



Doing church for babies and toddlers

Two of our churches have embraced a new-style, half-hour Sunday service that appeals to families with very small children

WHEN Emily Dennett was suffering from post-partum depression, she decided to knock on the door of her local church. She ended up interrupting a parish meeting and bursting into tears.

She was looking for some support as a new mum with a baby. She started coming to church and her family ended up becoming part of 'Bubble Church'. It's a half-hour Sunday morning service aimed at families with babies and toddlers.

Now Emily, her husband James and their two-year-old daughter Clara join in enthusiastically with the monthly service at **St Nicholas, Bedhampton**, which includes pastries, puppets and action songs. James and Clara have even been baptised.

Bubble Church was originally launched in Ascension Church, Balham, during Covid restrictions – hence families had to sit in socially-

distanced 'bubbles'. There are now dozens of Bubble Churches across the country, including two in our diocese. It combines fun, faith and hospitality.



It has been running in Bedhampton since April last year and attracts around 45 people each time. Around 80 per cent of those people were not churchgoers when Bubble Church began, but they – and the young leaders who help – consider it to be 'their' church service.

When parents and children arrive, they are offered coffee, fruit and pastries, and are given an activity

bag. Each family then sits together on their own mat, joins in action songs and prayers and watches a Bible story performed by puppets. They can then open their bag and work together on a creative activity linked to the story.

At Bedhampton, the prayer time even includes a chance for toddlers and young children to come forward and thank God for something good that has happened that week.

"We weren't going to church when Clara was born, but we were looking to be part of the local community, and we live in the same street as St Nicholas Church," said Emily.

"I was struggling with post-partum depression and was actually looking for a mums and toddlers' group. I walked into this parish meeting and burst into tears, and they helped me to become part of things here."

And James said: "Our neighbours were actually part of the Sunday service here and we both had a Christian upbringing, but didn't happen to be going to church at that point. We decided that this is where we wanted to be, and then when Bubble Church came along, we were sold on it immediately. It's perfectly aimed at kids.

"I also happen to be into the technical side of things, so I'm quite happy to do the PA and audio-visuals for the service. Emily had already been baptised, but Clara and I were baptised on the same day."

Two-year-old Sophia Peter enjoys watching the puppets at Bubble Church so much that she repeats the stories they tell at bedtime with her parents.

He mum Sarah said: "We've been coming since it started. Sophia knows the prayers off by heart and when she goes to bed for a couple of days after Bubble Church, we have to tell the story again. My husband and I went to St Thomas's Church and got married there, but this is so family-oriented that we wanted to be part of it."

And Paul and Leonie Sansbury enjoy coming with their three children – Oscar, aged 9, Sebastian, 7, and Isabella, 4 – because it is so inclusive.

Two of their children have special needs, and the whole family have discovered that the half-hour service works perfectly for them.

"It has been so welcoming here for us," he said. "Normal church is too difficult, but this is short, snappy and just right for our children. The short snippets of prayer and story and songs work well."

And Grace Bragaglia, aged 11, who is one of the puppeteers working



Top: action songs at Bubble Church in Bedhampton; middle: behind the scenes with the puppeteers; bottom: toddlers such as Clara can say thank-you to God