Advent & Christmas Newsletter

November 2022

Nativity Ideas | Toddler resources | Community Christmas plans

Church of Ireland
Board for Ministry with Children & Families

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ADVENT

Advent is a time of preparation, and for anyone involved in Children and Families Ministry, Advent is most definitely that! Preparing nativity plays, all age Christmas talks, prepping stars to paint, parties to plan, Gingerbread to bake and a million things to cover in glitter...often including the cat!

However, rarely is it a time that we slow down and actually prepare our hearts to welcome the one whom all this activity is meant to glorify.

As November rolls in and we clean up after the Light Party, we can almost feel our heart rates quicken as we turn our attention to Christmas.

This Advent we want to encourage you to take time to be still, to focus on Jesus, to prepare your own heart for His presence before you go out to prepare the hearts of others.

"True peace is not being in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work, it is to be in the midst of those things and be calm in your heart."

Author Unknown

GATHER NEAR TO US ONCE MORE...

THIS IS THE FIRST CHRISTMAS IN TWO YEARS WHERE WE CAN FULLY GATHER TOGETHER AGAIN.
SO HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO RECONNECT WITH CHURCH DURING THIS TIME?

Christmas Tree Festival

Christmas tree festivals are not a new thing but is there a new way of doing it? Usually local organisations and businesses are invited to decorate a tree.. The trees are then displayed in the church for people to view.
What if, instead of businesses, you had your festival as a giant family event. Inviting families to come along and decorate a tree. Making their own decorations from natural or recycled materials - sitting alongside other families, chatting, listening to Christmas worship songs, enjoying hot chocolate & gingerbread men - maybe even a simple meal of soup and rolls. Each family or group of families then decorates a tree - or even parents vs children.

Christmas Buddy Adoption Day

If your families have had their fill of the Elf on the Shelf and fancy a change, maybe this would be a good time to offer an alternative?
We've created a specific Christmas version of our Bible Reading Buddy pack which you can download for free **here.**
The idea of the adoption day is to invite families together so that the children can choose their very own Buddy to adopt. They get a certificate of adoption, a care guide to teach them how to look after their buddy and most importantly the Bible reading guide which includes passages taking them through the Biblical nativity narrative.
You could build a family service or messy church around this. On the **download page** you will also find a wonderful video by GoChatter called Wrapping Paper which is about a forgotten old teddy in a second hand shop being chosen despite his flaws, and relates to God choosing and loving us - it's beautiful but be warned, you will need a box of tissues!

Drive-in movie in a box!

Who doesn't love a good Christmas movie? Whatever your go to movie to get you in the Christmas mood why not put a spin on it and invite families together for a drive in movie in a box - yes literally!
Gather as many large boxes as you can from shops. Different shapes and sizes is great as long as they can fit a child sitting in them.
If they have patterns or logos on cover them with brown paper so that every box is plain.
Then as each family comes in each child is given a box and access to crayons - if you're feeling brave you can do paint...!
The children decorate their "cars" either with or without the input of their family. You could have a competition for most colourful / festive car. When everyone is ready, hand out the popcorn & turn on the movie.
Ideas to get you started: **The Star, Charlie brown's Christmas, The Christmas Candle**

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A little gift from us to you!

Interactive Nativity Trail

The second gift we bring you is an interactive video Nativity Trail.

This trail can be used in a variety of ways:

Placed around the church or outside, families can scan a QR code and follow the trail on their mobile phones in their own time.

As a family service using a large central screen connected to a laptop, with the images printed and hidden around the church families decide which character to find next.

In Children's clubs or your own family as a way of exploring the story together.

Click here for full instructions and to view the trail.

Nativity Photo Booth

If you get a chance to watch the Building Blocks video you will see both of these resources in action. And as our gift to you they are totally FREE!

The first offering we bring you is the nativity photo booth. The full set of Nativity characters - including the sheep! You can download and use this just for fun, as part of an instant Nativity, all age talk, Children's club, or just for your family.

Download it by clicking **here.** Enjoy!

Nativity Plays

To Baa or not to Baa...

We've missed the faithful nativity play the last few years...go on admit it, you have really!..?!
The wandering sheep, the slipping tinsel halos, the shepherds complaining about their "itchy robes" and the battle over who gets to be Mary - ah you have to love it!

Those of you who are uber prepared will already have your scripts and rehearsals underway no doubt. For the rest of us who are trying to get back into the swing of things and only just recovering from the Light Party last week - here's some helpful links to ease you into Nativity brain. Click on the Nativity title and it will open the relevant website.

The first Nativity is a fun take on the traditional, telling the story of Cheeky, Rascal and Scamp the sheep who love to party! With lots of upbeat songs to learn, produced by Out of the Ark, this year's production by them is called **Baarmy Bathlehem.** Cost approx £50 / €55

Another upbeat play the children will love is by Lean to Soar - It's called **Big Bad Bed of Bethlehem**. Focussing on the son of the innkeeper who experiences a transformation when he sees Jesus. Cost between £20 - £50 / €35 - €60

Third offering is by Edgy Productions and is called **A happy clappy Nativity** (not just for the charismatic among us! ;) Very song based with 8 songs in total. Costs approx £50 / €60

Angela Yardy has produced ten plays that are much more affordable but equally lovely - including "Grandpas Christmas" & "The simplest nativity play ever!" Cost only £10 / €12

The Bible Society has a lovely instant nativity for FREE! You can down load it **here.**
We also have a FREE rhyming nativity on our resources page **here.**

NIBBLY BITS!

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A bit like a plate of Mince pies & Sausage rolls, here's a random mix of ideas & resources you might enjoy!

Books:

The ever wonderful Bob Hartman has a Rhyming Christmas story book out which looks great fun and would be ideal for toddler groups or children's clubs and school assemblies. Can be purchased on **Eden** and Amazon.

If you fancy bringing a bit of GBBO to your Christmas events why not take a look at Bake through the Bible at Christmas for some floury inspiration. Available from **The Bookwell** or **Eden.**

The Bible Society have a lovely book called Amazing Days - only £3 so would make a nice gift for families as well as a resource for teaching. You can order from their website **here.**

Videos

To help your Christmas services be a little more visually interesting why not use some videos? I am a massive fan of **Go Chatter** who have a wide selection of Christmas videos, many of them free to download. There's one for **Christingle**, an evangelistic spoken word called **"Not just a baby"** and my all time favourite as mentioned above: **Wrapping Paper** They also have a range of **Christmas songs** with lyrics for use at carol concerts if you are lacking musicians.

Crafts

There are literally millions of Christmas Craft ideas but here is a small selection to get you inspired!

3D Angel - this is a super simple craft that looks really effective. You can find the template on our resources page **here**. They can be used to write prayers on the wings as part of a reflective prayer, or as simple decorations to do at an intergenerational church service.

Toilet roll or lolly stick Nativity - easy and cheap, words we love to hear these days! These two nativity crafts are so simple and cheap - find the instructions on **Red Ted Art.**

Bright Ideas

Meaningful Calendars

When I was growing up it was always a tough choice between a "Christian" advent calendar or a chocolate one, but now, thanks to the Meaningful Chocolate Company you don't have to choose anymore!
They have a beautiful chocolate advent calendar that comes with a book telling the story of the birth of Jesus. Behind each window is a line from the story and what's even better is all the chocolates are Fairtrade and palm oil free. What's not to love?! You can buy them here. £4.50 / €5

Christmas Comics

If you are looking for some gifts to give away to children in your church or groups, then CPO have these great Christmas Story comics. As well as telling the nativity story from the point of each character, there are colouring pages and puzzles to do.
It's a bright engaging gift to give away.
A pack of 50 costs £35 and you can purchase them **here.**

PLAYTIME CHRISTMAS

Care For The Family

Once again the resources team at Care For The Family have nailed it!
Along with all the wonderful Playtime resources for Toddler groups, they have produced a beautiful, easy to use and totally free Christmas session guide. There's everything you need - craft ideas, a script you can use to take the children and parents through the story, playdough mats to print and laminate, game ideas and loads more.
There is a whopping 6 sessions to pick up and use. These cover: Mary's story; Joseph's choice; The journey to Bethlehem; The Shepherds; The wise men and finally Jesus' birth.
It is really well structured and so easy to use. Even if you have never run a parent and toddler group this could be the catalyst to get you started.
Once you're up and running then the fun doesn't stop there, they have 13 other sessions based on stories from the Bible, a Father's day special and even a toddler light party, so even if you missed out this October you're all set for next year!
To download these wonderful resources simply head over to www.careforthefamily.org.uk and navigate to their playtime pages, or just click **here!**

BRAND NEW WEBSITE!

CHILDREN & FAMILIES MINISTRY. FULL OF RESOURCES, TRAINING, SUPPORT & MORE!

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www.cfm.ireland.anglican.org