attender has parts to say each week, and so it was easy to write children into these spoken parts. We also added a procession and a few small dances, we moved from spoken prayers of intercession to prayer stations with playful symbolic actions, and

we invited the children to set the communion table each week.

Of course, the ways we wove children into our service reflected the service style. Churches with different styles would need to find different ways to incorporate children; however, the questions to ask would be similar. For example, must worshippers sit still, or can people move about? Must all the words change every week, or could there be some regular responses that could be learned by heart? Could these responses be sung, and thus more easily memorised? Must a sermon be purely cognitive, or could we preach using narrative or other forms? Can a sermon engage people at different levels? Must the walls be largely undecorated, or could banners or icons or other liturgical imagery enrich the space, giving children things to look at and wonder about? By asking these and similar questions, and by thoughtfully and respectfully trying new approaches, a church can develop a service that is more welcoming to children.

Moreover, a service that engages children may also benefit adults. Many churches require a high level of literacy from its worshippers, as the service works its way through ever-changing responsive readings and prayers, and uses a cognitively challenging sermon style. Yet not all adults are literate or verbally oriented or capable of abstract thought. If the needs of children are being overlooked, chances are that the needs of some adults are also being ignored: adults who have intellectual disabilities, and adults who operate best in visual or other sensory modes. By welcoming children in, we may find ourselves more welcoming to adults.

Even so, some adults can be quite resistant to having children present during the worship service. One of the problems is an often unspoken attitude that children are somehow 'other'. Instead of honouring them as full members of the worshipping community and encouraging their presence during – and therefore accepting how they change the shape of – worship, we sometimes regard children as inherently different. Thus they are removed lest they disrupt or challenge adult behaviours and attitudes during worship.

For example, at our church, some adults have said that, while they love the idea of children being in the service, they find them too distracting. This is not because the children

run around screaming in quiet times. It is because, in the words of one member, 'they are too cute' and some adults find themselves watching the children playing quietly on the floor when they should be 'focusing on God'. They would prefer the children to be out for more of the service so that they are not distracted by them.

Implicit in this is the idea that worship requires a quiet individualistic stance, and that a successful worship service is one in which adults can focus on a God found in abstraction or silence or long words. The presence of children challenges this stance, because they do move about, they do look cute, they do boom out comments and questions from time to time, and they do become restless when a sermon goes on and on and on with no imagery or stories that they can latch on to.

Therefore, welcoming children invites us to distinguish between private devotion and public worship. The former can be quiet, introverted time; but the public liturgy is different. Public liturgy is a time for the whole community to worship God together. If we aim for perfection by cutting out anything that is messy or semi-articulate, then it is no longer the offering of us all. But when we allow children to interrogate our worship practices, we are more able to offer the worship God desires: the worship of the whole community, not just that of verbally capable adults. And we are all called to worship, so our services need to reflect this. Rather than setting the different approaches and needs of children and adults in opposition, the challenge for the church as the body of Christ is to find ways to incorporate all of these expressions into the body. This work may feel daunting, but if it is viewed as an opportunity then the experience of worship for all of us can be deeply enriched.

Including children in the liturgy does more than add a bit of movement and colour to the service. They are also a physical reminder of the incarnation. We believe in a God made visible in human flesh, in the softness and weakness and neediness of a newborn babe. The first visitors to see Jesus found him swaddled and lying in a crib; a nursing mother holding her baby is the richest icon we can have for this. As a toddler, Jesus and his family fled their country; refugee children remind us of his vulnerability and poverty. The boy Jesus asked difficult questions at



Alison Sampson

the temple; the piercing questions of an older child might evoke the same defensive awkwardness in us that the temple authorities experienced. God was first made known to us in a child, and the presence of children in worship can illuminate and expand our understanding of this fundamental declaration of our faith. Their presence also reminds us that the sacraments are not rewards for right knowledge, but pure gift. The presence of children can help save us from a gnostic approach to our faith.

Of course, children are not present purely for adult faith formation. Instead, children must be present in the service because, like adults, they have needs which can only be met through worship. Like adults, children need to respond to God's gifts, offer praise, make statements of faith, acknowledge the spiritual dimension of their lives, make confession, and exercise their spiritual imagination. The worship service is the primary gathering of the faith community, the locus and high point, the first educational experience, and the place where the people of God begin to live out what it means to be faithful; children need to be part of all this. And in being present, children will absorb the practices of faith, and master the work and play of worship.

And if the children in our community are anything to go by, this can lead to a strong sense of belonging to the church, and a lasting commitment to the faith.

Alison Sampson is the Associate Pastor at the South Yarra Community Baptist Church, and a regular contributor to Zadok Perspectives and her www.theideaofhome.blogspot.com.

Children and Families Ministry

– Reflecting on Our Conventions, Intentions and Inventions

In 2003, when George Barna's *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* appeared, practitioners and advocates in children and families ministry in Australia collectively cheered with joy, and wept tears as we read in print familiar phrases we had been scratching in frustration on the back of the store cupboard door. A mainstream ministry voice was speaking about children.

Children's ministry is accustomed to being the expendable church budget line, and the apprentice talent pool from which other ministries fish for those who are ready for 'real' and 'serious' ministry opportunities. Children's ministries are accustomed to neglect, lack of consultation and make-shift planning and resources.

Barna shone the statistician's spotlight on children's ministry, and he did so in a way that woke up a generation of pastors and church leaders and left them blinking and dazed, just as the last generation to experience the norm of suburban Sunday School culture – who had left the building for good – were starting to have their own children.

We began to hear more frequently the figures that indicate that churches with dedicated children's ministry staff, intentional and proportionately budgeted programs and resources for children were growing churches. We also began to hear that the overwhelming majority of 'decisions for Christ' or 'faith commitments' or 'conversions' are made before the age of 14. Twenty years later, this statistic is finding its natural counterpart in current studies seeking to understand the departure of young people from churches by the age of 14. I can't help thinking that the baseline set of assumptions around these two sets of data bears further investigation.

Barna's work focused a great deal on resources as indicators of priority, and triggered a flurry of effort to employ children's ministry staff. In the context of a culture where children are viewed generally as either 'troubles' or 'trophies', specialised programs for children have become a badge of being a growing church.

Alongside Barna's call to the church to step up to the responsibility it holds for children came a call to recognise the limits of the church's role in the faith formation of children, and to

acknowledge the home as the primary site of spiritual nurture. The last decade has seen the rise of parent resources for faith in the home: Orange, Faith@Home in the US, BRF's Faith in Homes in the UK, and Growing Faith among other locally produced resources.

While these movements all contribute to a more integrated and healthy approach to the spiritual lives of our children, they nevertheless represent add-ons to a system fundamentally running the same paradigm. We have added some good things, but they have had to operate within the same structure.

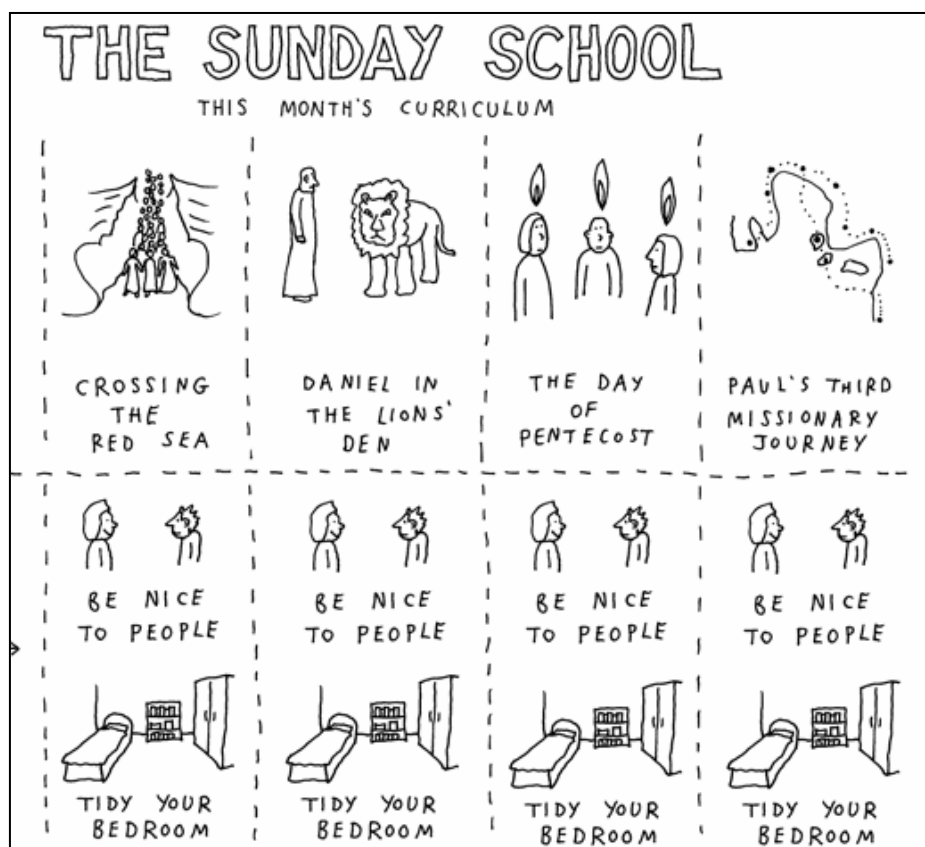
In our endeavours to think strategically and theologically about the role of children and families in faith communities, and in the broad story of the gospel, we contend with the reality that ministry and mission with children in churches has grown somewhat by default. Decisions have been shaped, not primarily in light of best thinking and practice around children, but through the knock-on effects of other agendas. Children are sent straight to their program without shared worship time in order to make space for more adults in the 'main' service, but at the cost of the children



Beth Barnett

being able to observe adult faith in action and worship. Or the gifted Sunday Club leader with a passion for opening the Bible with kids is noticed for his gifts and recruited for use in 'up front' ministries. Such (real) scenarios are all too common.

By and large, the content and structure of children's ministry has been contingent on a range of traditional and contemporary cultural assumptions about church for grown ups. For example, best practice clearly sides with supporting parents in having regular, integrated, natural faith-talk with their kids at





home. An easy way to promote and resource this is to align preaching texts and children's program materials, but it is a rare preacher who will adapt his or her preaching to follow a series proposed by the children's team.

At this point, I must gratefully acknowledge that in my decades of children and families ministry and mission adventures I have been incredibly blessed to work with some church leaders who have broken these norms and, at least for a season, allowed a community to be shaped by negotiation, recognising the vulnerability of children, as well as their strength of contribution, as models of the kingdom in our midst. I have tasted the goodness in not making our choices for children a by-product of other decisions and mechanisms in church life.

Nevertheless, despite these miraculous seasons, the models were easily overturned and challenged by winds of change, new leadership and restructuring. To many in church leadership, the idea of making decisions based on intergenerational factors is just too countercultural to be sustainable – yet. Extensive conversations with colleagues across the denominations and across the hemispheres indicate that this is representative of a pervading legacy and the current state of play in a majority of contexts.

While Barna's research left most of the assumptions about how adult church works unchallenged, he did raise the profile of children within our communities, hitting the

'growth anxiety' nerve with his findings on the connections between healthy churches and at least some kind of attention towards children.

Beyond a general call to commit to a greater degree of intentionality in resourcing ministry, there are some important trends in the content of how we tend to the faith of children that merit some re-evaluation and reform. Here are just three that I think are high in the minds of many children and families practitioners and are good topics for conversation and reflection in our communities of faith: the smoke screen of moral messages across our gospel engagements, the thinning of holistic discipleship into educational mimicry and the contest of time and resources and energies expended on Sunday.

Children's ministry as 'moral prophylaxis'

The moral anxiety of parents and communities is revealed in both the social agendas of ministries and the content of teaching programs. Children's talks and associated ministry materials all routinely address this anxiety. Despite the libertine morality of adult sexuality and material consumption of twenty-first Australian culture, moral judgments on children as a reflection of parenting success are as conservative as ever. Particularly in middle-class and affluent families, children are expected to maintain highly structured lives of training and discipline in skill acquisition. Children's programs, curriculum,

devotional literature and even so called Children's 'Bibles' are typically overlaid with a hermeneutic of moral imperatives and behavioural norms. Dave Walker, the UK church cartoonist has a frame, which perfectly depicts this phenomenon: (*bottom previous page*)

While tongue-in-cheek, this cartoon captures the essence of many Sunday School curricula quite accurately: from the Exodus to the journeys of Paul, the bottom line for kids is often a message of moral conformity.

This is a result of several things: the way children are viewed – as both vulnerable to corruption and a threat to adult honour – and a poor sense for what the Bible is actually saying to human community of all ages. In the shift towards resourcing parents in the role of faith nurture, we must beware that 'integrating' faith and life in the home doesn't deteriorate into co-opting faith as a blunt instrument for coercing good behaviour, or simply become a euphemism for (politically) conservative 'family values'. Robust faith-forming interactions in the home will be full of unresolved questions, possibilities worth exploring further, challenges back and forth, as well as dark chortles and shocked gasps at the scandalous stories of the text as they have been passed down to us. Jael, Jacob, Ruth, Rhoda, Hophni and Hosea are tear-jerking, laugh-out-loud, you've-got-to-be-kidding examples of God's interactions with his people. If we don't find ourselves gobsmacked

by them, we're misreading fairly badly.

Let's be sure not to underestimate the value of allowing children to drink deeply of the details and texture and culture and vocabulary of the Bible, and having the rich Word of God as a ready resource. Often our approach to opening the Bible with children diminishes the complexity of the text, which has the capacity to draw their curiosity back time and time again; instead, we flatten the text to something 'accessible'. The compulsion to add a moralised teaching point is often more to satisfy an adult need to feel like we have taught something – that children have 'got something out of the lesson' – and betrays, I think, a lack of conviction that the Bible is worth knowing deeply and intimately as the truly powerful, inimitable Word of God, for all people, for all time, for all ages.

This is especially important in missional contexts, like school-based programs, in which the moral preferences of parents can't be assumed – nor is it our call to make moral claims in these settings. In my experience of teaching CRE in Victorian State Schools over the past 20 years, focusing on the Bible as the central text and using it in an open and scholastically critical manner – read with inquiry and scrutiny, rather than used as a source of abstracted didactic principles – has been the key to maintaining a relationship of trust and transparency.

In the past, an apologetics based or moral agreement appears to have been a valid way to engage. It went something like: 'You wish you were good? Then here's the good news for you...'

We now don't have moral consensus, so this is not a shared starting point for evangelism with adults, and it creates walls if we make it the starting point with children. I do think that the gospel has moral implications – but it is the gospel itself that is primary, and moral reform is consequential. It is the witness of scripture that we trust as the foundational engagement by which children or adults can know God, not shared moral ground.

Educational paradigms as substitutes for discipleship

In Australian culture, childhood is almost synonymous with education and schooling. It seems self-evident to us that children should be educated, that they should be in school, and that 'progress' in education, against a set of milestones, provides a reliable template for normativity. We diagnose children who don't follow the template with a variety of labels, mostly ending in 'disorder'.

In schools we routinely sort children according to age and expect them to conform to some

approximate alignments in skill and interest. This kind of sorting certainly has its uses, but we do well to reconsider why churches also use this kind of system as a reference grid for children. Most often, children are considered in terms of an educational framework. Indeed, the origins of 'Sunday School' lie in a genuine philanthropic movement that aimed to provide basic literacy and numeracy to the child-labourers of the urban poor in Gloucester. Although many churches have now moved away from this as a title, the paradigm of learning and education still remain the primary way children are provided for and expected to participate.

Moreover, it is often the most antiquated models of education – those in which children are passive recipients of adult knowledge – that is replicated in our faith communities. When I train young people for service in beach mission teams they express most anxiety over whether the children will 'get the point' or 'learn anything' or 'be able to understand'. Children are constantly learning – we don't need to worry about if they are learning; the question is what they are learning. And we best pay close and analytical attention to the entire environment and all of the processes we operate within in order to answer this question well.

The challenge for us as households, faith communities or even schools, is to ensure that we neither deny children learning nor define children by their learning.

Discipleship is more than learning. Discipleship is more than training for a future faith. The call to discipleship is to walk with Jesus, in the gracious company of the one who is the Way; the call to discipleship is to pattern our lives on the cruciform shape of Christ; the call to discipleship is to participate in God's mission and in the service of the body of Christ.

Putting all our eggs in the Sunday basket

One of the great joys of children and families ministry is that most of it, and the best of it, happens in the local park, by the school gate, over a coffee next to the sand pit, at footy training, in the backyard, standing in the supermarket checkout queue. It happens in school classrooms, kinder working bees, parenting groups, community theatre, maths coaching, birthdays and even Halloween street festivals.

Children bring the gift of being natural integrators of life. Sometimes this manifests in ways that cause embarrassment to adults. Children see life happening around them and pose their questions and postulate their commentary on what they see; they respond

with raw, unfiltered genuine emotion; they are impulsive with passion, compassion and repulsion. They do their meaning-making in visible and immediate ways. They are able to sustain a cycle of wondering and questioning with a seemingly endless search for 'why?' with breathtaking philosophical stamina. Their 'wow' at the wonder of creation doesn't wait for Sunday for moments of worship; their hunger for the big stories of meaning in which evil is defeated and truth and honour, compassion and hope triumph calls 'more, more!' daily – not just once a week; our opportunities to love and serve our neighbours and our enemies with them abound.

In our time-poor culture, Sunday gatherings remain contested spaces for all the worthy priorities for which we gather: artful expressive worship, humbling faithful biblical teaching, gospel proclamation and invitation, the reconciling and interceding work of prayer, edification of the family of faith, and exercising of the gifted body of Christ. Many churches manage a token 'Kids talk' (in which children are passive observers, rather than actual articulators) and many others manage the crowded liturgical agenda of music, bible, prayer, community news, vision casting and fund gathering by outsourcing their children.

While there is a growing awareness among ministry observers that in this practice we are in fact training our children to leave church – a pattern that we can only hope they will grow up to rebel against – we also recognise the superlative nurturing value of an integrated life of faithful discipleship in the home, in the community, in family and household small groups, in summer mission teams, in regular service projects, soaking in the stories and images and sayings of scripture, sharpening the reflexes of daily prayer and cultivating the habits of other-oriented service.

More and more, we are realising the alternative spaces in which ministry to our children and mission with our children overlap and blur their edges.

More than this, when we do these things as adults with children in our midst, we have the opportunity to pay attention to the model of entry to the kingdom that Jesus gave his disciples – a model that as adults, we do well to cherish and heed.

Previously serving Anglican, Baptist and ecumenical communities in children and families pastoral, training and consulting roles, Beth Barnett is currently a University of Divinity doctoral candidate, and works with the Victorian Council of Christian Education (VCCE) with responsibility for Learning and Theological Engagement.

St James' Old Cathedral Children's Chapel: Story Telling Scripture

Colleen Arnold-Moore

We must not underestimate the significance of Children's Ministry. Christian surveys estimate between 75-83% of Christians became believers before the age of 21, leaving only 17-25% coming to faith as older adults (Barna, Age of Faith, 2004). So how can the gospel be presented appropriately and sufficiently to children while engaging with their whole person? It is with this in mind that I approach the role of Families Minister at St James' Old Cathedral, West Melbourne.

I first participated in *Godly Play* as an adult many years ago after formally studying and subsequently teaching theology. I was completely blown away at the scriptural interaction and presentation. I was not the only one engaged by the story of God and his interaction with his people. Many of the adults and children around me were also completely engrossed and challenged. How could such simple storytelling be so powerful?

What this first and foremost reminded me was that the Bible is mostly narrative storytelling. Although there are other literary forms in scripture, we have taken a large step away from thinking and responding to the Bible as stories. We have forgotten the power of the story and how it captures our thinking and our imagination. We have forgotten the wonder provoked and prolonged by the actions of God.

One model for children's worship that aims to nurture the exploration, engagement and analysis of scripture is based upon Montessori educational theories and practice. Central to this work articulated by Maria Montessori is a model of exploration, observation, interaction and independence for the development of the whole person within a safe and structured environment. This constructivist or discovery model encourages children to learn concepts through discovery by working with materials instead of learning through direct instruction. This model was then developed specifically for the Christian context by Dr Sofia Cavalletti and Professor Gianna Gobbi, who wrote the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. Inherent to these models is a focus on scripture, liturgy, prayer, individual response and corporate worship.



The story shelves

In these and their subsequent iterations within Protestant circles, *Young Children and Worship* (Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome Berryman) and subsequently *Godly Play* (Jerome Berryman), we can observe the same commitment to exploration, observation, interaction and independence for the Christian development of the whole person within a safe and structured environment. All three forms provide a way for the whole person to engage with the stories of the Bible, from Abraham and Sarah through to the incarnation of Christ and his earthly ministry. All three articulate their worship within the wider church community and its practice. All three encourage children, individually and corporately, to wonder about and explore the person and acts of God with his people. These varied aspects also provide the language, practice, models and structure to enable children to grow spiritually within the church of God.

It was with some of these key factors in mind that we have formed our Children's Chapel. At St James' Old Cathedral we have formed a comprehensive model for our children's Christian worship and education. It is scriptural and liturgical: we model and teach prayer (using wooden eggs containing prayers, or the chocolate box of pretend chocolates with images of things for which to thank God), participate in confession and repentance (using water and stones), give glory to God in song (and with percussion instruments) and

then engage in Bible study (with elements of investigation, analysis and wonder), using the Montessori methods of storytelling. This model uses wooden figures to act out the narrative and then posits open-ended 'wondering' questions to deepen the exegesis of the story without direct instruction. This ultimately equips the participants to engage with the biblical narrative themselves. The new stories we have written are now collectively called Story Telling Scripture. After the biblical presentation in our Children's Chapel, our children have the freedom to respond in a number of ways. These choices include an artistic response (drawing, collage and so forth), reading from a large box of Bible storybooks, or re-telling another story from its basket. We have unashamedly drawn on the liturgical practice of the church historical by following of the shape of the prayer book. We begin with the whole community, process out before the Bible readings, participate together in Children's Chapel and then return to celebrate Communion with the entire congregation.

At the heart of our worship is a three-year program that covers the overarching scriptural narrative from Creation through to the *New Heavens and the New Earth* in Revelation. We have set aside a particular space that holds our collection of story materials. This set of five (soon to be six) shelves (see above) is itemised into discrete sections: Old Testament,

Liturgical (Baptism, prayer, Holy Communion, Church year), New Testament and Parable. Within each of these areas are the individual story baskets or parable boxes. Each story is encapsulated in a story basket that contains all the materials (think a number of wooden people approximately 8-10cm tall, significant items such as the big fish in Jonah, or 'artefacts' such as the temple furnishings of ark and lampstand) needed for each individual story. On the top shelf are the larger pieces such as Noah's Ark and the Temple or, in the New Testament, Bethlehem or the Jerusalem gate.

The use of Montessori-style models fulfils a number of key goals. First and foremost it makes the Bible stories more tangible. As an adult member of my congregation commented on our model of the Temple in Jerusalem, it was the first time she had comprehended how it had actually functioned. Seeing the model made her conception concrete. Second, these models provide motor-sensorial experiences of the story. In the holding and moving of the figures during and after storytelling, children are able to learn and engage with the story. Playing in a hands-on way makes the story concrete.



Next, the use of these materials allows both independent learning and also individual exploration of these stories. One of the most significant features of these story baskets is the freedom given to the children to return to stories we have already told and to re-tell them themselves. This means that children do not need to wait for the adults to engage with a scriptural story but have the means themselves to tell a scriptural story. Finally, the use of these models can demonstrate the links across and between scriptural stories such as the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment of Jesus. Sometimes the children make the link in the question/response time or they ask if there is a similarity or connection between stories such as *Moses and the Manna* and *Holy Communion*. In each of these instances, the children are developing biblical theology in their grasp of the character and actions of the living God.

We are clearly indebted to the work of Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gabbi, Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome Berryman.

However, within an Australian Protestant context, some aspects of these programs have needed tweaking and reshaping. First among these factors has been the shape of the 40–41 week Australian school year. Both *Young Children and Worship* and *Godly Play* presume a 36 week American school year. This difference is compounded by where school holidays fall in Australia, typically including Easter and Christmas. This has given us more weeks for Children's Chapel, immediately requiring the need to adjust the curriculum.

The next area of reshaping has been to use the Montessori model of storytelling within a larger worship service for children. Our Children's Chapel is broad in shape, encompassing features not within the previous models, which presumed children accessed these aspects of Christian worship elsewhere. The addition of repentance prayers and the declaration of God's forgiveness is one such example, as is the inclusion of corporate and individual prayer. We have also removed the thanksgiving meal found in *Godly Play* because, at St James', our children return to share in Holy Communion with the whole community.



We have also developed a three-year lectionary that covers the sweep of scripture. The writing of stories from scripture not previously covered has allowed St James' to fill in the missing weeks. Each year we re-tell stories of Lent, Easter and Advent and Christmas seasons, as well as Transfiguration, Pentecost, Ascension, Trinity Sunday and Christ the King. But around all of these, during the ordinary time, we work through the Bible chronologically, from Genesis to Revelation. Our holiday time is dominated by Parables (except at Christmas and Easter). Finally, we have reshaped some of the material to more closely reflect scripture. It is our hope that this faithfulness to the Word of God will mean many different Christian churches from a variety of traditions will see this as a useful model for their own children's ministry.

It is understandable that the development of these models firstly within Roman Catholicism and then in American Presbyterian and Episcopalian circles has made many

Australian Protestants wary of them. But we should not hesitate when an emphasis on biblical narrative and structure readily reflects the priority of scripture for spiritual growth. We should instead be willing to grasp these models and apply them in our context. This storytelling model actively encourages all participants to engage with the scriptural stories and partake in the wondering and questioning. It further equips our youngest members to begin the lifelong process of relationship, individual understanding and interaction with the living God, his character and work among his people through community and scripture.

One other aspect has further hindered the development of these forms of children's ministry: that is, the inaccessibility of materials, whether through the prohibitive costs of international shipping or the minimal selection created here in Australia. In either instance it has been expensive to set up and maintain this form of children's ministry. These difficulties are compounded by the lack of instruction or pattern within the *Godly Play* material on how to make your own materials. In its precursor, *Young Children and Worship*, patterns and material lists are included with the presumption that leaders will either make or commission the needed figures and buildings. Our Children's Chapel has benefitted from these patterns, and has developed further figures for the stories we have written augmented by select materials purchased locally and from the United States.

In our synthesis and redevelopment of these Montessori models, closely based on scripture and the historical practice of the gathered Church, St James' Children's Chapel has created a new model for children's ministry and worship, incorporating *Story Telling Scripture*. We have made the decision that our Children's Chapel is not childcare, it is not a sports or games session or school, nor is it craft activities to fill time while the adults are fed. Instead, Children's Chapel is worship: worship especially tailored for children ages 4–12 years. If indeed most Christians come to faith before the age of 21, then we, the church, must develop solid, age-appropriate and biblical models to nurture and grow our youngest members into faith.

Colleen lectured and tutored at Ridley College for 10 years in Systematic Theology and Church History. In 2013 Colleen became Families Minister at St James' Old Cathedral, West Melbourne. Married to Tim Arnold-Moore with 3 children, Colleen enjoys reading and playing PS3/PS4 games with her children — or even alone!

Mainly Music as Missional Activity

Denise Cooper-Clarke

In the increasingly secular and post-Christian cultural context of contemporary Australia, churches can no longer rely, certainly not solely, on attracting non-believers to big events, whether they be outreach or worship, no matter how well run and good quality such events are. We also need—and many would argue this is the most important strategy for evangelism—to engage with people where they are: a ‘missional’, rather than ‘attractational’, model of church. But this model need not exclude some programs, where such programs or groups are designed to provide a bridge between local communities and the church community. One such program, which can be very effective in drawing children and families into the life of the church, is Mainly Music.

Mainly Music is a preschool music program that began in 1990 and is now run by many churches throughout Australia and New Zealand. It is open both to church members and the general community. It has proven to be very popular, and many churches have waiting lists to join. At our church, St. Hilary’s Kew/North Balwyn/Mont Albert North, we run four groups per week at three sites, and are planning a fifth this year. We could probably run more, being only limited by the number of volunteers required, which is around six per group (of up to twenty families).

Why are preschool music groups so popular?

From a young age, most children love music. Babies are soothed by the sound of singing. By twelve months, children dance, move in time to music and develop favourite songs. But it’s not just about enjoyment: parents are advised to encourage and promote their children’s musical experiences because, as psychologist D’Arcy Lyness puts it, ‘Kids who grow up hearing music, singing songs, and moving to the beat are enjoying what experts call “a rich sensory environment”. That’s just a fancy way of saying they’re exposed to a wide variety of tastes, smells, textures, colors, and sounds. And researchers believe this forges more pathways between the cells in their brains.’

And it is active participation in music, not just listening to it, that makes the strongest neural connections. It is claimed that children who play or sing music regularly do better in reading and maths, focus better, play better with others and have higher self-esteem (<http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/learning/>

preschool_music.html). That is a pretty strong incentive for parents to get their preschoolers involved in music!

Why is Mainly Music so popular?

Parents have many different options when it comes to preschool music groups and programs. There are a number of reasons why a Mainly Music group might be more attractive than some others. First, it is very affordable, usually \$5 per family per week, paid only on the weeks when they actually attend. This low cost is achieved by running the group with volunteers rather than paid music teachers, though no doubt some volunteer leaders are trained in music. Second, it caters for all ages of preschoolers: parents (or grandparents or other caregivers) are welcome to bring along three or four (or more!) preschoolers, even babies, whereas many other music programs are directed only at a specific age group. Third, many parents have a really happy experience and often invite their friends. I would also hope that parents experience and appreciate the genuine care of Mainly Music volunteers, for both them and their children.

On the other hand, for parents who are atheists or have, perhaps with good reason, hostile attitudes to the Christian faith, the fact that Mainly Music groups are run by a church and on church property could be a negative. And once people come along, the ‘God-talk’ at Mainly Music, though gentle, is overt. There will be one or two songs out of a dozen or so that talk about God – usually focusing on God as creator of people (and animals) and on God’s love and care for all people. This is not done in a preachy way, rather an invitational one: ‘Families (are) given a chance to think about the God-part of life’. From time to time, there are invitations to Mothers or Fathers Day breakfasts, parenting courses, special Easter and Christmas events designed for families or courses such as Christianity Explored. These invitations are made by the leaders, but even more important are the personal invitations from participants who are church members.

What happens at Mainly Music?

Mainly Music runs like a franchise, with a central administration, and churches need to obtain (and pay for) a licence to run a group. This gives the church access to the recorded songs for which Mainly Music holds copyright as well as the words of those songs which can be put into a power point show. There are many CDs of the songs available, with new ones coming out regularly. Mainly Music also



Denise Cooper-Clarke

sends regular newsletters with suggestions for ways to run the groups, especially ways to introduce matters of faith, and runs training courses. They are quite prescriptive about how the sessions run: a half hour of music using authorised songs followed by morning tea, preferably with home-baked goods, and then an informal play time, which can run for quite a while as children play and adults chat. Six volunteer leaders are required – two to run the singing, two to welcome and register, and two to prepare and serve the morning tea for adults and children. This means there are a good number of church people to form relationships with the children and families, and to pray together for the ministry. It is also important – especially where leaders or helpers are older people – for volunteers to include some Christian parents and families: they are the natural peers of other participants, their children form friendships with each other, and in this context it becomes easier to invite participants to other events, including, if they develop an interest in the Christian faith, outreach or worship services.

What do children learn at Mainly Music?

It’s not just a matter of singing some children’s songs and encouraging the children (and parents) to sing and dance along. There are songs that focus on keeping a steady beat, and those that use different kinds of rhythm, or teach the children to copy rhythms. There are songs that include fast and slow, and soft and loud. There is a segment that uses instruments from the ‘instrument bag’: wooden rhythm sticks, shakers, and bells. There are songs that combine simple movements such as clapping, stamping, patting, blinking and so on, all of which teach concentration and body control. There are songs that teach numbers (Three jellyfish, five red balloons) and songs that teach body parts (Heads and shoulders, knees and toes and I woke up this morning with dancing feet). Although the session leaders are not professional music teachers, the songs

continued over

used are designed to help children learn co-operation and how to follow instructions, alongside growing their numeracy and literacy skills and developing gross and fine motor skills.

What is the ethos of Mainly Music?

As the Mainly Music website puts it: 'The dream we have for your Mainly Music experience is that you'll find the session a safe, nurturing space where connection occurs' (<http://www.mainlymusic.org/>). This connection occurs in a number of dimensions. First, it occurs between the child and the parent or caregiver: this connection can be continued throughout the week as they sing the songs together at home. Some songs specifically focus on the caregiver-child bond. Second, connection occurs between the adult participants – usually young mothers, for whom the session may be one of their few experiences of getting out of the house, talking with other adults, sharing their joys and difficulties, being encouraged and forming new friendships. Mainly Music groups are usually multigenerational, so first time mums can interact with other new mothers as well as with those who have several children, and with grandparents.

Finally, there is the connection with the church community, which may lead to exploration of faith and commitment to Christ. As the Mainly Music website says, 'We'd love you to connect with the local church who make the session happen. Churches are more than a place of spiritual nurture; they're also a place of community and friendship. Many churches provide practical assistance – like marriage ceremonies and baby dedications as well as a place for you and your family to explore God. They provide help through the tough times – like conducting funerals, counselling, or food parcels'. That's a big call – and churches that offer Mainly Music need to be willing to follow through and make real connections with families. If they do, Mainly Music has great potential to be truly missional.

Denise Cooper-Clarke works as a volunteer for ethos and is involved in music ministry at St Hilary's Kew/ North Balwyn/Mont Albert North, including Mainly Music.

Spirituality for the Classroom

Bishop Philip Huggins adapted launch Address on 3rd February, 2015.

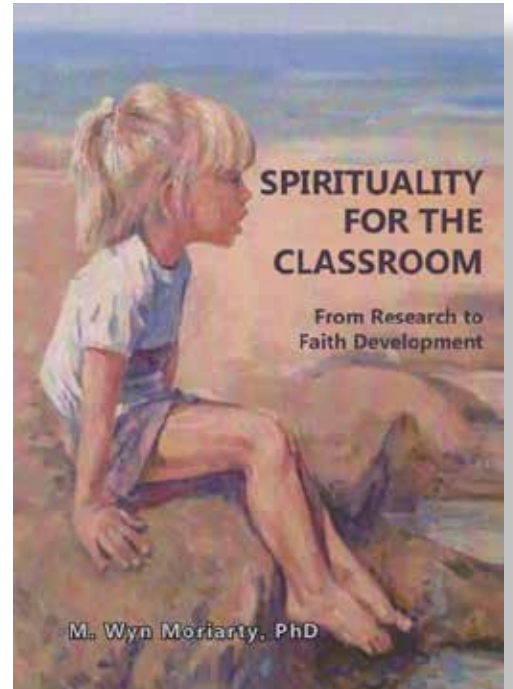
Wyn Moriarty's book is written with a noble purpose and is full of helpful, important, PhD research-backed insights. Before reflecting on its content, I give you Dr Moriarty's own words on the genesis and purpose of the book:

The seeds of this book were sown nearly 10 years ago, soon after I began volunteer teaching Religious Education in state schools in Victoria. As a retired teacher I became aware of the difficulties faced by RE volunteers, who often had minimal training for a difficult and responsible task. One difficulty was overcoming the cultural gap between older volunteers who had grown up within the church, and children in the twenty-first century growing up in a technologically sophisticated world but mostly in total ignorance of the Bible, and without any religious affiliation.

To bridge this gap I undertook a research project to discover something of the innate spirituality of contemporary children, and how this is expressed in a secular world. I am indebted to the children I interviewed for showing me their sense of wonder and the transcendent, their meaningful relationships, and the way in which they develop their values and aspirations, usually without a religious language or worldview. Analysis of these findings was the basis of my thesis and this book.

My goal is to help teachers of Christian Religious Education to create a classroom environment more sensitive to the children's individual spirituality. For me this means less prescribed instruction and busyness, but providing children with Biblical narratives which speak for themselves, and more time and space for reflection. This is to assist their individual spirituality to eventually grow, in some cases, into personal faith in Jesus Christ, and for all children to develop a sense of wellbeing, and life-affirming values.

The book was originally written for volunteers in secular schools. Christian Religious



Instruction in these schools is undergoing great cultural challenge and change. A recent visit to ACCESS ministries has shown me that this organisation is making a valiant effort to meet these challenges, already making some changes to curriculum style I suggest in my book. However I believe that there are still philosophical and political issues relating to religion in state schools to be addressed.

The book is also relevant to teaching Religious Education in faith-based schools and children's ministry in a parish setting. It acknowledges the spiritual needs of the children's teachers and ministers. The book aims to assist the process of development of children's pre-religious spirituality into mature personal faith, through the nurture of a faith environment: that is, the church community with its sacred stories, its beliefs and practices.

Wyn's book is written in our perplexing context, where spirituality is vivid in daily life and yet the public discourse is that this generation is somehow different to all preceding generations. Wyn wisely recognises this current public mindset, whilst reminding us of both the universal yearnings of all people and the particular nature of childhood spirituality. She writes for a society

in transition, needing religious education teachers who are thoroughly and professionally qualified, competent in educational theory of child development and with a sensitive understanding of contemporary children's spirituality. Plainly, too, she hopes religious educators will be attentive to their own faith development and respectful of other faith traditions in our transitioning multicultural and multi-religious society.

For some years I have represented our church on the Multifaith Advisory Group to the Premier and State Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Accordingly, I have participated in the discussions provoked by controversy around ACCESS Ministries' approach. In the public domain, this is where debate has focused: on allegedly poorly-trained, proselytising amateurs with dangerous access to children.

Lobbyists, including The Age, have focused on this and on federal funding of chaplains to state schools, seeing these as remnants of a perceived unhealthy link between church and state. Their campaigns have been assisted by well-publicised failures and also by the concurrent tragedies unveiled in evidence to the Royal Commission on Institutional Child Abuse.

Personally, I remember with gratitude some of those 'amateurs' from my childhood as people of gracious faith in the love of Jesus. Wyn provides this balance too, affirming many beautiful souls who have conveyed God's love in Word and deed.

Whilst all this in public debate goes on children are growing up with, as Wyn conveys, their unique spiritual capacities:

Wisdom: a way of knowing and being, that takes small children beyond the limits of ordinary, everyday experiences into a deeper stream of consciousness where they connect with people beyond the limits of time and space. Every parent and grandparent has an experience of 'out of the mouths of babes ...'

Wonder: experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight, and a deep sense of reverence, unity and love.

Relationship: refers to compassion and sensitivity to others' needs often displayed by young children. Their first responses are to be helpful.

Wondering: refers to young children's capacity to consider questions of ultimate concern (such as questions about infinity, God and death) because of their openness, vulnerability and tolerance for mystery.

Seeing the Invisible: this includes altered consciousness which some young children experience, such as seeing angels, or an aura around people, or expressing a more intuitive way of knowing than is usually expressed by older people.

Wyn's research also demonstrates that there are children having their own spiritual experiences looking for a narrative that explains and interprets who they are and what they feel. The story of Mary (p.58), who saw an angel, touched me deeply. Aged 6, she was in hospital. When her parents left her overnight she was feeling very scared. Suddenly an angel appeared and said, 'Don't be afraid. I'll stay with you tonight. I won't leave you tonight. And I'll be there with you tomorrow.' Mary described the angel as wearing a gold dress and a bright thing on her head. She had wings. Although Mary only saw her briefly, she was aware that the angel was still present with her. Significantly, Mary said 'That night I wasn't scared.'

Thank God little Mary had Wyn's warmth and attentiveness to help her tell and understand her experience. How many such children are without a sympathetic and intelligible setting for understanding the divine love for us all!

This takes us to the heart of why Wyn's book is so timely and helpful. The essence of the good news, which Wyn restates with theological depth and clarity, is that God loves all and each of us with the utmost personal knowledge. God yearns for our freely chosen, ever-deepening communion. The One who was, is, and is to come, gifts us with life and accompanies us all the way to abundant and eternal life.

To know we are loved like this is such a blessed and wonderful gift. We are bound to want every child to know this so they can have this peace and confidence as life's adventures unfold. Tragically, as we know, many children are growing up without this blessed assurance. They do not see faith lived. They do not see parents and grandparents saying their prayers. They are not taken into sacred spaces to smell incense, light candles, sing 'Alleluia'. Their kinder or school may be

ambivalent about angels and shepherds and Magi and baby Jesus in a Christmas manger.

Then, too, we think of children growing up amidst wars raging in homes of domestic violence. We think about the impact of incessant media violence: wars raging out of television sets and media games portraying savagery, harsh voices and acts of brutality; so vivid, scarring young imaginations relentlessly.

God knows, our world leaders and all adults need to reorientate and see the world afresh through the eyes of children! Amidst so much that evokes fear and drains hope, we have worked ourselves into a space where we cannot say clearly, with wonder and delight to our children, 'Jesus loves me, this I know.'

This all points towards the moral and political implications of Wyn's *Spirituality for the Classroom*. If Wyn's book is taken seriously it is revolutionary! Recasting economic and social policy so we see the world through the eyes of children and protect their enchantment in childhood is one thing. Recreating the space in which we can sing Jesus loves me innocently as gift, is quite another.

Wyn reminds us of Jesus' words and our responsibility:

Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones: for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:10) This is the sober side of Jesus' beautiful, loving invitation: *Let the children come to me ...*

Through her *Spirituality for the Classroom*, with its lovely cover painting *Wondering*, by Alec Stevenson, looking to be down beside the seaside on the beautiful Bellarine, Wyn's loving influence is extended as a blessing to all God's children.

Philip Huggins is Bishop of the North and Western Regions of Melbourne Anglican Diocese.

Review of “Children and the Church: Jesus brings the child to a place in the middle”

by Vivienne Mountain (Christian Research Association, 2014).

What is the place of children in the church? How should the structures of our church programs and services be developed so as to most faithfully serve our children and families? What do children have to teach the broader church, and how might our understanding of God be shaped by ‘becoming like children’? These are all questions that I’ve asked and discussed with other people in the church, and in recent years it seems that they are being asked more frequently. ‘Godly play’ and ‘Messy Church’ programs are frequently encountered, with enthusiastic proponents. Vivienne Mountain’s book, then, is a timely contribution to a field of reflection about how our theology of children and the church is being incorporated into practice in Australia today.

Potential readers should be aware that this is not primarily an introduction to Child Theology, although it does include a historical overview and good bibliography for those who want to pursue these ideas further. Instead this book starts from the assumption that the reader is reasonably familiar with the Child Theology Movement, and focuses on the question of how the insights from the movement are being incorporated into practice in a variety of churches around Melbourne, based on a series of research interviews conducted by the author. Working around themes such as ‘Blessing the children’, ‘Change and become like a child’ and ‘Placing the child in the midst’, Mountain explores the impact and practical outworking of Child Theology in different church contexts, with both senior ministers or pastors and those working particularly with children being interviewed.

I was especially struck by reflecting on the significance of Jesus ‘blessing children but calling adults to repent’, with certain groups within the Child Theology Movement rejecting original sin and the need for (particularly young) children to repent. The difference in emphasis between adult and child here is challenging both theologically and in terms of church praxis. Mountain’s interest is primarily in reporting the influence of these ideas in churches rather than arguing for a particular



Justin Denholm

viewpoint, but her highlighting of theological assertions such as this is helpful for engaging with the influence of the Movement as a whole. Leaving aside the theological debate this raises for consideration of the practical impact, on one level, this insight could provide a helpful way to frame children’s ministries around blessing, too, rather than confrontation regarding sin and need for repentance. However, if adults and children are to be approached in a fundamentally different way, it seems to me to raise additional problems where ‘child’ and ‘adult’ again are regarded as separate and distinct, rather than part of a fully integrated church. Again, Mountain’s focus lies on surveying the impact of Child Theology rather than expounding it, but her treatment of these ideas as they arise forms a useful backdrop for those us approaching this topic as newcomers.

As a lay person developing an interest in Child Theology (and actively working to develop a children’s program in a local church!), this book introduced me to some challenging ideas. While I would have appreciated a more systematic consideration of how to incorporate its theological insights into church contexts, this book has raised interesting questions for me, and offered some good suggestions for pursuing this topic further. This book will be of primary interest to those already engaged with some elements of Child Theology or children’s ministry, but those open to new insights into our life together will also find ideas worth engaging with here.

Justin Denholm is a father of three and apprentice children’s ministry worker. He lives with his family and small flock of chickens in Brunswick West,

The Value of Sunday School



Rev Dr Philip Hughes

Dr Juhani Tuovinen (Tabor College, Adelaide) has put together a report on the value of Sunday School. The report is based on some items in the National Church Life Survey of 2001. While the data is now 14 years old, it does indicate some trends which are worthy of reflection.

Historical notes

The Sunday School movement was started by Robert Raikes in Gloucester, England. Raikes was concerned that the prisons were full because children received no Christian or moral education. Most children were working the rest of the week, and so he started a school on Sundays to provide some basic education for them.

Dr Tuovinen reviews the literature on the history of Sunday Schools in Australia. The first Sunday Schools began in Australia in 1810. At the beginning, they also offered basic education in literacy and numeracy, as well as morality and religion. As Protestant day schools were handed over to the government in the 1870s, Protestant churches focused their Sunday School programs increasingly on religious education. In the 1960s and 1970s, Sunday Schools went into decline. Rather than catering for large numbers of children from the local neighbourhood, they were attended mostly by children whose families were involved in the church.

Tuovinen quotes the American study by W. Haystead (1995) in which Haystead argues that Sunday School is still the best agency of the church for ‘effective education and outreach’. Haystead sees four important goals of Sunday Schools as:

- winning people to Christ;
- teaching God’s Word;
- building supportive relationships; and

- encouraging Christian service (Haystead 1995, quoted by Tuovinen (p.15)).

However, Tuovinen quotes a more recent Australian study by D. Goodwin (2012) as arguing that there needs to be more attention to the way children are embraced by adult members of the church and given involvement in church services, as well as being involved in activities where they can find Christian friends.

What activities lead to faith

Tuovinen's analysis is based on National Church Life Survey data from 2001 about what activities were most significant in helping people come to faith. Within the analysis detailed in the report is an important story about the comparative influence of church services and Sunday Schools in the development of faith.

Respondents to the NCLS 2001 were asked to note two activities (from a list which did not include family) that had contributed to their coming to faith. Four types of activities were shown to be most important.

- 28% of respondents indicated church services or Mass contributed to coming to faith;
- 15% Sunday school / Sabbath school or kids club;
- 12% a church youth group; and
- 9% religious education or Scripture in school (Tuovinen p.23).

He also notes that 7 per cent of all attenders said that among the two most significant people in showing what faith was were Sunday school / Sabbath school teachers.

To some extent, these reflect what activities respondents were involved in when they were growing up. Just 17 per cent of the Catholics attended a Sunday School, for example, compared with around 70 per cent of Protestants and 57 per cent of Pentecostals (p.47). In comparison, he noted that 27 per cent of Catholics attended a church youth group, compared with around 50 per cent of Protestants and 44 per cent of Pentecostals. Tuovinen found that girls more than boys indicated that Sunday Schools were significant in their coming to faith, while youth groups had equal impact on girls and boys.

Differences by age or cohort and its significance

There are very significant differences when one examines the age of the person and their indication as to whether the major influences were church services, Sunday school, youth group or religious education in school.

Among those under 50 years of age, just 20 per cent indicated Sunday School was significant in coming to faith, compared with 40 per cent of those aged 80 and older. In comparison, for those aged under 30, more than 30 per cent indicated that youth group had been significant, compared with less than 15 per cent of those aged 60 and older.

In other words, in recent years, Sunday school has decreased considerably in importance for people coming to faith while youth groups have increased markedly. Tuovinen also found that youth groups were identified by respondents as having a greater impact than Sunday Schools on their continued involvement in Christian community. Tuovinen responds to this by suggesting that 'as a matter of urgency churches need to face this problem to overcome the decline [in the influence of Sunday Schools]' (p.104).

However, one might put this finding in another context. In past generations, particularly prior to the 1970s, the process of coming to faith was one of socialisation of the child into the community of faith. It was generally expected that children would take up the identity and traditions of their parents, and these patterns were reinforced in childhood by Sunday School.

Since the 1970s, in an age in which individual choice has been given much more attention, young people have seen faith as something they should choose for themselves. They have assumed that it was a decision of lifestyle that they would make for themselves in their teenage years (Hughes 2007, chapter 3). In general terms, then, the change in importance for faith development from Sunday School to youth group reflects the change in culture from modern to postmodern. Children's ministry still has a role to play, but the decisions about faith made by the teenager have become increasingly important, and the context of these in the communities of faith of their peers must be recognised. In our day and age, churches cannot rely on what happens in Sunday schools, or in other forms of ministry among children, for commitment to or understanding of faith. For young people today, the more critical decisions and development of understanding and patterns of church involvement mostly occur in the teenage years.

Rev Dr Philip Hughes has been a senior research officer with the Christian Research Association since its foundation in 1985.

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2015

Faith and Work
Award Recipient
Barney Zwartz



Faith and Work Award Dinner

Saturday 23 May

6:30 for 7:00pm

Ridley Melbourne, Parkville

3 course meal and drinks

\$75

2015 Award Recipient and After Dinner Speaker **Barney Zwartz**, former Religion Editor for *The Age*, now with *The Melbourne Anglican* and Centre for Public Christianity. Barney is a truthful, fearless, and prophetic voice in the media. He is also an occasional music critic and reviewer, and Manchester United supporter.

Our pre-dinner speaker, on **Serious Play: Work as Sub-Creation with God** is, **Prof. Sean McDonough**, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. Sean previously taught at Pacific Theological Seminary, Fiji, and is biblical editor for the Theology of Work Project www.theologyofwork.org. He is author of *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (Oxford, 2010) and co-editor *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (Continuum, 2008) and the forthcoming *Creation and New Creation*.



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