

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." Matt 19 v14

Our Toddler Group is Great!

Here at St Mary's we are justifiably proud of our toddler group, and it was no surprise to me when I read an article in the Church Times last month entitled "Groups get toddlers school ready".

The tendency to downplay toddler groups has been challenged in a new booklet "It's not just a parent and toddler group". It highlights the vital part that toddler groups play in preparing children for school, for example:



"Toddler groups are right up there in terms of missional impact in your local communities. The opportunity that you have with all those local families at that vulnerable age of new babies and little ones. . . It's really important that these youngest children and their families receive a welcome. For me, the primary thing of a toddler group is that unconditional welcome to all."

"A number of recent reports and surveys have raised concerns about whether children have acquired the skills necessary to start primary school. Last month, the early-years charity, Kindred2, published the results of a poll of 1000 primary-school teachers and 1000 parents of children in Reception. The teachers reported that 37 per cent of children were unable to listen and respond to basic instructions; 46 per cent were unable to sit still, and 38 per cent found it hard to play or share with other children."

At St Mary's, developing social skills is achieved through interaction between children. They learn to resolve conflicts: in particular the sharing of toys and taking turns: developing friendships both for the children and parents, and supporting the parents to encourage good manners; words like "please" and "thank you".

We have developed a sense of routine which is an important part of children's development. As the children arrive, they are greeted and soon recognise that playtime comes first, where they develop the skills to learn about taking turns and learning to be patient. It's all about following a routine so that children know what they will be doing next. When it's tidy-up time they learn to pack up the Play-Doh and Lego, knowing that snack time follows. It is equipping children to start to predict what will happen next. After snack time, they know it's story time and singing.

The development of interaction from an early age is the foundation of language development. We are blessed with volunteers who chat with parents and children during their activities, so that the children become comfortable communicating with other children, parents and volunteers. Understanding language and words starts from birth. Volunteers often look after the babies whilst a parent plays with an older sibling, giving them time together. Reading a book with a baby is invaluable from a very early age. Our activity table is always popular, where the children can experiment with colour when painting, and learning to choose textures and objects to create.

We try to develop a sense of independence in a safe environment where they feel happy and secure. This comes gradually when they are encouraged to try new things away from the home environment.

Attention and listening are important parts of a child's development. Sitting for a short period, giving another person direct attention and repeating simple activities from an early age, helps children learn to concentrate. Here at St Mary's the children know that after snack time it is story time followed by singing, and they automatically run to the far

end of the hall as soon as snacks are finished, ready for a very short story. Some days can be challenging, but we persevere. The children love singing and join in with the action songs. They learn to listen and follow simple instructions.

Snack time is when the children all sit together to share fruit and biscuits. When there is a birthday, parents often bring a simple cake to share. We light candles and sing "Happy Birthday", all joining in with a big clap at the end. The parents can then enjoy their refreshments while watching their children.



I am very proud of what we do at St Mary's with the families. The parents, toddlers and volunteers are always sad when the children leave us to start nursery school, but we feel happy that we have done our best to help them to be school ready.

Here are two quotes from the leaflet about church parent and toddler groups:

"What a joy to explore one aspect of the "hidden treasure" of our toddler groups and see how attending such groups benefits children in developing school readiness in so many amazing ways. It encourages me, as a toddler group leader, to keep doing what we are doing. (Jo Gordon - CEO Daniel's Den)"

"The work that toddler groups do is invaluable in getting children ready to start school. They bridge the gap between home and school and allow children to socialise with other children of similar ages as well as giving parents and carers the chance to chat and share with others. So many parents and carers feel isolated and there is little support available now in the form of health visitors, etc. (Linda Tomkinson - Reception Teacher)"

Daphne Richardson

May Services and Events

Saturday 4	08.30	Men's Breakfast at Horton Golf Park
	10.00	Crochet session in the Leverton Room
Sunday 5	08.00	Holy Communion (BCP)
	09.30	Sung Communion
Sunday 12	09.30	Sung Communion and Children's Groups
	11.00	Annual Church Meetings in Church
Monday 13	19.30	Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room
Thursday 16	10.00	Ascension Day Holy Communion
	14.30	Thursday Club in the Cuddington Hall
	20.00	Ascension Day Sung Communion
Saturday 18	10.00	Women's Group in the Cuddington Hall
Sunday 19	09.30	Sung Communion
Sunday 26	09.30	Sung Communion
Wednesday 29	19.15	Men's Carvery at the Hogsmill Tavern

Morning Prayer is said in church every weekday morning at 9am
Everyone is very welcome

Easter Workshop

A craft morning Easter Workshop organised by St Mary's Toddler Group volunteers was a very successful community event. Toddlers and their siblings of all ages came with their parents and grandparents, and enjoyed time together crafting Easter themed activities.



The activities involving chocolate were of course very popular, including making Easter baskets with chocolate eggs, decorating cakes and biscuits and Easter bunnies with hidden chocolates table decorations.

A really fun morning ending with hot cross buns was enjoyed by all and was a wonderful way to reach out to the community.