

Do not despise the small things!



Church of Ireland ✝
Board for Ministry with
Children & Families



Small
Summer
Camps



School
Transitions



Messy
Church

cfm.ireland.anglican.org

Summer

WELCOME



Church of Ireland ✠
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Children & Families



Gearing up for summer can be a great joy - Summer Camps, beach missions. church picnics and never ending BBQ's! Or maybe you get to enjoy the tranquility of a more peaceful church as families all head here to the sunny south east coastline! Whatever end of the scale you are at this summer, please know that we are praying for you, and I hope that you will find something in this newsletter that will inspire and encourage you.

I wanted to focus this year on the smaller side of summer - the ways we can connect and encourage children and families regardless of how many you are connected with. Taking time to be more intentionally connected and supporting all ages during the long summer break.

For a long time the message given to churches thinking about doing summer activities is "go big or go home!" And don't get me wrong, there is something fabulously exciting about big events and large summer camps and festivals. But being in the midst of them can for many feel overwhelming, and sometimes we come to the end of a big event and wonder "how do I sustain this" - which is in reality impossible.

So this year we want to champion the power of petite, the might of the miniature and the delight of the diminutive (thank you thesaurus!!). And maybe you will discover big opportunities come from small beginnings.

As always in our newsletters, you can click on any text in bold and it will open the relevant link/resource on your device. Blessings,

Rachael

Small Camps Big Connections!



Over the 30-odd years (some of them very odd!) that I've been involved in children's ministry, I have had the joy and privilege of leading many summer holiday clubs. Some of them had numbers in the hundreds, live bands, mad games and noise levels that would rival a Six Nations final in the Aviva! Others have almost had more leaders than children!

Both extremes have their benefits and their challenges, but today I want to champion the impact of the smaller camps, which often get overlooked, but can have a massive impact.



“The aim of children’s ministry isn’t to grow children’s ministry – it’s to grow children!” (Dr. Lawson Murray, *Children’s Ministry Basics*).

It can be very tempting to treat the summer months as prime recruitment season for our children’s ministry. But when we do that, do we risk missing the heart of what our children actually need?

More than ever, children long for opportunities to connect, to build strong relationships, and to feel truly listened to. Recent research challenges many of our adult assumptions about the emerging generation and shows that their first choice isn’t screens:

“...despite their digital immersion, Generation Alpha values face-to-face interactions with friends above all other forms of communication. Their preference is direct communication with friends or would-be friends.” (*The Characteristics of Generation Alpha and Their Attitudes to Christianity, Mark Griffiths*)

In a large crowd, forming those kinds of connections can be very difficult. Of course, every child is different. In our own family, one child loved the buzz and energy of a big group; the other found it completely overwhelming and struggled to connect with anyone.

Children who find large-group settings hard often spend the whole time in a hypervigilant state. Their stress levels are high, and their capacity to absorb information or build meaningful relationships is very limited. By contrast, a smaller setting gives them a much better chance to relax, settle, and truly engage, rather than staying on high alert and feeling overwhelmed.

Even children who enjoy big groups still tend to appreciate smaller gatherings – as long as there’s space to connect, have fun, and be known. The difference is that for those who struggle in large groups, a smaller camp isn’t just a nice extra. It can be the key that unlocks real connection, growth, and a deeper experience of God’s love.



Small Camps Big Connections!



“Sadly, most youth (and children’s) ministries are long on fun and fluff and short on listening and thoughtful engagement.

The former produces a million paper boats; the latter produces a handful of seaworthy ships.

Launching a million paper boats is an amazing spectacle on a clear summer day, but only a ship can weather storms and cross oceans.” (Tim Clydesdale.)

The quote above I believe is a challenge we should try to consider before we do any ministry with children. It is not saying that we shouldn’t have fun, games and activities, they are of course great ways to help children express their energy and allow them freedom to move. The danger comes – especially in the holiday club context – when those are the things which dominate the programme and we stick a Bible reading at the end in hope that the children won’t find it too boring! It is a particular challenge (though not impossible) to create space to listen and engage effectively with children when the group is very large, less so with a small group.

Small clubs are not without their own challenges. Without that “big group energy,” if one child wobbles emotionally it can quickly affect others, and some activities simply don’t work with only a few children.

Even so, small groups offer great scope for creativity. Themes can be closely tailored to the children’s interests or to the specific skills of available volunteers.

Revd Canon Jennifer McWhirter and her husband, Revd Stephen, in the Diocese of Clogher, ran a ukulele summer camp last year. Jen reflected that it provided a valuable chance to really get to know the children and their parents, and for the parents and children to know the church. It has since helped them build stronger links with the local community, and they have even formed a ukulele band.

Other themes you might use include: gardening, sewing, gaming, or woodwork—the list could go on!



Where do you start? Well, those who know me will know exactly what I am about to say! 😊

**“Start where you are,
Use what you have,
Do what you can!”**

N.B. Whatever the size of your camp, please remember that all Safeguarding procedures must be followed.
<https://safeguarding ireland.anglican.org/>



SUMMER CURRICULUMS



You might detect a slight theme to the curriculums we're highlighting this time!

First up is **KINGDOM BUILDERS** from Scripture Union which was launched at this year's Hand in Hand conference and is written by Joanne Gilchrist.

Kingdom Builders comes with all the advice, ideas and resources you need even if you are starting from scratch. At the start of the book there's some hugely valuable guidance which is brilliant, even if you're a seasoned Summer Camp pro. They cover issues such as ongoing strategy, children from other faiths, children with additional needs, building and supporting your team and loads more.

I know we often like to jump straight to the session content but trust me, you don't want to miss out on this gold standard advice.

Moving on you will then find three full sessions with a further two sessions available online. Each session works on its own, so you can use them together as a whole week club; as one off days throughout the summer, or as Sunday Club with a difference. They are designed to make sense to children who have never set foot in church just as much as to the minister's children.

The sessions are designed to last approximately 3 hours, but you can edit and adapt the content to fit your timescale. Each session - as you may have guessed! - uses those lovely little bricks that can't be mentioned by name for copyright reasons...but we all know what they are! 🧱 so there's plenty of familiar fun to be had.

Guess what the second curriculum is called?! You got it... **Kingdom Builders!** But this time from **Roots** - to be fair, they did launch their version last year! Clearly the Spirit was moving in both creative marketing departments!

This curriculum also comes with all the ideas you need to run either a week of summer camp, or one off sessions spread over the holidays.

The main difference is that the Roots curriculum utilises both the "little plastic bricks" we know well, and the slightly larger bricks of Minecraft (I think I am safe mentioning it by name here!! 😊)

Similarly to SU's curriculum this is a flexible holiday club experience - the three sessions can be used over three consecutive days, across three weeks, or you could pick out a stand-alone day. Each session is designed to last 90-minute sessions, with plenty of room for adaptation, and it includes take-home activities called 'Level-Up Challenges'.

If you were really eager, you could even use both curriculums and run the back to back over the whole summer! Both are fantastic resources and well worth looking out for.



SESSION 1 IN THE BEGINNING

God is our Kingdom Builder

Bible story: God's perfect creation, Genesis 1:26-28

Game referenced: Minecraft™

SESSION 2 BUILDING A TEMPLE

God wants to be close to us. As Kingdom Builders, we can make God's world a better place.

Bible story: Solomon builds God's Temple, 1 Kings 6:11-13 and 1 Kings 8:10-13

Game referenced: Lego®

SESSION 3 HOW TO BUILD

We should build our lives on Jesus

Bible story: The Wise and Foolish Builders, Luke 6:46-49

Game referenced: Lego® and Roblox™ (Dress to impress, obby's)

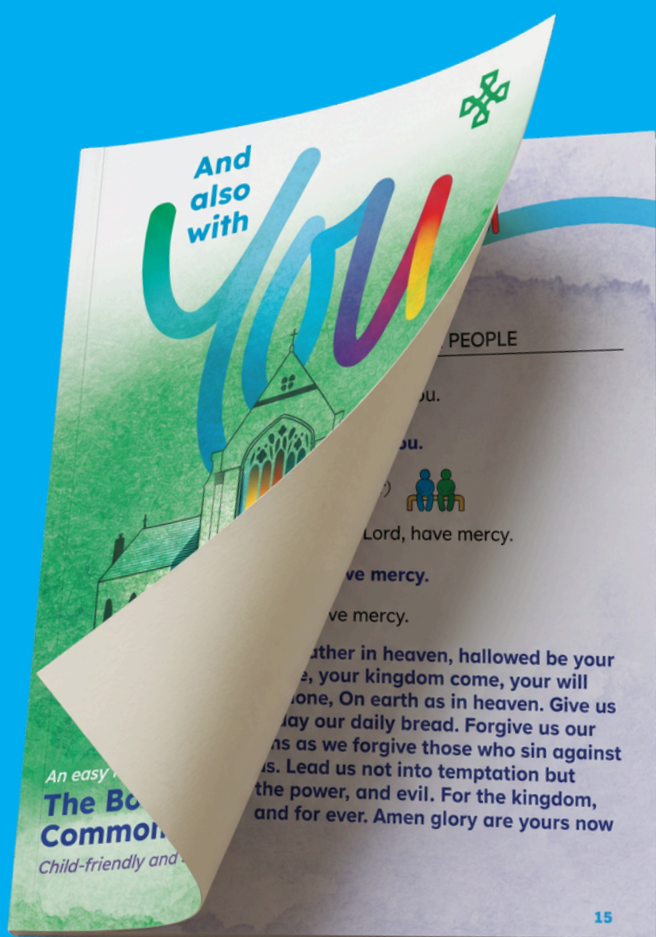
KINGDOM COMPLETED!

Closing session for families and the wider church community

Bible story: Living stones, 1 Peter 2:4-5 (and previous passages/sessions)



And Also With You...



We are excited to announce the launch of our new resource, "And Also With You," a **child-friendly and accessible version of Morning Prayer 2 and Holy Communion**.

Initially designed to help children engage in their own way with these services, we soon recognised its broader usefulness for individuals with dyslexia, non-native English speakers, and those with mobility challenges. We therefore ensured that it was child-friendly but not childish so that all ages feel comfortable using it.

The design is bright and colourful, featuring clear icons for easy navigation, indicating when to speak, stand, sit, or kneel.

The resource reduces the need to flip through multiple pages and includes engaging activities that encourage focus. In Holy Communion, prayer options are colour-coded for easy access, and a pocket in the front for a notepad allows users to write their thoughts or doodle, enhancing engagement.

Scan or click the QR Code to order your copies of 'And Also With You' from the Online Shop



Small Fish Big Pond



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For most parents, the thought of their little one starting school for the first time brings about a strange mix of excitement and fear.

This child, whom you have nurtured for the past four or five years - teaching them to walk, speak, eat, and use the toilet - is beginning a whole new chapter that will last for the next six to eight years. And Oh, how quickly those years pass!

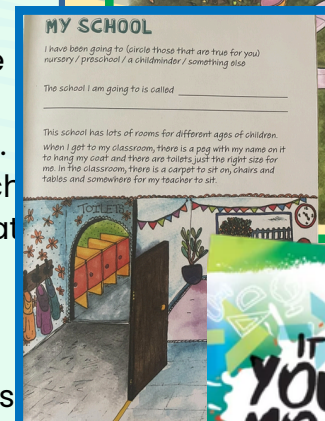
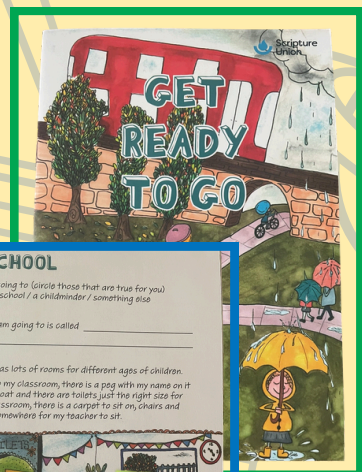
We are nearing the end of the school journey for one of our children while being halfway through primary school with another. Meanwhile, our three older children have quickly married and are about to make us grandparents! And yet it feels like just yesterday that we were choosing their new uniforms and packing their Bob the Builder lunchboxes for the first time.

As a church, our support for families during this transition can make a significant difference. So we have put together a few ideas to engage with both children and parents over the summer and help them through this journey.

First up is a really sweet resource produced by Scripture Union called [Get Ready To Go](#). This booklet is designed to help parents discuss what school will be like with their children. It encourages parents to give their child space to think and ask questions, which can help them feel more prepared for starting school in September.

If possible, why not consider hosting a coffee morning or open playdate at your church. In partnership with your local school, invite all parents of incoming Junior Infants to attend. This will provide an opportunity for parents to meet each other while their children play. At the event, you could distribute copies of 'Get Ready To Go' to each child, along with information about the children's activities offered at your church and your service times.. You can purchase packs of 10 [here](#) direct from [Scripture Union](#).

For older children who are transitioning to secondary school, there is another booklet just for them called ["It's your move"](#) which includes 'Top 40 tips for thriving at secondary school'. It covers friendships, peer pressure and bullying, giving them the understanding and reassurance they need to start strong.



Small Fish Big Pond

There is plenty of advice out there for parents of new primary school children, and it can be overwhelming to know where to start. Signposting parents to clear support can be very helpful.

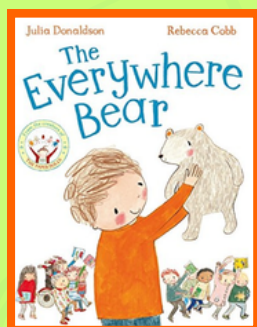
In the Republic, the National Parents Council have some great booklets which are free to download including [Supporting your child's transition from Pre-school to Primary School](#) and [Who's who in your child's primary school?](#)

The library also have free bags of books for each new primary school child which parents can collect at their local library.

In Northern Ireland, [Parentline.NI](#) have a lovely leaflet for parents giving very practical advice in an easy to read format that you can download and print free.

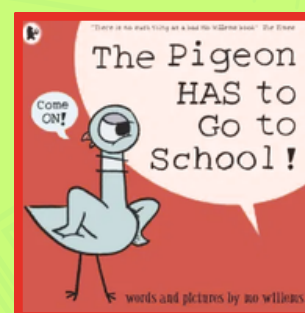


If you run a toddler group, you might consider holding a special story-time session or themed party for those moving onto primary school. Lynn has picked out some books that would be ideal for these sessions:



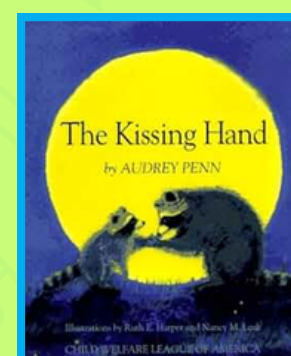
The Everywhere Bear. Written by the ever-wonderful Julia Donaldson, This story follows the adventures of the Everywhere Bear who is looked after by Class One - or not as the case may be!

The Pigeon HAS to go to school. Written by Mo Willems. This is a funny whacky story about a stressed out pigeon who worries about what he might have to do at school. A fun way to help children chat about their worries and to help bring perspective.



The Invisible String. Written by Patrice Karst is a beautifully gentle story, which helps children to explore the idea of not being with their adults and how this feels, whilst developing their sense of security when in the new school environment.

The Kissing Hand. Written by Audrey Penn is similar in its focus to the Invisible String, in that it helps children who might struggle with separation anxiety. It also provides a practical idea to help both parents and children cope with those first wobbly days of being apart.





Focus on the under 5's with Lynn.

How can we lean into this season, serve families well, and walk alongside them?

How do we build a healthy culture where ministry feels sustainable and families feel valued?

As we approach the summer months, ministry with families and young children begins to feel different. With longer days, better weather, and schools closed, the rhythm of family life shifts. Changes in routine mean families may not consistently come to our church buildings on Sunday mornings.

This isn't due to a lack of commitment or faith. God or church hasn't slipped down their priority list, and families aren't simply choosing holidays, day trips, weekends away, mobile homes, sunshine, or visiting relatives over church or faith. This winter has been long. Families have been cooped up by bad weather and short days. Now they are making important memories together – and they don't need reminding that they have missed church. What they do need is to know that they are loved, seen, and valued.

Summer ministry is at its best when it is flexible. We might feel as though we are losing families to the summer holidays, but instead we can build on the wonderful connections we've made over the previous ten months. Let's explore how we can support ministry with our families beyond the church building itself.

Faith in the everyday: Small habits, repeated daily, or weekly depending on the practice, have great impact. Share some simple but meaningful faith practices that parents can weave into the busyness of everyday life.

Below are some ideas and practices you can share with young families to help equip them and walk alongside them this summer.



Faith In The Car

Play the 'Silent Game' – suitable for short trips.

"I wonder who can stay silent the longest?! Gives everyone's brain a rest and reset!"

Play some quiet worship songs.

'I Spy God' – along the lines of 'I spy with my little eye' but spy for God. What can you see, or hear, that makes you think of God? (a smile from a stranger, a beautiful sunset or rainbow, birdsong). Involve all the senses. This might well become part of a family's faith at home rhythm as the talk and share all the ways you have spied God.

Gratitude Café (a twist on the idea above)

Grab yourself and your family, your favourite drink from a drive-thru at your favourite local café. Pull in somewhere and talk about the things you are thankful for.

Mini Daily Routine

- Share a favourite moment of the day
- Thank God for one thing.
- Pray for tomorrow's adventure

Equipping and supporting young families in summer?

Summer is a great opportunity to equip and support young families. Keep things simple and uncomplicated for parents. Instead of trying to do lots of activities, encourage families to do a few things well.

Sensory Bible Storytelling

Summer is an ideal time for families to make Bible stories feel hands-on, relaxed and memorable. Sensory storytelling works especially well outdoors: on the beach, by a river or lake, in a forest or in the countryside. You can use local or holiday surroundings on trips or days out.

Combining sensory experiences with parts of a Bible story helps children engage in playful, meaningful ways, while also creating moments of family connection. Share simple ideas that families can easily adapt for themselves.

Multi-sensory Bible stories can involve:

Sight – find objects that relate to the story

Sound – make sounds with hands, feet or objects

Touch – use different textures

Smell – bring in aromas or fragrances

Taste – some stories lend themselves to including food



Top tips

Use movement as part of the storytelling – children will engage more.

Use what's around you: sand, water, food, nature.

Keep it simple and short – no longer than 10 minutes.

Repeat favourite stories – children love repetition.

Encourage children to lead and explore: touching, moving, splashing, building and acting.

Don't worry about getting every detail right.

Focus on one takeaway thought, idea or reflection.

On the next page you will find an example of a sensory Bible Story to use.

Bedtime Prayer

Parents can use this simple prayer daily, it takes 15 seconds, 30 if you say each line twice.

A little, stretch, a little hug, a little prayer each night before bedtime, repeated over time will become something special.

I stretch up high (stretch)

I bend down low (bend)

I hug the ones I love (hug)

Goodnight family

Goodnight world

Goodnight God.

Amen



Jesus Calms the Storm

Sensory Bible Story



You could suggest families use this at the beach, in the garden, by a river or even in the bath.

You can find both of these stories in [“The Big Storybook Bible”](#) or choose a version you prefer.

Sensory Focus:

Water, shells, sand, towels, sound, movement.

A bowl/paddling pool/bath, or on the beach by the sea if it's calm.

Create a storm by splashing, blowing or shaking the water.

Add props: toy boats, shells, etc.

Add sounds: blowing for the wind, tapping sticks or stones/clapping hands for thunder.

Then pause everything and say 'Peace be Still'.

Feel the contrast between chaos and calm.

Tell the story slowly while children move the boat or simply create calm and rough water.

Faith Connection: Jesus is with us when things feel scary or noisy.

Chat:

I wonder do you ever feel like there is a storm inside you?

I wonder what calm feels like?

Extra Sensory Idea: wrap children in a soft towel like a 'peace blanket' after the storm calms.

Pray: a simple prayer: Jesus help us feel safe.

Jesus Feeds 5000 People

You could tell this story at a picnic story time in a park or countryside, or in the church grounds.

Sensory Focus: Food, sharing, taste and touch.

Faith Connection: Small things can become a bigger blessing

Use real bread rolls/crackers/tins of sardines.

Let children break and share pieces with each other.

Talk about how a little food became enough for everyone.

Chat:

Are there any other stories when Jesus spent time eating with others?

I wonder what Jesus' favourite food was?

Have you ever shared your snack?

I wonder what you would share with Jesus?

Pray: Thanking God for food and caring for us.

**You can many more ideas
at Faithful Families
by Traci Smith
<https://tracismith.com/>**



Children's Ministry Essentials

Flexible training in the essentials to equip and support everyone working with children: insights, skills and discipleship.



Along with our partners in the Children's Ministry Network and TheologyX, we are delighted to introduce Children's Ministry Essentials, a comprehensive introduction to mission and ministry with children in whatever context you find yourself.

This ten-module programme is quick and easy to access online. Initially we will offer the modules as standalone options which you can complete in your own time. Each month we will also have the option to meet online with others to discuss the module and unpack it in more detail, chatting with those in similar situations.

If you belong to a Church of Ireland parish and are involved in Children and Families Ministry you can access this course from September completely **FREE!**

Just complete an expression of interest by clicking [HERE](#) and we will be in touch with further information.



Laura's
Messy Page!

Laura Steerman, one of the Children and Families team in Taney Church Dublin, is a passionate champion of all things Messy Church. She will be writing in each Newsletter to inspire you to get up, get out and get messy!

Summer is a gift for Messy Churches because the season itself does half the work: sunshine, fresh air, and a natural sense of play make it easy to create meaningful, low-prep gatherings with all the usual messy church core-values of hospitality, celebration, Christ-centred creativity for all ages.



A popular craft in the sunshine is placing nature objects on cyanotype paper (you can find this cheaply on Amazon) – when the paper is exposed to light the covered areas turn white after being rinsed in water (see photo). These activities feel light and fun, yet they naturally open space for wonder and conversation.



Water-themed stations could include a 'stick in a stream' relay-race, bubble-making, or a favourite messy idea – dilute poster paint and shoot through a water pistol at trees, or an old white sheet hung outside!

Why not take your Messy Church outdoors with a "Creation Walk," where families wander through a garden, park, or church grounds and stop at small activity stations: leaf rubbing, decorating gratitude stones, painting seashells, cloud-spotting different shapes from God's Creation, or building tiny shelters for wildlife.





Messy Church

Get your hands on the
latest copy of
Get Messy!



Any opportunity we have to explore with our families that faith is an active, everyday way of life – not just something confined to the walls of a church building – is a wonderful gift. And what better way to help them discover the excitement of faith adventures than by focusing on the five marks of mission: Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform and Treasure?

The latest edition of Get Messy brings the **Five Marks of Mission** to life, brilliantly weaving exploration, excitement and challenge in that uniquely messy way. It helps children and their adults to chat, make, do and celebrate our vibrant life of faith in ways that are relevant and easy to unpack.

As always, everything you need to run a session is here for you, packed with inspiration, fun... and even edible insects realistic enough to make Bear Grylls proud! Whether this is your first time or your 901st time running a Messy session, there is plenty here to explore and enjoy together.

Get Messy! Vol.4 is released on 10 June 2026 containing 12 Messy Church sessions.

Packed full of ideas to make mission possible.

Get Messy! vol. 4 is available in print or as a digital download.

Pre-order your copy [HERE](#)

