Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

(Matthew 19:13-15)

Children are a vital part of our church communities. Far from being the Church of tomorrow they are a key part of the Church of today. It is important that they are involved in the response that parishes make to this second phase of Faith Hope Love and that their voices are heard and listened to. You may find yourself surprised by the insights and wisdom children bring. Be prepared to be challenged and for what they say to change the thinking and practice in your church.

This resource is offered to facilitate children’s participation in the second phase of Bishop Christopher’s call to Mission. It is a tool for those who work with children e.g. Sunday School Teachers, Junior Church Leaders and clergy.

Each session
• begins with a biblical passage to help engage the children and focus their thinking. The passages are from the stories of the early church and offer links to our churches today.
• Offers ways to help and encourage children to open and explore the passage

The final section of this resource offers some additional activities and suggestions of ways the children might feed back their thinking to the wider church.

It is particularly suitable for those between the ages of 8 and 10, but could be used with other age groups if adapted.
Why this story?

This story was chosen to illustrate faith as it gives a wonderful example of the faith the Disciples had in Jesus’ promise that he would send them a helper when he left them. It also shows the fruits of that faith, the birth of the church. It provides a great springboard for considering what the church today might have faith in and how that might be expressed.

Faith

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

(Acts 2:1-4)

Questions to explore…

Start by opening up the story for the children. Put it into context

- Explain that this happened after Jesus had died, risen and ascended to the Father.
- Talk about what was happening to the Disciples at the time - that they were waiting, in faith for the helper Jesus had promised them would come.
- Explore the Disciples feelings during the different events in the story.
- How might the disciples have felt at the end of the story? How had their waiting, in faith, changed their lives?
- Have the children ever had to wait for something they really wanted? Ask them what it was like. Do they think that faith made it easier for the Disciples to wait? Why do they think this might be? Can they give any reasons?
- Consider how the Disciples were changed by what happened to them.
- How might other people have known that the Disciples had changed?

Move the discussion on to the church today. You could do so by using the “wondering” questions suggested below

- I wonder what you have faith in?
- I wonder what you think faith is?
- I wonder what our church has faith in?
- I wonder how our church shows people what it has faith in?
Hope

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”
2 Corinthians 13:14

Questions to explore...
Start by opening up the story for the children. Put it into context

- Explain that Paul was a man who did extraordinary things, that he went to lots of far away places to tell the people about Jesus and to start churches. When he had to go away he wrote to the churches to encourage them and tell them what he hoped for them.
- Explain that we often read Paul’s letters in church today. One of the most famous parts Paul’s letter is called the Grace. Paul tells the church in Corinth what he hopes for them. We use these words in the prayer we call the grace.
- Some children will have heard the Grace before. You could say the words together.
- Explore together how the churches might have felt when Paul went away, and how they might have felt when they got a letter from him.
- Talk about how Paul cared for the churches he had started and didn’t forget them when he went away. Talk about the good things that Paul hoped for the churches he started.

Move the discussion onto the church today and more particularly your church. What might Paul have hoped for the church today, and especially for your church. What do the children hope for the church today, and for your church particularly.

You could explore this by using the wondering questions below

- I wonder what you hope for?
- I wonder what you think hope is?
- I wonder what you think our church hopes for?
- I wonder how you think our church can show people what it hopes for?

Why this story?
This passage was chosen because it is one of the great expressions of the hope Paul has for the churches he founded. If your church uses a different version of the Grace in its services then do use that version.
Love

“All who believed were together and had all things in common: they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved “

Acts 2: 44-47

Questions to explore...
Start by opening up the story for the children. Put it into context

- Explain that when the church was very new the early Christians had to decide how they would live and how they would follow what Jesus had taught them. One of the ways they decided to do this was to make sure that everyone had what they needed, even if some had to give up their possessions to help others who didn’t have enough. They did this because they wanted to do what Jesus had told them to - to love each other.
- Explore how rich people in the early church might have felt about having to give up their possessions and how those who did not have what they needed might have felt about receiving help from others

Move the discussion on to your church. How does your church help those in need? How does it show love?

You could explore this by using the wondering questions below
- I wonder what you love?
- I wonder what you think love is?
- I wonder what you think our church loves?
- I wonder how you think our church can show people its love?

Why this story?
This passage was chosen because it shows a very practical way in which the early church demonstrated love and a radically different way of living.
Further activity ideas

There are a whole range of other ways you can help open up these stories for your children.

- You might like to have children act out the stories. Re-creating the Pentecost story could be quite dramatic.
- You could read through the stories, stopping at various points to ask the children what they think might have been going on, how they think key characters or involved groups might have been feeling (freeze framing). You could even ask one of the children to be Paul or one of the members of the early church and have the other children interview them (hot seating).
- If you really wanted to let the children’s imagination have free reign you could provide a range of craft materials and invite the children to make pictures, collages, model or anything else that helped them show their ideas about faith, hope, and love.

There are a range of activities on the Mothers Union website and in their leaflet “Hand in Hand” which focus on developing faith in the home. It’s well worth a look to see if any of them might be appropriate for your group. ([http://www.themothersunion.org/faith_in_the_family.aspx](http://www.themothersunion.org/faith_in_the_family.aspx))

If you wanted to work with your children on a personal response to Bishop Christopher’s call to Mission you could use some of the great biblical stories that illustrate a personal response to the themes of faith, hope, and love (for example the story of Ruth as an example of faith, the Prodigal Son as an example of love and Moses being left in the Bullrushes for hope). Many of the suggested activities and “way’s in” can be adapted to work with other stories.

Feedback

There are many creative ways in which the children can feed back to the church what they thought about and discussed. If they have their own ideas these should be encouraged. It’s their voice that should be heard. Explore with them how they would like that to happen.

Some may want to talk about what their ideas. It may be that they present it to the whole church, or if the church is looking at this issue the children may want to join with groups of adults in their discussions.

Some may want to draw or write to express their ideas. They could perhaps write a letter to the church, produce a collage, altar covering or picture board. You might want to consider producing a prayer board where the children could write or draw their prayers for the church.

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