Where have our children gone?

A toolkit for churches with few or no children

Revd Ruth Pyke, Diocesan Children’s Work Adviser
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Introduction

All the latest research tells us that we are living in a changing culture - and the way in which childhood is experienced is vastly different from previous generations. There are far more opportunities for leisure, sport and travel on Sundays and church attendance competes with all of these. Families are just as likely to be “blended” families, with one or more partners being in a second or subsequent relationship as they are to be nuclear families. Increasingly generations do not live in the same area and grandparents may well live many miles from their grandchildren. Friendships are maintained via social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter rather than face to face contact. The internet is available on smart phones and tablets and seems to have permeated every part of our lives.

The publication of From Anecdote to Evidence focuses attention on children and young people. “Growth is found where there is a high ratio of children to adults. Churches which offer programmes for children and teenagers are more likely to grow.”

All this is set against the truth that many churches have nobody in their congregations under 40 most weeks of the year. More parishes find that Sunday School meeting alongside the main worship service no longer works and clergy and lay leaders lament the decline in attendance by children and young people Sunday by Sunday.

It is worth remembering that the original Sunday Schools were not for the children of attending worshippers and nor did they run alongside parish worship. Robert Raikes’ original Sunday Schools were a chance to give poor children an education, instructing them in reading and using the Bible as their main reader.

There is a variance between rural and urban, between affluence and under-privileged, but Anecdote to Evidence has found no single recipe for growth but rather that active engagement with children and teenagers is a key ingredient.

Today our aim in St Albans Diocese is to enable our children to “go deeper into God, to make new disciples and to transform our communities.” So what tools are available to the church which is ready to reflect on the possibility of growth and of active engagement and ministry with, for and to children?

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1 The Good Childhood Inquiry: The Childrens’ Society
A Good Childhood: the report from the Inquiry by Richard Layard and Judy Dunn

2 From Anecdote to Evidence © 2014 The Church Commissioners for England
www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk

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Bible Studies for Parish Groups and PCCs

Longing for Children - a biblical reflection

These reflections and readings could be used for a home group, a PCC meeting or for a sermon. They are a resource for parishes to reflect on the promise of children in Biblical times and in our contemporary church.

- **God’s desire for children.** The line of God’s people was assured through the birth of children even when things went wrong. The first children Cain and Abel fought against each other. Noah’s children were part of the great promise of God. Sarah gave birth to Isaac after many years of childlessness – the struggle of infertility made her cruel and cynical and yet God blessed her with a son because of his promise to Abraham of faithful descendants. (Genesis 9.1, 7-19) (Genesis 18.1-15)

- **The desire of men and women to share in God’s work of creation.** From the beginning God created humanity to be fruitful and to share in his work of creation. Hannah prayed desperately for a son that she would offer to the Lord, Isaac prayed for his wife Rebecca that her infertility would end and that children would be born to them - and Esau and Jacob were born. (Genesis 25.19-21) (1 Samuel 1)

- **The image of children as a blessing continues in the Psalms** - the image of the fruitful vine, of children at the table. (Psalm 128)

- **Birth as an image for resurrection and new creation:** “You will weep and mourn but the world will rejoice. When a woman is in labour she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. (John 16.20, 21). Paul speaks of the present difficulties and persecutions of the early church as labour pains, as the church struggles to come to birth. Our own developing spiritual lives are groaning as we continue to be transformed. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8.22,23)
Now consider these points together:

- **Hope for the future gives meaning and purpose to society.** In the novel “The Children of Men” P D James explores a society which has become infertile. Social disorder, fear and tyranny result as humanity faces extinction. What do you imagine might happen in our society/our church if the last generation of children had been born? Hope is restored at the end.

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• **Disappointment and hurt of infertility.** Many still suffer from infertility. Hopes are raised through IVF and other treatments and yet there are still women and men who have longed for a child and not conceived. Some turn their attention to other ways of nurturing children, supporting friends and family as aunties and uncles and godparents. Does your church feel as though it is infertile? What solution would you hope for in your church? What would be the equivalent of IVF or adoption for your church?

• **What about your congregation?** Is there faith and trust that God’s promise and blessing is given through children? Does your church feel in need of the blessing of children? What would need to change if God blessed you with children? What would you long to hand on?

Which character do you identify with as an individual or as a church? Adam and Eve - watching children harm each other; Noah bringing children on board for safety but willing to trust God’s promise; Sarah cynical in the face of statistics and declining numbers at church; Hannah praying desperately for a son, wanting to offer him to the Lord if only she can conceive; Hannah’s husband Elkanah, who loved her and gave her double portions; Isaac who prayed for his wife that she might conceive. What can your church learn from these?

• **Jesus of course put a child in the middle of those who asked him about status and power.** We are urged to become like children, yet how can we do so unless we live alongside them, worship with them and ask them to lead us?

• **The image of the child assuring the continuation and growth of the family of God is one which we must hear and pray through today.** God surely longs to bless us anew with the gift of children.
Look at your Parish

A tool for self-assessment of provision for children and young families. This should be done by a group of people - the PCC or a group with special responsibility for a church growth project.

Where are your children?

1. Look carefully at your church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children in church most Sunday mornings. How many on average?</td>
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<td>What ages are the children who attend?</td>
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<td>Do you provide something for children each Sunday? If yes, what form does it take?</td>
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<td>Do you have a child focused worship/activity at least monthly?</td>
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<td>Do your congregation have grandchildren/great grandchildren?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do children’s concerns regularly feature in your intercessions?</td>
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<td>Do you have a child focus to your Mission Action Plan?</td>
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<td>Are issues around children regularly on the PCC Agenda?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have an up to date Child Protection Policy?</td>
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<td>Do you display a Childline poster?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have a Child Protection Co-ordinator?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have Children’s Co-ordinators accessed child protection training?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has any other children’s work training been accessed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you consulted the Diocesan Children’s Work Adviser?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you a safe place for under 5’s and their parents?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there any provision for older children during worship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there provision for children attending Baptisms / Weddings / Funerals?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are families made welcome and shown where facilities are? E.g. baby changing / toilet / crèche.</td>
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<td>Are children encouraged to participate at all levels?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you encourage multi-generational events and activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you arrange outings, pilgrimages or visits for children and /or families?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you explored the Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you support and stay aware of charities which work with under-privileged children?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When did you last use Back to Church Sunday?</td>
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2. Look carefully at your community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there children living in your street? How many, what ages?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a school in your community? What sort and for what age group? Is it a Church School or not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have contact with the school? Who and how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a nursery school or playgroup? Do you have contact with them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a Children’s Centre? What contact do you have?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a medical centre? What does it provide for children?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have contact with the Health Visitor / Midwives?</td>
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<td>Is there a local recreation ground? What is it like?</td>
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<td>Are these facilities used by children?</td>
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<td>Are there any sports groups/playing fields?</td>
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<td>Do you know of any current issues affecting local children?</td>
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<td>Have you ever contacted the local council about facilities for children?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you support any local charities concerned with children?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many shops / restaurants (approx.) are in your community?</td>
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<td>What other leisure activities are in your community?</td>
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3. Using the information
Look at the two tick sheets, and ask:

Having looked carefully both at your church and your community where could you begin to make contact most easily with children and families?

What could you offer?

- What is missing in your church?
- Of the questions which you answered “No” which could be changed most easily?
- And which is most difficult?

- What attracts children most in your community?
- Where would you find different age groups of children?
- What about your community has surprised you?
- What could the church support in your community and how?
- How could your church relate to your community most easily?
- And what would be most difficult?

What do you think they are looking for?
Can you offer something that matches with what children and families are looking for?

Who could you talk to in your community that might help you reflect on this? (Maybe a Health Visitor, childminder, teacher, head teacher, Children’s Centre etc.)

What social opportunities might attract children and parents to meet your church community?

A picture from Ben, aged 6 of his local ford, sent in to us by the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Braughing.

Looking at your Local School

For many families the school that their child attends stands at the centre of their community life providing social occasions, friendships and support as well as education. This is especially true of primary schools, less so of middle and upper or secondary schools. If there is no school in your parish (don’t overlook preschools and playgroups) then find out where the school is that the children in your area attend. Speak to the local clergy person for the school and see whether your parish can
share in some pastoral contact.

If the local school is a church school there will be certain expectations of the links with the church but even in a maintained school relationships can be built and valuable connections developed.

- Is there a pre-existing contact (through members of staff who worship with you or are already known, or families who are known to you)? Speak with them and talk about the school and your willingness to make contact and be involved.

- Call the school and ask to make contact with the head teacher. Explain who you are and which church you are from in a casual but friendly manner.

- If you are invited in to meet the head, listen hard to what they have to say, encourage them to talk about their school, maybe asking if there is anything that you might be able to offer help with.

- You might like to take a magazine from your parish, a small box of biscuits or some such gift.

They may have specific ideas or they may ask you for ideas of ways in which you can help. Some clergy, ministers or retired teachers may be willing to take assembly, they may be willing to help deliver an RE lesson but these are not the only ways to build a relationship in a school. The following are ways in which many schools in St Albans Diocese are already engaged in working with their local schools.

- The role of Governor is increasingly demanding but it is a necessary and significant role. For church schools there is an expectation that a proportion of the governors will be nominated by the local church. When was governance last mentioned in your church as an opportunity for service to the local community?

- Not everyone is confident to lead an assembly or to deliver an RE lesson but you will have gifts that may be welcomed. Listening to readers, running a choir or recorder group, helping with cooking, art or other activities, being a “history resource” or offering a welcome at church for school visits. What skills might you be able to offer?

- Offer your church as a venue for school Christmas and Easter services. The staff and children will usually do the presentations but the church can offer a welcome and a final prayer.

- Experience the Festivals materials enable churches to welcome staff, children and families into the local church for an experiential presentation of the Christian festivals. Scripts are provided for volunteers along with pictures to illustrate the way
in which the different areas of the church may be set up. The materials support the National Curriculum targets in RE.  

- Open the Book is a resource developed for groups of volunteers from local churches to develop participative, dramatic bible story presentations suitable for Primary School assemblies. It is supported by The Bible Society and once a school/parish has signed up resources are available and groups enjoy planning and preparing the stories.

- Prayer Spaces in Schools offer an environment of prayer which encourages pupils to explore different ways of prayer and space to reflect on their own hopes, dreams, thanks and regrets. It is amazing to see how both pupils and staff interact as they ask some truly difficult questions. Effective for both Secondary and Primary age groups.

There are also local trusts which support work in schools (contact details available through the Diocesan Youth and Children’s Work Office).

**Prayers for use in Worship**

Prayer was at the heart of Hannah’s desire for a child and Isaac prayed that his wife Rebecca might bear a child. God surprises his people with new life in the shape of a child; Isaac was born when his mother Sarah was well past childbearing age. John the Baptist was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah when she “was barren and both were getting on in years”. (Luke 1.7). The following words from Jeremiah speak of a restoration of Israel after the exile.

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6 Prayer Spaces in Schools [http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com](http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com)
Keep your voice from weeping,
and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work,
says the LORD:
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future,
says the LORD:
your children shall come back to their own country.

*Jeremiah 31.17*

Heavenly Father you promised Jeremiah that the children of Israel would return from exile. We hear the words of the prophet, “There is hope for your future,” “Your children shall come back to their own country.” We ask for that same promise, that we too may know the joy of children in our church communities once again.

**We pray for the children of the world:**
Who live in places of danger and violence
Who live in places of ease and affluence
Who live in times of stress and family instability
Who live in poverty and hunger.

Lord give us hope for the future
That our children will return.

**We pray for the children of our nation:**
Who have not heard your Word
Who have not seen your glory
Who have not experienced your love.

Lord give us hope for the future
That our children will return.

**We pray for the children of our community:**
Who play in our playgrounds
Who learn in our schools
Who live as our neighbours

Lord give us hope for the future
That our children will return.
We pray for the children of our families:
Who hear the stories of our faith
Who depend on our love and commitment
Who are named before you now... in silence or aloud

Lord give us hope for the future
That our children will return.

Prayer of confession

Lord Jesus you placed a child among the disciples and said that, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

Forgive us for the times we have failed to welcome children;
When we have made your living word too difficult to understand;
When we have not listened to their voices calling to us;
When we have ignored their questions and curiosity;
When we have excluded them from our communities.

Forgive us our pride and lack of imagination and help us to rediscover the wonder and excitement of your love and share it willingly with those around us. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Prayer of thanksgiving

Creator God for those children so full of creativity and life; we thank you.
For those constant questions, Why and Who: we thank you.
For the boundless energy and ideas; we thank you.
For the excitement of new adventures and for laughter; we thank you.
For the willingness to forgive and for generous love: we thank you.
Heavenly Father we thank you for all the gifts which children bring to us, help us to welcome them as gifts and not as frustrations, that as children and adults we may follow your Way together. Through Jesus Christ our friend and brother; Amen.

A prayer for the schools of our parish

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens - wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

Isaiah 50.4

He established a decree in Jacob,  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors  
to teach to their children;  
that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children,  
so that they should set their hope in God,  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;

Psalm 78.5-7

The following prayer is the one used in the Diocese of St Albans at the Licensing or Induction of a priest to a new parish. It will have been used in your parish!

Creator God, we pray for our places of learning, for our nurseries, schools and colleges, that our young people may learn to see you in the beauty of the world around them and discover your creative spirit in their work and their play. May those who learn and those who teach discover their true value and potential and may we serve one another after Christ’s example. Amen

A prayer for the places where children play

Jesus said, “You are like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn’”.

Matthew 11.16 and 17
Lord Jesus, you saw children playing in the streets and market places, and understood their need to test boundaries, to learn their place in the world through play and to show their great gifts of creativity.

We pray for the play spaces in our community, that they may be places of safety, where no harm may come to body or mind; that they may be places of community where children and adults may find friendship; that they may be places of fun where laughter may be heard, so that our children may grow in a spirit of adventure and imagination; we ask this in the power of the creator, playful Spirit. Amen.

A prayer for the homes of our parish

Lord Jesus you were born into the family of Mary and Joseph; Be with all the families in our parish. Be close to all parents and children that they may know that you are with them, and together they may share your love and discover your truth. Amen.

Other ideas for prayer
• **Prayer walks:** Walk with a partner or two, praying quietly as you walk. Maybe discuss or repeat some short verses from Scripture, notice the people and places that you encounter. Notice especially the areas where children gather or play.  

• **Pray regularly in the Sunday intercessions** for the children that you do have - even if they are grandchildren or godchildren who live at a distance. Pray for them using their Christian names.

• **Pray for a children’s charity:** Many of them will have prayer diaries asking for specific prayers, adopt a World Vision or Tearfund child and pray regularly for them. Support our own Diocesan initiatives which seek to enhance children’s and family’s lives in other parts of the world. E.g. in 2015 the Bishop’s Harvest Appeal is working with Mission Direct.

• **Encourage and promote ways in which families can pray together; useful resources include:** Faith in Homes, GodVenture, Treasure Box People, Love Life Live Lent, Advent and Christmas resources. Family round the Table is an app-based guide for special weekly family celebrations mainly using the readings set for the Sunday.

http://www.faithinhomes.org.uk  
http://godventure.co.uk  
http://www.thetreasureboxpeople.co.uk  
http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715141823/love-life-live-lent  

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**Be Prepared for Children**

7 [http://waymakers.org/pray/prayerwalking/how-to](http://waymakers.org/pray/prayerwalking/how-to) will give a starting point though there are other publications which will help in this area.


There are often times when children appear in our churches - maybe a family visiting, maybe for a wedding, baptism or funeral, maybe just looking round when the church is open for visitors. How can we show that children are welcome?

**What does a visitor see?**

It is not only children visiting that should notice a welcome to children, but all other visitors.

- **Noticeboard (external)**
  Look at your external noticeboard and see what pictures are included on your posters. Do they represent all ages (*and for that matter all ethnicities*). Is there a welcome poster that shows children?

- **Noticeboards (internal)**
  Is your Safeguarding Policy and Poster with Safeguarding Information clearly displayed and up to date? Do you have information easily available for parents which includes directions to facilities for toilet or nappy changing, places where babies can be fed, where refreshments may be served and books and other resources to engage children in the worship? (*Some of this may be better in a leaflet clearly available*). Do you signpost other children’s activities within the area - both secular and church based? Do you have an up to date display about your chosen children’s charity, pictures from your local school, and pictures of children from the Bible?

- **Your Website**
  Most parents today will first look at the church website to familiarise themselves with a church before they ever go along. They will want to know that children are welcome and what facilities there are for them. Be honest! If there is no Sunday School say so but add that suitable Sunday bags or puzzle sheets are available. Say that children are very welcome and that there are facilities for toilets and changing areas - again if these are across the road say so. Include pictures of the story bags or story baskets on the website. Add links to sites which encourage families to grow in faith together (as above).

**On Sundays**
When a family with children arrive unexpectedly at a Sunday morning service, ask yourself what their experience will be. The welcome may have begun on your website, and will continue as soon as they enter your grounds. This is why the noticeboard is so important.

How are they greeted by the welcomers - are the children spoken to or acknowledged or is it just the adults. When speaking to the children is it with a smile and eye contact? Are they handed a special bag or book or shown where they can go during the sermon or prayers? Are they told they are welcome to come to the communion table for a blessing or asked if they regularly receive communion at another church?

What is available for children which will reflect the theme of the day? Puzzle sheets, story basket, etc.

What is available which reflects other stories from the Scriptures or the traditions of our faith?

Suggestions for resources

Scripture Union\(^{10}\) publish a selection of novels and Bible story books suitable for children from 6 months to 18 years. Buy a small selection of books which are easily available for children to take and read - maybe in plastic wallets with an age guide and a card in case they wish to borrow it for longer.

Buy a selection of children’s books to accompany the service of Holy Communion. Available from Church House Publishing, SPCK\(^{11}\) or usual online retailers.

\(^{10}\) [http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk)

\(^{11}\) [http://www.spckpublishing.co.uk](http://www.spckpublishing.co.uk) [http://www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)
Some churches have been very imaginative in making soft cloth books to accompany the service.

*Photo courtesy of St James the Apostle, Bushey.  
Book created by Vicky Adamson.*

Be selective about the bags/baskets you provide. Develop story bags which concentrate on one Bible story. E.g. a bag for Daniel could include:

**A Daniel story book**
- A fact book about lions (boys especially love non-fiction books)
- A soft toy lion and a soft toy Daniel (available commercially or enlist someone to knit some lions and a Bible figure as Daniel)
- Small puzzles which show the story or a lion
- Paper and some crayons.

Use a story basket for children to explore during the sermon/creed/intercessions. Include Bible story, fact book, puzzles sheets\(^{12}\) or simple craft activity with some relevant soft toys.

*Story basket to illustrate Jesus feeding the 5,000  
Photo courtesy of St John the Evangelist, Digswell.  
Made by Selina Evans.*

\(^{12}\) [http://www.sermons4kids.com](http://www.sermons4kids.com)  [http://www.sdc.me.uk/sundayliturgy](http://www.sdc.me.uk/sundayliturgy)  [http://www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com)  [http://www.takethis.org.uk/7.html](http://www.takethis.org.uk/7.html)
A liturgical basket may focus on Baptism, Holy Communion or the seasons of the year. e.g. Seasons of the Church Year: a small altar table with four different coloured cloths, four small dolls dressed as priests in different coloured vestments, a simple circle based on the Godly Play church year with key festivals marked, strands of wool in four different liturgical colours to make a friendship bracelet or pictures laminated and cut out to make jigsaw puzzles, books which link the Holy Communion with the Last Supper.

Following the model of many successful family restaurants, some churches are giving special packs to children as they arrive. A zipped plastic wallet can contain: a small pack of coloured pencils, a lead pencil, puzzle sheets, a simple story book related to the theme of the day or a Bible character, or a simple craft activity relating to the theme - which may need a safe pair of scissors, a Pritt stick, fabric or other craft material, or maybe a finger puppet or two. These need to be prepared weekly and kept up to date.

A children’s corner (not necessarily at the back of the church)

Too many children’s corners have jumbled boxes of poor quality secular toys. Provide toys which enhance the Christian faith - a play church, a Noah’s Ark, a Nativity Set, Bible story puzzles, Bible story and Christian fiction books, somewhere comfortable for babies to be fed. It may provide a focus area for children and parents to go to - maybe during part of the service. It may be the area where they go to do a simple craft activity, puzzle sheets etc. may be placed here for children. Relevant pictures can be downloaded from Google Images and laminated. Other artefacts may be put there - it may have a more visual element to enhance the Sunday theme or reading. It will need to be kept tidy and ordered, toys cleaned and checked on a regular basis and all attempts to include secular toys resisted!

http://www.godlyplay.uk
Occasional offices: Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

Weddings and Funerals

How are children welcomed into the church? Do clergy welcome children specifically and give permission to find children’s corner/wander around/look at windows. This sets parents at their ease which immediately transfers to their children.

The same principles apply as Sundays - though it is helpful to target any sheets, books, play figures simply for the specific service. Although the following are suitable for baskets, it may be that you adapt it to a simpler idea for each child to have a wallet.

Baptism Basket: A baby doll in christening robe, a small felt or knitted dove*, a small wooden bowl, the baptism cube, a baptism book, a simple homemade jigsaw of a baptism scene, a puzzle sheet, or things to look for sheet, a picture of Jesus’ baptism, the story book of Jesus’ baptism.

* why not engage some of your crafters into knitting or sewing a small dove for each child who is baptised at your church?

Wedding basket: A bride and groom doll and maybe a vicar doll, a story book of The Wedding at Cana, a colouring sheet of the Bible story and of a wedding, ideas as above themed to weddings.

Funerals: It is less likely that you will have children present, and even more unlikely that adults will be wanting a quiet corner to do activities with their child(ren). However a simple booklet about death and funerals with ideas for producing memory boxes, drawing pictures, or writing prayers or poems may be taken at the funeral visit and allow families to talk through issues with their children even if they are not present for the service. A library of books about bereavement for children might be gathered for loan at such times.

Maybe a simple book telling the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection is enough, or a homemade bookmark of Jesus’ resurrection and a short prayer. Handing something directly to the child as they enter reinforces the welcome to them and their family.
On Weekdays

In the most recent church statistics more children attended church midweek than on a Sunday.

The average weekly child attendance figures were 165,100 whereas only 124,000 attended on a Sunday.\(^{14}\) There are increasing expressions of church attendance outside the regular worshipping congregation. Messy Church is the best known and maybe resourced of these but across our own diocese there are examples of many other ways in which churches are reaching out to families.

BRF published resources include: Messy Church and Who let the Dads out\(^{15}\)

The challenge is to support midweek church as church, as a further congregation. Further challenges arise as it develops a regular community - how do we encourage and enable discipleship, how do we reflect the tradition of both words and sacrament, can we do Baptisms in Messy Church, how do we cater for teenagers and older people without children? Contact your Messy Church Regional Coordinator – you can find them on the Messy Church website.

Further ideas include film nights, toddler church, Saturday breakfast and many others.

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\(^{14}\) Statistics for Mission 2013 Published 2014 by Archbishops' Council, Research and Statistics, Central Secretariat Copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2014

\(^{15}\) [http://www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk](http://www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk)    [http://www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)
How Much are Children Integrated into the Worshipping Life of the Church?

When there are just one or two children who come, maybe irregularly, what can be done to include them and enable them to participate? They may need help or supervision and DBS guidelines must be followed\(^\text{16}\). But tasks which prepare for worship as well as tasks during worship can include children:

- The Welcome rota, handing out books and welcoming others
- On the Readers and Intercessors rota. Use a simpler version if necessary or choose ways of praying the intercessions that includes children
- In the choir/music group - many churches are successfully introducing junior choirs and music groups
- As Servers
- On the refreshment rota
- As PA technology assistants
- In the offertory procession, bringing up the collection, the bread for communion
- Lighting candles.

If your PCC are discussing something major consider what impact it would have on any children in your congregation. Ask them their thoughts and opinions.

- Do you see children as brother and sister Christians who may share in the Eucharist at the altar? Have you explored the Children and Communion resources available on the Diocesan website\(^\text{17}\)?

\(^{16}\) DBS guidelines. See [http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/safeguarding](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/safeguarding) and [http://www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)

\(^{17}\) [http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/children-and-communion](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/schools/children-and-communion)
Resources

Materials which assist with All Age opportunities both on Sunday and during the week.

ROOTS: Children and Young People
A quarterly magazine with access to web resources including a children’s sheet for each Sunday of the year. Lectionary based.
There is also an Adults and All Age magazine. Each are subscription magazines which then give access to further online resources.
http://www.rootsontheweb.com

Take This
A monthly subscription leaflet for older children and young people with topical quizzes, puzzles and articles. Designed by children for children.
http://www.takethis.org.uk

Footprints in Faith, and Step by Step
Covering all three lectionary years in one volume, both of these books are published by Kevin Mayhew and contain a photocopiable double sided activity sheet (which can be folded to produce an A5 leaflet) reinforcing the day’s Gospel message with picture and number puzzles, word games, quizzes and codes. And wherever possible the back page looks ahead to the following Sunday and encourages the children to do their own exploring in advance - a wonderful take-home sheet.

Footprints in Faith for 7-12 year olds. ISBN 9781840033007 £44.64
Step by Step for 3-6 year olds. ISBN 9781840033014 £44.64
http://www.kevinmayhew.com

Come and Join the Celebration
A resource book to help adults and children experience Holy Communion together. This needs more “unpacking” and some artefacts made for children to use. It has some good ideas to help children engage with the progression of the liturgy.
Church House Publishing ISBN 9780715149478 £12.95
http://www.chpublishing.co.uk
Books to read

**Rural children, rural church: Mission opportunities in the Countryside**
by Rona Orme. This short, accessible book offers practical resources and ideas to help churches build an effective children’s ministry in a rural setting (and is sympathetic to small churches in any situation). The ideas are drawn from churches and communities in rural areas where children's work is starting to grow.
Church House Publishing  ISBN 9780715141267  £5.99
http://www.chpublishing.co.uk

**Where two or three... Help and Advice for churches with few or no children**
by Margaret Withers
This book has been written to help churches find a way of having a ministry among the local children, even if they have no children or very few at present, and it is peppered with practical ideas and real-life examples.
Church House Publishing  ISBN 9780715140284  £4.99
http://www.chpublishing.co.uk

**Let the Children come to Communion**
by Stephen Lake
This useful handbook includes helpful insights into process and advice on the practicalities of including children in the Eucharistic community.
Published by SPCK in 2006, still available from various outlets including
Church House Bookshop  ISBN 9780281057955  £10.99
http://www.chbookshop.co.uk

**Godly Play UK**
This isn’t a book but it’s worth a read; the Godly Play UK website has a ‘further reading’ page - around St Nicholas’ Day each year there is a lecture on children’s spirituality or child theology, hosted by the trainers and trustees of Godly Play UK. The texts of previous lectures can be downloaded from the website (the website also contains lots of useful information and links to Godly Play resource suppliers, training events etc).
http://www.godlyplay.uk/further-reading

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