

Children's Space - report to Cityside AGM 2007

Numbers

There are currently 53 children under ten who attend Sunday services semi-regularly.

Under 2s: 15

2to5s: 22

Middle Cs (Years 1 and 2, 5-7 year olds): 10

Middle C#s (Years 3 and 4, 7-10 year olds): 6

We usually have about 15 2to5s and 10 Middle C/C#s, as well as about 10 adults and some under twos with us when we go out the back during the morning service, that is, about 35-40 people.

Philosophy

"A community is where they know your name and where they miss you when you are not there"
R. Jonathan Sacks

The children of Cityside need to build lasting links with our church as a whole if they are to feel part of our church community. This is vital for when they grow old enough to leave the children's programme, and are no longer part of our church just because their parents happen to come here.

At Children's Space, we one of our aims is to nurture the links between the children of Cityside and our church community. We do this by...

1. Planning activities which reflect the ethos and practices that happen in the main church space.

- We have introduced meditative prayer practices this year. The 2to5s have started doing an interactive mediation slot adapted from the Montessori 'Godly Play'. This term it has been using Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd. The Middle Cs/C#s have been doing a range of silent meditations including focusing on breathing, sounds, tastes and imagining Jesus in an empty chair.
- The children are given opportunities to hold or place a symbol of their prayers during prayer times. The 2to5s have used flowers or stones in sand trays, a duplo block on a tower, and adding a sheep to a flock around the shepherd. The Middle Cs/C#s light candles, have used play dough and pipe-cleaners during confessional prayers, and have been given a range of objects to hold to help them focus on a prayer topic, such as a world globe, people, animals, stones, sandpaper and glass beads.
- The children are given the option to pray out loud or in their heads. They can take part in front of the whole group, or to use the equipment later during the activity time if they want to pray privately or to do another one.
- We use liturgies written especially for our Cityside children, that have become familiar to them through repetition.
- We give children opportunities to think. We are developing a 'wondering' time after a Bible passage or meditation. We ask open questions. We also give the children opportunities to ask questions that are not necessarily answered, or answerable.
- We use a range of metaphors to describe God, and try to be gender neutral or interchangeable with he/she when referring to God.
- Each Communion Sunday, the children are refocused on what we do during Communion and why we do it. We talk about what they can do and think about during the silent times, before they rejoin the main service for communion.
- We are starting to generate more of our own resources that suit our approach at Cityside.

2. Looking for ways that the Children's Space programme can add to the spiritual development that happens within the family setting.

- Sometimes the children make things designed to be used at home, such as prayer boxes of objects to hold, or bags of prayer stones.
- The creative/make and do activities aim to serve as a reminder of the story and what was talked about.
- We want to work on this aspect, to include things like advent candles and Lenten ideas.

3. Including parents - our time together is not a 'drop off creche'; the 2to5s area more resembles the play-centre approach. Parents are rostered on as helpers, and many stay out with their children even when not rostered (usually because their children are not comfortable to be left yet). This is a

disadvantage if parents are wanting time-out from their children, but a positive thing in that parents can be part of what their children are experiencing and learning during the session, and can talk about it and build on it later. We are really grateful to those extra parents for what they do to help out, because it means we don't have to roster as many people on formally.

Needs

"You don't have to know every child, but every child needs to be known by someone." Hilary Hague

Take the time to talk to some of the children regularly, and get to know them.

It would be good if the roster reflected the whole range of Citysiders, rather than 97% of it being parents of Children Spacees.

We have been very fortunate to have Jeannie, who has gone out with the Middle C# group every second week during term time. Having a regular leader makes an enormous difference for the children. Next year, it would be great to have more people who would be willing to commit to leading a group regularly. Even if it was only once a month, it would make a difference to that group. Everything is planned and organised for you.

Next year 9 children turn five, which will mean we need to form a third primary school aged group.

We need a set of Bibles for the Middle C# group, as they grow beyond the Bible story books we currently have for them. Fundraising? Donations?

We plan to put storage cupboards into the 2to5s area so that the whole hall space can be used for non-Children Space purposes, and also so that we can put some gear away safely during times like morning tea. Any offers to help fund them or build them?

We currently have 15 children who are under 2 years old, with more babies on the way. These children are currently not catered for, once they get too restless to stay in the service. We can accommodate some of them in with the 2to5s, and always need to be able to include wee ones if their parent needs to be with an older sibling or on the helper roster. It's not fair to expect the littlies to sit through the whole mat time, but it gets very difficult to do the prayer and meditation times if there are too many wandering children playing with toys. It would be good if there could be another area for some of the Under 2s who could either be in a creche situation (if we could bear another roster aagh!) or in an area where their supervising parent could still hear the service.

Some sort of heating would be welcome on cold, frosty days...there isn't anything apart from us breathing!

Thank you to...

Thank you to the seven people who have been helping with the planning and preparation this year, and who have been leading the mat times for the 2to5s. They are Helen, Isa, Sarah J, Sarah O, Kimberley, Sandra and Michelle. It is because of them that the Children's Space programme happens each week, because it has become far too huge to be run by one person. It is because of them that we are doing so many things that make our programme uniquely Cityside.

Thank you to Jeannie, who not only anchors the Middle C# group and the prayer time for both the Middle C groups, but who helped with getting the roster out and rings and reminds helpers each week.

Thank you to Andrew, who wrote some meditations for the older children to use.

Thank you to Michelle, who has taken on the job of the colouring clipboards.

Thank you to Lois and to Hyunsil for all the times you have sorted and sharpened pencils, and to Hyunsil and Gabrielle for play-dough services.

Thank you to Brenda, who has written liturgies and paraphrased Bible passages for us, who spends a lot of time and effort designing parts of the services that the children can link into, and for supporting what we're doing out in Children's Space in a wide variety of ways.

Thank you to all the parents and grandparents of Children Spacees who help out, whether they are on the roster or not, who dance and sing at mat times, who scrape play dough off the floor and glitter off the tables, and who show all the children who are out there that Cityside cares about them.