

# Good News for Children

May 2004



## Greetings from Judy Jarvis, Vice-President of the Methodist Church

This is an amazing period in my life. I have had during the past year the opportunity to serve the Methodist Church in a way that is only experienced by a few. To be Vice President of the Methodist Conference is a wonderful privilege. But for me it has come at an extraordinary time. It has come at the end of my period of full-time service to the church. In the summer I retire from my post as Children's Secretary in the Methodist Team, having worked in the team and in the Division of Education and Youth since 1989.

These years have covered a period of great change. When I came into post the Berlin wall was still in place, Mrs Thatcher was prime minister, Sunday trading was limited to garden centres and a few corner shops, hardly anyone had a computer in their home, there were only four

television channels, and child protection was of concern mainly to local authorities and a few other agencies. How things have changed!

Work with children in the church has been profoundly affected by all the changes in society. There are fewer children in church on

Much has been done but there is much more to do. How can we meet the needs of children today more effectively? What does this mean in our local churches and circuits? What can be done ecumenically? What can we do for the communities in which we live? How can we support more effectively people who work with children and young people? It's not a soft option: their work is undervalued.

## How can we meet the needs of children today?

Sundays and more in activities during the week. Safeguarding our children and those who work with them has become a way of life – with all the heart-searching it involves. Since the introduction of the ecumenical training course *Kaleidoscope* in 1993 more than 20,000 workers with children have received training – though a great deal more needs to be done. More churches recognise that children are the Church of Today, not the Church of Tomorrow.

The church is one of the few places where people of all ages meet together. We need to look afresh at the times when all ages are worshipping together, whether for part of a service or for the whole. We often fail everyone because we focus on specific groups rather than remembering that we are all in it together, all there to worship God.

I come to the end of my year and the end of my job, recognising that for all Christians the task is never-ending. We are called to serve God within the church and in the world. It's a life-long task. It should keep me out of mischief!



## 2004 Consultation for Children's Workers

*"Mind-blowing – swept off my feet by the breath of God!"*  
*"Thank you for much inspiration, renewal and fresh insights."*  
*"An amazing, challenging weekend."*

These were some of the comments made about the 2004 Children's Consultation, which was held at the beginning of February. This year, as well as inviting District Children's and JMA Secretaries, the weekend was open to anyone working with children or with an interest in *Godly Play*, which was our theme.

Godly Play is a method of telling Bible stories, or presenting parables or lessons about religious traditions. It invites listeners into the stories and encourages them to connect the stories with personal experience. Godly Play is a non-coercive way to encourage children to move into larger dimensions of belief and faith, through wondering questions and open-ended response time. It is a way of preparing children to join in the worship and life of their congregations as they develop a deeper understanding of stories, symbols and rites.

Godly Play aims to:

- make religion come alive for children
- assist their spiritual development
- help Christianity become part of daily life
- make the language of religion familiar

In most religious education children are *told* who God is. In Godly Play children *discover* who God is. If you would like to find out more about Godly Play please contact Steve Pearce in the Children's Section to register your interest. You can also find more information on [www.godlyplay.org.uk](http://www.godlyplay.org.uk)

## 2005 Consultation for Children's Workers

Planning is underway for the next Consultation. Many children's workers and churches up and down the country have expressed an interest in thinking more clearly about inclusive worship. How can we do it better? What are the issues underpinning inclusive worship? These and other practical and theological questions will be the subject of the 2005 Consultation and we are delighted that Rosemary Johnston, Children's Advocate for the URC, will be leading our sessions. This Consultation will be suitable for those who work with children as well as those who lead worship and will take place from the evening of Friday 25 February until lunchtime on Sunday 27 February. Contact the Children's Section for details. [children@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:children@methodistchurch.org.uk)



### Churches' Network for Non-Violence

*"What would Jesus do? ... Well he certainly wouldn't hit children!"*

The Methodist Church, along with the URC, the Catholic Children's Society, the Children's Society and more than 350 other groups working with children and families, agree that hitting children is wrong and the law should say so.

So says a leaflet recently produced by the Churches' Network for Non-Violence (CNNV).

The leaflet also answers some common questions about the physical punishment of children and looks at what the Bible says and how the attitude of Jesus can help us in the way we discipline children.

Discipline is often understood to mean punishment, but it comes from the same Latin root *discere* as discipleship, meaning literally to learn. Positive, non-violent discipline is designed to foster self-discipline, reduce parental stress and improve relationships between children and the adults who care for them.

*"Hitting people is wrong, especially people who are younger and smaller than you. Discipline and love must go hand in hand."*

For more copies of this leaflet, contact the Children's Section or email [info@churchesfornon-violence.org](mailto:info@churchesfornon-violence.org)

*"If the Connexional Team only produced one resource, this should be it."*



So said one person about *New Eyes*. Indeed, a re-print has been ordered as the initial print-run was out of stock in six months. *New Eyes* is a free resource enabling churches to look at Our Calling in new and fresh ways, including all ages in the process. Here is a story of how one church has used it:

### Party Packs in St John's Methodist, Whitley Bay

'Jesus invites you to a party each Sunday'. This thought, developed in the *New Eyes* publication, generated some very creative thoughts on Party Packs in the joint Mission and Church Life Committee at St John's. The packs, for new people in the church, would include an explanation of each of the items in the Party Pack:

- A packet of love hearts to demonstrate God's love for us.
- A beer mat to suggest a socially friendly church with a concern to 'mop up' concerns and spillages.
- A pen to inspire communication.
- A bible portion to communicate the need to read God's word.
- A fun item to generate a smile.

The church has set up a group to look into this option and make it happen. Initially the Party Packs will be given to everyone in the church.

**New Eyes** (ref GE233) is available from MPH, 01733 325002

## Praying with Children

I was sitting in the doctor's surgery recently waiting for my name to flash up on the electronic screen so that I knew my turn with the doctor had finally come. Behind me a little boy said, "Dear God, please let my name come up now. Amen." And then he added, just to be on the safe side, "Dear God, I mean RIGHT now. Amen."

For children, prayer can be a natural activity. For those who work with children, encouraging them to pray in ways that nurture their faith and understanding of God and the world is both exciting and challenging.

Why not try some different ways in your group, so that prayer becomes an activity that engages a variety of senses and doesn't become something that's less than the rest of your programme.

- Use pictures from magazines and newspapers to help children think about what is going on in the world. You could stick them on a prayer wall or in a prayer book.
- Use bubble mixture and blow bubble prayers. The bubbles burst but the thoughts and prayers don't.
- Use your hand to help with prayer. The thumb is the strongest digit – thank God for people in our lives who help to keep us strong. The second finger is the pointing finger – pray for people who guide and point the way for us. The middle finger is the tallest – pray for important people in the world who make decisions such as people in the government. The ring finger is the weakest finger which can't do much by itself – pray for those who are poor and weak. The little finger is the smallest – pray for yourself.
- Create a graffiti wall using rolls of lining paper. Children can write or draw their prayers directly onto the wall or onto post-it notes or paper that they then stick on the wall.
- Often when we pray with children we invite them to 'put their hands together'. This creates an impression that prayer is only about inaction, whereas actually prayer is often the reverse. Give each child a sheet of paper so that they can draw around their hand and cut it out (or use pre-cut hand shapes). Children can write on their hand people who need our help – and the prayers can be stuck on a large sheet of paper under the heading 'helping hands'. Prayer is as much about asking God to transform us as it is about asking God to transform a situation.

### Useful resources include:

*New Ideas for Creative Prayer* by Judith Merrell (Scripture Union)

*Multi-Sensory Prayer* by Sue Wallace (Scripture Union)

*Pocket Prayers for Children* by Christopher Herbert (National Society/Church House Publishing)

[www.urchin.org.uk/urchin](http://www.urchin.org.uk/urchin)

www.rootsontheweb.com

# ROOTS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



*Roots Children and Young People* is the magazine for those who work with groups of children and young people aged 3 to 14.

For each Sunday you'll find the following:

[ABOUT ROOTS]

[MORE ABOUT ROOTS]

[ROOTS WORSHIP]

[ROOTS CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE]

[ROOTSONTHEWEB.COM]

[THE ROOTS ETHOS]

[THE TEAM]

[PARTNERS]

● **Bible notes**

a quick explanation of the main points in the Gospel reading.

● **Set the scene**

suggestions to help you create a suitable setting.

● **Get started**

ideas to help kick things off.

● **Use the Bible**

ways to get deeper into the Word.

● **Be creative / Be active**

creative use of craft or other responses for the under 11s, and activities specially designed for 11-14s.

● **Work it out / Make connections**

help connecting the Bible's teaching with life today.

● **Pray it through**

prayers to use and ways to pray.

● **Music and resources / Resources**

a list of suitable songs and resources to use with children under 11, and resources to use with 11s-14s.

Each issue also contains additional material such as ideas for celebrating a festival or special Sunday, a short story, or training materials.

To find out more, read the sample Sunday available online now.



**Further Information**

Please contact Leslie Noon, Children's Section at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR  
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**Who else in your church might find this useful?**

- JMA Secretary  .....
- Junior Church leader  .....
- Uniformed leader  .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Please write their names and get them to tick the box when they have received or seen a copy.