

The Numbers

There are 56 children who come to Cityside fairly regularly.

23 primary school aged children and 19 2to5 year olds are regularly involved in our Children's Space programme, and we usually expect to have about 35 of them join us on a Sunday. There are another 8 little ones turning 2 over the next few months. We have 6 adults rostered on a week, and there are often another 5 or so extra parents who stay alongside their kids.

What We've Been Doing and Why We Do It

The Children's Space programme aims to reflect the ethos and practices that happen in the main church space, to add to the spiritual development that happens within the family setting, and to build relationships between people of all ages in our Cityside community.

Reflecting the ethos and practices that happen in the main church space

- We want our children to think. We try and ask lots of open questions, and to give the children opportunities to ask questions too. We explore answers together, and ask for different viewpoints. We aim to encourage thought and questioning, including those questions that are unanswerable.
- We have introduced a range of prayer practices, including meditative prayer, repetitive 'bead' prayers, prayer journals, and interactive meditations using objects to hold. We use liturgies written especially for our Cityside children, which have become familiar to them through repetition. And of course what Cityside prayer gear box would be complete without at least one candle...
- We have continued to focus on Communion each month, to explain why we do what we do during Communion, and to give the children ideas of what they can do and think about during the silent times when they come back into the main church space.
- We often plan for a creative activity, for kids to respond to a story, or to think about a story and its message further - as they do the activity together and talk informally, and later when they look at what they've made at home.
- We base some sessions around events in the church calendar, such as Easter and Pentecost, so that our children can link into those aspects as they surface in the main church space.
- We have been exploring a range of metaphors to describe aspects of God. In Term 2 we looked at God as mother and father, rock, breath of life, shepherd, flame, eagle, and water.
- We have been looking at the lives of some saints - this term has been Francis of Assisi.

Adding to the spiritual development that happens within the family setting

Most of what children learn about God, they learn at home. Each term we do something small to support this. Over the past year, we have sent home advent candles with liturgies, a picture book about communion at Cityside, prayer journals with ideas for drawing or writing in them, and prayer beads with a liturgy. We have set up The Magnificent Memory Challenge - a series of prayers and Bible verses for kids to learn if they want to work towards awards.

Building relationships between people of all ages in our Cityside community

We want our children to grow enduring relationships with all of Cityside, so that when they graduate from what we do 'out the back', they feel connected and part of us, especially when they get to the age when the choices about what they do on Sunday mornings are not just made by their parents.

- I believe that relationship and connection with others is a powerful way of learning about relationship with God. We have some wonderful people who have committed to being on the roster 2 or 3 times a term so that they can get to know a particular group of children better. There are also some more social outings on the horizon being planned by this team. Thank you to Jeannie, Michelle, Saul, Clair, Nicki and Chris for undertaking this role this year. It would be great to have more people willing to lead a group once a month, as it really helps with the stability and tone of the groups to have people who know the kids well leading them. We presently have two sessions of every month covered by the regular volunteers. I'd love to have all four weeks covered next year. It's not a role that requires extra time beforehand on your part, just a willingness to come out once a month during term times to read a story with your small group, lead a discussion, and do a creating activity that has all been prepared for you.
- Our Children's Space is not a 'dump and run' facility - most of the parents of the kids who attend are on the roster to make it happen. This helps parents to get to know other parents and other kids, as well as finding out first hand about what their child does when they're in Children's Space. Thank you to all of you who give of your time so generously. Thank you to all of you who stay with your kids when they need it even when you are not rostered on to help. I believe that our kids will remember how they felt at church a lot longer than they remember any of the stories and prayers we do. Your support of your kids helps them to feel comfortable and at home at church.
- We love the fabulous people who volunteer to help with Children's Space even though they don't have kids of their own involved. Thank you to each of you - I particularly appreciate the vitality and enthusiasm you bring to

the sessions you help with. It makes a huge difference to have people whose energy has not been diminished by getting small persons to church on time or by keeping them quiet and still during the first part. You show our kids that they are important enough for you to choose to be with them when you don't have to, and that you value them as part of our church community. And to those of you who are wondering what you're missing out on outback, there are many roles to choose from, most of which require no preparation and lots of fun. Really! Volunteer today! Even just once a term would be great.

- Brenda is hatching plans to match up some of the older children with a Cityside friend - an adult who notices when their assigned child is at church and who could say a wee hello to them during morning tea.
- Thank you to Brenda and other people leading service slots who think about how children could take part in what you have planned, and who take a moment to alert the children to those opportunities.

Thanks to...

We create a unique programme to suit our needs and ways of doing things at Cityside. I am hugely grateful to the Planning Team who have such creative ideas and who work so hard to bring these ideas into being: thank you to Helen, Sandra, Mark, Isa, Sarah O, and to Kimberley, Michelle, Sarah J, Gabrielle and Brenda. These people are the ones who make it easy for the rest of the Children's Space helpers, because they do all the planning and preparation for each session. Appreciation to Helen, Sandra and Mark for anchoring so many of the mat times in Terms 2 and 3.

Thank you to all the people who do the essential jobs to keep things running smoothly - in particular, to Hyunsil for being an exceptional play-dough chef and play-dough toy cleanser, to Adee, Clair and Michelle for keeping the colouring boards sorted, to Isa and Sarah E for tissue and sticker supplies, to Sarah E for roster distribution, and to Jeannie for photocopying and all sorts of other help, including sorting through scruffy piles of receipts. And thank you to all the other people who I haven't named or who just do things they notice need doing.

A special thank you to Mark Prins, who works tirelessly for Children's Space, often late on Saturday nights and long after church has finished on Sundays. Thank you for all the times you fill in when the rostered helpers haven't made it to church, and especially for doing nearly every week in Term 2, and for all the jobs that I take on that you end up doing so graciously.

Thank you to Chris, who made the parent room upstairs happen - and with buzz-free sound. Having somewhere for little ones to play and make noises has really helped the 2to5s focus during their mat time.

Thanks to the Bayldons for providing a heat solution for those freezing mornings.

Thank you to Brenda, and to the Cityside Council, for your support of Children's Space and me.

Thank you to everyone who emails wee glimpses of God-moments in their children's life to me - they encourage me when I wonder if it's worth all the work.

Thank you to the community of Cityside, to those of you who have produced such lovely children for us to populate our Children's Space with, and to all of you who through your actions show the children of Cityside that God loves them.