



Sunday groups help to disciple children

It's rarely called Sunday School these days. But Sunday groups for children can help them to develop their fledgling faith

WHEN children are sent out of our church services to do their own activities, it's easy to imagine they're doing Sunday School as we used to. We may think they sit in serried ranks while teachers lecture them about Bible stories and help them to drill memory verses.

However, just as regular lessons in our schools have been transformed, so have Sunday morning activities in our churches. For a start, it's probably not called 'Sunday School' any more. And it's probably more fun too.

Typically, children will be split into different groups for pre-schoolers, infant school and junior school age groups. Some churches will have groups for 11 to 14-year-olds and perhaps even a youth group for teenagers in the evening.

Volunteers will prepare sessions during the week, which may

include games, art and craft, interactive storytelling, prayer and discussion. Older children may enjoy discussing passages from the Bible, or help to lead younger children.

'It's a lovely community and they love learning more about Jesus'

But learning facts about the Bible or the Christian faith is perhaps less important these days than giving children time and space to respond to the stories they hear and exploring what faith might mean for them.

At Holy Rood Church in Stubbington, the children's work has been rebranded as 'Crofton Kids'. This includes Sunday morning groups, their Saturday afternoon family fun days and

their midweek toddler group Little Fish. They even have a mascot, Crofton Cat (*pictured on the front cover*), who appears regularly.

On a typical Sunday morning, children sing a few songs with the rest of the congregation before splitting into separate groups. Parents, babies and toddlers head for Wrigglers, while a dozen or so three and four-year-olds go to Scramblers. They enjoy singing songs, listening to stories, and responding to what they've heard using play-dough, glue and paint.

Volunteers welcome up to 25 five to seven-year-olds for Climbers, while another 15 or so seven to 11-year-olds form Explorers. Those groups are growing so large that they have to meet together in the church's biggest hall. They'll sing along to action songs played on a video screen and act out Bible stories together - before splitting into their Climbers and Explorers

Children can really help each other

MANY churches offer different groups on a Sunday for children of different ages. But one advantage of putting them together in one group is the chance for older children to help younger ones.

That's what happen at St John's Church, Newport, where its Junior Church spans the entire age range from five to 16 years old.

There are around 20 children and young people in Junior Church, and just over half of them are also in the choir. The five adult leaders teach them in one group, using materials from Scripture Union.

The sessions start with notices and prayer, then they read a passage from the Bible in an interactive way - acting it out, using a parachute or asking questions as they go through it. Then there'll be a game or craft or both.

Leader of Junior Church Ethne Whitlock, who is also a Reader at St John's, said: "At the moment, it works well and the older ones are effectively junior leaders, helping the younger ones and organising

groups for games and activities that reflect that day's theme.

Meanwhile the 11 to 14-year-olds head upstairs to relax on comfy sofas, read Bible stories and discuss issues with their leaders. They are also tackling Youth Alpha on a Sunday afternoon. Older teenagers have a midweek homegroup and meet once a month on a Sunday morning.

Curates Dan and Jude Greenfield head up this work alongside children and families support worker Heather Brown, and a network of volunteers who meet regularly to compare notes. Those volunteers all wear blue, Crofton Kids-branded t-shirts on a Sunday



Children from the Junior Church at St John's, Newport

games and craft. Craft is enjoyed by everyone, so we do a lot of it, usually something the children can take home.

"The children are very caring of each other, which we encourage, and we've had comments from parents that it's one of the few times that children mix with those of other ages."

There are also other young people in the congregation who choose to stay in church for the whole service - either in the choir or with their parents.

Once a month, Junior Church join the adults for an all-age service. Members of Junior Church often do readings or prayers in these services, and they also help run the Mothering Sunday and Christmas Nativity service - the latter is a café-style service in the

church hall.

And once a month, they join the adults at the Peace, so families can celebrate Communion together. On the other Sundays, the children start in church with the adults and then move into the hall for Junior Church.

Sanna Saunders, who is mum to Wilbee, aged 9 and Ettie, 6, said: "Junior Church has a very inclusive and friendly atmosphere. I really like the broad age range in the group and the way that everyone's voice is heard and appreciated. Wilbee is a lively chap, but he has found a place where he feels able to participate and share his thoughts."

And Wilbee said: "It's really fun. You get to do lots of different things - crafts, readings and prayers."

morning, so that parents know who is running each group.

Lindsey Davies brings her 10-year-old daughter Ruby regularly to Crofton Kids at Holy Rood. "It's a lovely community, and there's a full age range of children and adults, so plenty of people to make friends with," she said. "They love learning more about Jesus."

And Liz Mawdsley, who brings her daughter, Ava, 4, said: "People are really welcoming. There's so much going on for children, including the Saturday family days and the toddler group."

Jess Wedick is one of the volunteers. She has been leading

Scramblers for the past few months. "My son is in the group, which helps me to know what will work with children who are that age," she said. "We are given resources to use, but I'm a teacher, so I do a mixture of that and my own stuff. You have to keep any talking short and have lots of activities."

And Lis Olaniyan, who regularly leads the Climbers group, said: "Children's ministry is really important to help them develop their understanding and to learn to love Jesus. My own children talk about things they've learnt at church, and it's exciting because they are the next generation of the Church."