

Mission Community Celebration/Commissioning

INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Celebrating and Commissioning

Many Mission Communities have a plethora of opportunities for children and young people to engage with church community throughout the week through breakfast clubs, lunch clubs, after school clubs, youth clubs, holiday clubs, kids clubs, uniformed organisations, bell ringing, choirs, music groups, volunteering in schools, All-age services and Sunday schools. An MC Celebration/Commissioning service is an exciting opportunity to gather members from these groups and give them a greater sense of being part of 'One Body'. It will also provide a wonderful opportunity to thank and commission the dedicated volunteers and workers as they are the hands and feet of the church in these settings. If space allows, ask each group to provide a display about their group in the form of a board, poster, banner or flag which can be displayed or even presented during the Commissioning Service to visually show that 'though all its parts are many, they form one body' 1 Cor 12:12.

A Mission Community Commissioning Service is also a wonderful opportunity to celebrate all that is going on and allowing congregations to realise that by working together, many more children can be reached with the Good News of Jesus. For instance, once you have an OPEN THE BOOK team trained, they can go into 2 or 3 schools across an area with very little additional effort or by pooling 2 or 3 volunteers from each of the churches, running a craft morning, holiday club or Messy Church will become much more possible that just using the resources from one congregation. It gives individual parishes a chance to focus on different areas of ministry rather than each one trying to provide everything.

Commitment to the future

If a Mission Community is not currently engaged with any children and young people, it is vital this is addressed, with the support of the Diocesan Children and Young People's team, in the Mission Action Plan long before the service date so that at the Commissioning Service, congregation members can publically commit to changing this situation.

We must grasp that children are the church of today *and* the church of the future. If there are no children, we should be crying out to God like Hannah (1 Samuel 1) to give them to us. *Children should not be regarded as an 'insurance policy'.....Children are a blessing, an integral part of the Church of today, and a sign of the kingdom of God among us* (Withers, Mission-Shaped Church page xii). They are also an indispensable part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:2) and every generation has a responsibility to tell the next generation what God has done:

'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old – what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide from them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done' (Psalm 78:2-4).

School involvement

The majority of Mission Communities will contain at least one school. Whether this school is a church school or not, the children in it are part of the 'Cure of souls', exercised by a priest in office.

Within a Church school, Governors and Head teachers are appointed with church involvement and there needs to be recognition by the Mission Community that the work going on in the school is done on behalf of the church and a sense that the staff are commissioned by the church to fulfil their jobs. A MC commissioning service is a great opportunity to show the school staff and children that they are part of the Church's mission and are loved and supported (in prayer and hopefully in practical presence) by the Mission Community it is situated in.

There are several ways that a school (church or community) could be involved in a commissioning service:

1. Ask the school to create a display about the school showing pictures of the children and staff. Display this in the building where the MC commissioning service is taking place.
2. Ask the school to help a group of children to prepare a drama, song, reading or prayers to include in the commissioning service.
3. Invite the head teacher, chair of governors and other staff members to the service with a specific role e.g. to do a reading or include them in the service at the point when commissioning those working with young people in the Mission community.

Involving children in the Celebration/Commissioning Service

Children and young people are more than capable of being involved in many aspects of the commissioning service.

It might be that a children's or youth group want to take ownership for one of the sections, planning and preparing it exclusively. However, it may give a powerful visual message if children were to work with mix generation members of the congregation i.e. not just having a child doing the reading but having a child and an adult doing part of the reading each, not having a child reading prayers written by an adult but having four different aged congregation members writing and reading their own prayer.

Parts of the service children and young people could be involved include:

- Welcoming people at the door
- Music group / choir
- Readings
- All-age Drama*
- Offertory
- Leading prayers
- Serving at Eucharist
- Serving refreshments (and/or making or shopping for cakes prior to the day)

Please be aware that *'asking a child to read the epistle, or to answer questions about what they have learned, or take part in the offertory, makes the children visible to the adults but it has not actually made the service more accessible to the children'* (Withers, Mission-Shaped Children page 64). Therefore it is crucial that in planning the rest of the service, thought is given to making it child friendly (see notes below).

Other ideas for involving children and young people include:

- In the weeks leading up to the service, ask the children and young people (via their various groups) to record what they'd like church to look like in 10 years time. This could be shown in pictures or writing. Display these or interview a couple of young people about their ideas within the service.
- Have an object (perhaps a Bible, a key, a candle) that is physically passed down the generations within the service i.e. From someone in their 80s, to someone in their 50s, to someone in their 30s, to a young person, to a baby (although beware a baby will probably put the object in it's mouth!).
- When the M.A.P. or similar document committing to the future of the church is presented, placed on the altar or given a blessing/prayer, consider having a young person alongside representatives from other generations, presenting the document and/or being a signatory on behalf of young people.
- Create a Church Family Fun morning or afternoon around the service i.e. put on craft activities, games, bouncy castles etc. followed by the service, followed by cream teas or soup supper.

Child friendly church – All-age worship

Here are some tips to making a child friendly church

- The notice board outside the building contains photos and bright posters of what is happening. Make sure there is specific good quality **publicity** for the Commissioning service and make sure it gets into the hands of everyone you are hoping to engage. The ideal length for an all-age non-Eucharistic service is 45-50 minutes (50-60 for Eucharistic), mention this in your publicity *and stick to it!*
- As soon as a child enters the building they should see at least one thing that makes them feel its ok to be a child in this place i.e. children's corner, pew play bags, colourful displays, section of the notice sheet with quizzes/pictures for children, comfortable chairs/cushions to sit on.
- Have at least one capable young person on the leadership team for **planning** the Commissioning Service, they will bring wisdom about what will work in a service with children present.
- **Pray** over all your plans that God would use them for building His Kingdom.
- Treat all ages with respect (use songs, adverts, music etc from the past as well as modern).
- Beware of using in jokes. They will be understood by the family but not visitors.
- **Attitude** – If you want everything to go right, you'll never be family friendly. All ages need a chance to be involved and therefore it won't always go right.
- Incorporate different **learning styles** within the service presentation remembering that only 24% of the population are auditory learners, 37% are visual learners and 39% are kinaesthetic learners.
- **Music and songs** – use a mixture, aim for a balance between songs that are more suited to young people and songs that are preferred by more traditional people. We do not want to alienate whole chunks of the worshipping community.
 - Traditional hymns – meaningful to older members AND reassuring to people who got to church occasionally. They teach us a lot through their words. Do think carefully about the words and chose hymns that use simple, clear language.
 - Children's praise – Don't use songs that patronise children or say untrue things. We don't want children to have to unlearn something later in life. Repeated chorus' or sections of songs, help children to join in.
 - Action songs – they have their place but children are capable of engaging with songs without actions if they are led well and songs chosen are understood.
 - Signing – helps people with all ages connect words with meaning. Use sparingly, not overdone.
 - If you don't have a band, consider using a CD to inject some high energy music.
- The average **reading age** is 10yrs (that is for adults) therefore, find alternatives to asking congregations to read long responses or readings.
- The average **attention span** is about 4 minutes ie no element should last more that 4 minutes.
- **Reading** – there are many different styles in which to do the reading.

Auditory - Read it straight, Mum's the word (a mum on a big chair telling the story from a book) , Read with different voices (1 person), Read with different parts (several people), Rap, Poetry, Song (words put to familiar tune)

Visual - Story box (Godly Play), Sketch board, Visual aid or symbols, Visible words – images to support part of the text , Arrow board, 1 Big picture or several smaller ones, Cartoon strip, Visualisation (close eyes and imagine), Video film or clip, Act it out, Puppets, Props, Story coat (has pictures, artefacts that remind us of the story), Interview characters, Hats or masks, Mime, Dance, Dressing up box Improvisation Narrator while actors act, Tableaux (for curtains up/down use eyes open/shut)

Kinaesthetic - Sound effect card, Key words with actions (4 groups each with a different word), Repeated actions, Sign language, Re-tell it as an active story
- **Sermon:** Have one mega theme/ teaching point which is constantly repeated through other elements of the service. Make everything you do quality because the message is quality. Keep it short to add power and value and make sure it benefits everyone, not just children. Deliver it well by using visuals, props or other people, these will help to make the message memorable. If you need inspiration there are good resources online such as www.sermonspice.com and there are All-age resources with service outlines and talks which you can borrow from the Old Deanery.

- **Eucharist** – make sure, through preparation on other occasions or by simple explanations during the service, that children understand what is going on during the Eucharist prayers. Nationally, there are parishes trialling 2 new Eucharist liturgies for use in services involving significant numbers of children – find out if your Mission Community is one of them.

All-age drama

We are the Body of Christ

Written by Katherine Lyddon

3 characters stand in a line.

1. Child or young person
2. 20-60 year old
3. Over 60 (older the better!)

Once you have the idea of the drama, feel free to substitute endings to the statements that are relevant to the people doing the drama.

1. My name is..... Georgia.
2. My name is..... Mark.
3. My name is..... Betty.

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. I am..... 8 years old
2. I am44 years old
3. I am..... older than you think!

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. I live in.....Westhill Road
2. I live in Station Lane
3. I live in..... Seaview Avenue

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. I like to play on my computer
2. I like to..... play cricket
3. I like to.....play bridge.

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. The worst thing about church isI have to be quiet
2. The worst thing about church isgetting up early on a Sunday
3. The worst thing about church isthe hard pews

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. The best thing about church is..... meeting my friends
2. The best thing about church is..... the teaching
3. The best thing about church is..... signing great hymns

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. I help in church life by..... singing in the choir
2. I help in church life by..... helping at the afterschool club
3. I help in church life by visiting people in their homes

1.2.3. And we are the church

1. I believe in God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
2. I believe in God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
3. I believe in God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

1.2.3. And we are the church

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