



See that you do not despise one of these little ones:  
How can churches communicate to children the value  
they have in the Kingdom of God?

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## Abstract:

**See that you do not despise one of these little ones: How can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God?**

This empirical dissertation examines how churches can communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God. My own research, conducted with children and experienced practitioners, led me to explore the importance of relationships and the use of learning styles and fresh expressions of church, in communicating to children their value. With the use of other research and theorists, I concluded that fostering relationships, both between children and intergenerational relationships, was the most important factor. Treating children as individuals provoked an interest in learning styles within my research, and an exploration of how they could be used within churches. This led me to investigate the importance of Fresh Expressions to this hypothesis and the value displayed when the church goes out to meet children where they are, in ways that they will understand and appreciate. While my research was supported by a range of theorists and theologians, this dissertation seeks to offer practical advice and models to churches, as to how they can communicate value with whatever resources are available to them.

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# Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with children's value in the Kingdom of God, and how that can be communicated to them by the church. Based upon the belief that children are unconditionally valuable to God, it is vital for the church, as Christ's body, to demonstrate God's love for them. Communicating this effectively could transform children's lives, and the church community.

## Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to discern how churches can communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God.

I have previously conducted a small-scale pilot study which indicated that while most churches understand children's theological value, they often lack the knowledge and understanding of how to practically communicate it. This study therefore, aims to aid those churches who desire to value children, but need practical guidance and ideas.

There appears to be a recent rise in the number of theologians recognising the role of children, such as Bunge, who advocates the importance of a theology of the child (2008:xv). In correlation to this, I believe there is a call for a practical assessment of how the church can live this out.

Willmer and White's Entry Point initially highlighted the importance of this particular verse in Matthew 18v10, which has shaped their child theology, and in turn influenced my own viewpoint (2013:11-17). I believe that this verse is essential to demonstrating to the church the theological backing behind the move to communicate to children their value- and to see what value they have in the Kingdom of God. This study aims to suggest how Matthew 18v1-14 can be lived out in church.

While there is existing material to assist in working with and valuing children in church, such as Messy Church (Bayes, 2013:96-100), Godly Play (Berryman,2002:18), and other various studies by practitioners such as Mark Griffiths (2017:17), this study is primarily focused on valuing children within the church context. I will seek to listen to children themselves, alongside a wide range of children's practitioners and experts in the field. In this way, I will have a wide breadth of valid and insightful data to assess how the church can integrate this theology throughout its services and community.

## Key Terms

### *Church*

Within this study, when I refer to the Church, I am talking about the institution of the Church, both the local church of all denominations, and the national Church. Thus in asking the question 'how can churches communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God'; I will be looking into different church services and Sunday provision, as well as the church community gatherings and relationships.

### *Value*

Oxford Dictionary defines value as 'the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth or usefulness of something' (en.oxforddictionaries.com). Therefore, within this study, I will be assessing how the church can communicate how important children are in the Kingdom of God; their worth, position, and right to the Kingdom of God.

### *Children*

For the purpose of this study, when I refer to children, I am focusing on children aged 0-12 years.

### *Kingdom of God*

Without getting into a theological dissection of the Kingdom of God, within this assignment, I am referring to God's Kingdom both here on Earth and in the life to come. It is a central theme of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels (Marshall et al, 1996:647), declaring Jesus' reign (Green, 2013:473), those who are in relationship with Jesus (Murphy, 2013:10), and indicating to us God's principles and values. In relation to my dissertation title then, the children's value in the Kingdom of God is therefore the value that God places on them.

What is a child's value in the Kingdom of God?

Due to the significant lack of focus on children within theology and Church history, the question of a child's value and what that looks like within church and our theology, is complex (Jenson, 2005:1; Bunge,2001:3). As Murphy explains, while there is evidence of children in the Bible, it does not always paint a clear picture (2013:2,97). While the Child Theology Movement (Willmer,White,2013:12) and others may interpret passages such as Matthew 18v1-10 alongside parallels to suggest that Jesus was a child advocate, Murphy highlights the apparent contradiction in Jesus' teaching on leaving family to follow Him (2013:97). This suggests the lesser value of children. On the other hand, Nkwoka points out that in this instance, in the busy few months before Jesus' death, He made time to bless the children (in Murphy,2013:25).

I am writing this assignment and conducting this study from the viewpoint that children are infinitely valued in the Kingdom of God.

Richards begins to unpack the worth that God places on children from Scripture; stating that children are 'called into being... that they can... come to know who God is' (2013:29). While we can see the abuse of children in Biblical times and in our world today, Richards counters this by highlighting God's reaction to this is lament (31). Not only does God show compassion upon children, but also calls us to acknowledge the blessing they are (Psalm 127v3), and the responsibility we have towards them in their faith journey (Proverbs 22v6). Therefore this demonstrates the worth and value He places upon them, and how He sees them as part of His Kingdom on Earth.

Some have argued that the presence of children within the Bible primarily for metaphorical value (Murphy,2013:10-11). On the contrary, I would suggest the fact that the relationship between children, parents and their community, is such a key theme throughout Scripture (Wright et al,2003:19), implies the value that God places upon them.

The particular passage in Matthew, and parallels in Luke and Mark, demonstrate to me the value that Jesus places on children in the Kingdom of God as it is 'affirming the worth and importance of children' (Mercer,2005:50). It describes Jesus taking a child into his arms in a 'protective and tender embrace' ('enagkalizomai'). The Greek also clarifies that Jesus is not just referencing 'childlike', rather children themselves (Pridmore,2009:193); indicating the responsibility on believers to welcome and value children in the same way.

### Reflexivity

This topic is important to me, as a children's and families' worker at a church, because discovering how we can communicate to children their value, will guide the rest of my ministry. Forming a clear idea of how this can be done effectively, could transform the lives of countless children, giving them, a firm hold on their true identity.

I am aware, when researching and conducting this dissertation, of my own perspective and how that could potentially impact the results. As a children and families' worker, I am already aware of the importance of families and the community. As a result, I have diligently followed the research in front of me, and have asked specifically children focused experts within my own research.

### Structure, Theme and Material

This dissertation, will initially examine previous research into this area of children's value within church, which will form the basis for my study and influence my own investigation. I will then outline my own

research, the results of which will define the vital ways in which the church can communicate to children their value. This therefore will be the focus of the main body of my dissertation.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## Child Theology- White

Willmer and White's *Entry Point*, has been one of the most influential books in my decision to undertake this study. Especially as this work is a research study into child theology through the lens of Matthew 18v1-14 (2013:11). The very essence of the Child Theology Movement is that there is 'no theology without the child in the midst' (13), which therefore implies a child's infinite value in the Kingdom of God. White has continued further research into a child's theological value based upon this passage, where he recognises the various roles of children in our theology and church (Wright, White, 2015:36; White 2007:204). While his research undoubtedly informs our practice, as he highlights the value of the child, and even provides five important themes for child development (2008:30), he has not transferred this into a practical guide for church contexts. This is the gap that my research aims to fill.

## Children with Theology - Bunge

Bunge acknowledges the lack of focus on children within theology, and within the church; claiming that 'issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theology' (2001:3; Bunge in Berryman, 2009: 172-3), and later suggests that the majority of contemporary researchers have a professional bias (Winter 2008:350). She suggests that this absence of well-developed teachings on children, despite the numerous 'direct references to children' in the Bible (2008:xiv) has resulted in churches struggling 'to create and sustain strong' child focused programs (2001:4). However, from her writing in 2001, there has been an increase in interest and research into the child's role in theology, with Bunge herself leading the way in this.

In her paper, *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (2008:348-358), Bunge continues to unpack the theological and Biblical value of children, in order to understand how the local church can assist the formation of faith in children. Her research is centred around the Biblical emphasis upon the role and responsibility of parents/caregivers (Winter 2008:348-358; 2007:53); providing a different Biblical and theological base to White. Bunge's research is therefore relevant to my study. However, she is an American researcher, making the context of her research, and her experience of church, notably different.



### Children and Theology- Jenson

Similarly, Jenson acknowledges the lack of children in theological books or thinking. However, he suggests that this has never had the power to silence the voice of the child, claiming that they 'demand to be heard' (2005:1). He recognises that while children have largely only been involved in themes relating to the wider church, such as 'baptism, the church' and 'sin' (2); they have had the power to change some theologians (1), and have been the voice of hope, as well as 'abuse... attention and... neglect' (2). Jenson focuses on the vulnerability of children, and the Christian approach to them, to acknowledge children theologically and allow them to change and challenge our theology (121). Thus, his work is useful for my study, as it provides unwitting evidence of the child's value in the Kingdom of God. Jenson also poses the question of 'how the church might change if it is claimed by children'; but does not practically answer this in terms of how the church can communicate a child's value- hence the need for my study.

### Jesus and Children- Murphy

In Kids and Kingdom, Murphy provides a contrasting view, as he deconstructs Jesus' teachings involving children, including Matthew 18v1-10 and parallels in Mark (9v36-37,42-44, 10v13-16) and Luke (18v15-17) assessing their value in the Kingdom of God, within the context of the whole of the synoptic gospels (2013:1). He disputes the clarity over Jesus' position on children and their value, suggesting that Jesus' radical call to discipleship appears to contradict the importance of valuing family (97). Murphy highlights theologians such as Barton, who comment that a child's 'significance for Jesus lay chiefly in their pedagogical function as a metaphor for adult discipleship' (27). However, in deconstructing Jesus' teachings, Murphy cites a wide variety of scholars and theologians who hold vastly opposing beliefs on Jesus' view of children. Therefore, his study assists me in providing a well-rounded assessment of a child's value in the Kingdom of God and thus how the church should treat them. His deconstructive literary approach also provides me with a clear historical and Biblical understanding of children (5-7) and the Kingdom of God (10-11); which are essential key terms for my study.

### Children in the Church – Griffiths

Griffiths' focus is on evangelism, and how we can bring children and families into church and into a relationship with God (2017:17). However, in doing so, he puts an emphasis on a child's ability to have a relationship with God; unwittingly unveiling his beliefs on a child's value in the Kingdom of God (22).

Similarly, Griffiths highlights the importance of 'setting up home among them' and learning their culture, in relation to evangelism, which is also useful for my study (23). This implies a respect, a value placed on a child's culture, and therefore suggests that one of the ways that we can communicate to children their value, is to live among them and respect their culture.

#### Children's Value to God - Richards

Richards' book *Children in the Bible* examines how 'God finds children worthy of calling...of salvation... of commission...of healing...of blessing' (2013), and explores the Biblical foundations for those statements. This therefore offers a Biblical insight into children's value in the Kingdom of God; enabling me to conduct my research in light of this and in comparison, to these statements. Richards' aim in this book is to give a fresh insight into a child's value, how God can speak to us through children (xiv); and prompt the reader to reflect on their own childhood and the children around them. Richards makes a connection between these statements of worth (28), and certain words 'be, grow, act, whole, grace' (xiv). By doing so, she is not only aiding me in my understanding of a child's worth in the Kingdom of God, but also providing me with suggestions of how the church could show value to children by encouraging them to 'be, grow, act', and to experience wholeness and grace (xiv).

#### Children's Spirituality -Nye

Rebecca Nye has explored the theme of children's spirituality, and in doing so, provides unwitting evidence towards my study. Nye recognises the importance of children's spirituality; noting its historic neglect and the 'assumption that children are too young for 'spirituality'' (2009:13); and in doing so, points towards the value that children should hold in our ministry and in our church community (16-17). Her study aims to assist ministers in reflection of how their church or context could value children's spirituality; and therefore, there is an overlap in our studies. However, where Nye focuses on spirituality, which is a significant part of my study, I will be focusing on the child as a whole and will be supporting it with Biblical references.

#### Godly Play

Godly Play recognises the importance of communicating to children their value in the Kingdom of God, and offers resources and a structure and style to put that into practice within church. It provides the

opportunity for children to interact with the spiritual world and recognise God in everyday life (Berryman, 2002:18,19). In doing so it convey their belief that children too, have a spiritual life and valid faith journey. Thus, while Godly Play is not created with the sole purpose to communicate to children their value to God; it is a method which may assist me in my study, and in turn, churches in their efforts.

Godly Play recognises the validity of children having their own interpretation of life and Bible stories, and being spoken to as an individual child or group by the Holy Spirit (Lamont, 2007:85). Each session is thoughtfully modelled on the Eucharist, and the room plan and scripts have been designed to facilitate indirect learning (Lamont, 2007:87). The 'wondering' section encourages the children to theologically reflect (Nye, 2009:38), and values their own thoughts, theology and experiences. It provides a safe, and sacred place (Berryman, 1995:21) for children; where both children and adults can learn from one another and therefore communicate a child's value to God.

### Messy Theology

Bayes suggests that children are the 'people group who have been theologically marginalised and ignored the longest and most consistently to the present day', and links this to the ignorance and bad practices within churches in relation to children and children's provision (2013:100). Therefore, I would go on to suggest that there is a great need for a practical study to outline for churches how they can communicate to children their value. Bayes goes on to suggest that if the church engages with and includes children, it would 'enrich' the rest of the church in their relationships with God and each other (2013:100). Payne highlights a child's ability to be in relationship with God, and from that suggests that in terms of learning about God, both adults can learn from children, and children from adults (2016:20). This implies an equality in the value of children and adults in the Kingdom of God. Messy Church advocate a 'Messy togetherness'; where all are able to learn from one another and develop in faith (21-22), implying that Messy Church is a model where children are made aware of their value. This is one model of communication which I will look into within this study, the theology of which will inform my research. Messy Church can be seen as a separate meeting from the rest of the church, primarily aimed at families (Hollinghurst,2013:31-32), hence the need for my study into the activities and relationships in the whole church.

# Chapter 2: Methodology

## Research Approach

### *Overall Research Approach*

In order to obtain the most valuable results from my research into how churches can communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God, I conducted both focus groups and interviews.

### Focus Groups:

I conducted five focus groups within this study. Focus groups 'rely on generating and analysing interaction between participants' (Barbour, 2007: 2). This is different from a group interview as it is less of a conversation between myself as the mediator, and the individuals within the group, and more of a discussion between all group members (Liamputtong, 2011: 31). They were designed to retrieve qualitative research, as I was searching 'for meanings in specific social/cultural contexts' (Swinton, Mowat, 2016:43); asking open questions will allow the research I have retrieved to guide the direction of my study.

One of my focus groups was with children, which had similar questions adapted to be suitable for the children to answer. The results from my adult focus groups guided my questions, as I needed more closed questions in order to receive valid and helpful results.

### Interviews:

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with adults, which were 'open-ended research instruments' used in qualitative research (43), as I interviewed experts. I then conducted more structured interviews with children.

### *Data Analysis Method:*

I have collected 'narrative data' rather than just 'numerical data' (Plowright, 2011:18-20). While any data can be transformed into narrative or numerical data, I decided that it is most helpful in this study to analyse the data in a narrative format (20), to allow the results of my research to directly impact the main focus of this dissertation. With this in mind, I have used open questions in both my interviews and focus groups.

### *Sampling*

For my focus groups, I have taken into consideration the possible benefits of both pre-existing groups and constructed groups (Liamputton, 2011: 37). While conventionally focus groups are strangers, so that individuals can be completely honest and not worry about seeing the individuals again (37- 38), I also wanted to analyse the natural conversations of a group of friends who all go to the same church and have shared experiences to discuss (38). In my pilot study I had the opportunity to evaluate both a pre-existing group and a constructed focus group. As a result, I used one pre-existing group so that I have the benefit of participants being able to refer to shared experiences; and four constructed groups. As the majority of my participants are children's workers for churches, constructed groups would work best for them, and therefore provide a large breadth of experience and expertise.

All the adults in the study are experts in their field and were chosen for their wide variety of experience, to produce the most accurate and helpful data. All the children involved are church members, and the majority of which have experienced several churches.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

I am aware that in all my research, the questions that I asked could have potentially affect the validity and reliability of my results, owing to my own pre-conceived ideas and prejudices.

I am also aware that there is a danger that the pre-existing focus group was not completely honest owing to existing relationships and pressure to conform to the popular opinion. I was mindful when leading this group, of the pre-existing hierarchies and group norms (Liamputton, 2011:38-39). I was also conscious, as a mediator to take all these factors into account when recording results, as well as when mediating to try and ensure each person had an equal voice.

There are many factors which affect the reliability and validity of interviews. As Thompson recognises, advanced planning has to be a priority: considering the time, location and content of the interview (2015: 127-128). Whitehead views an interviewer as a facilitator who has a vast amount of control over the environment, thinking about both the 'emotional climate' as well as the comfort and suitability of the physical environment (2009: 35-42). All of the above aspects can affect how honest and complete the interviewee responded to questions, and therefore how reliable the research is.

#### Research

##### *Use of Focus Groups*

I conducted three adult constructed focus groups, which were held at a neutral venue for all of the members of different churches involved. All of the participants were experienced children's workers in

churches, which included a number of professionals. While these groups were all small, they were experts in this field, this worked to my advantage as they were then all able to participate fully.

My fourth adult group was a pre-existing group, with eight participants who all had some experience of leading and organising children's work in churches.

My final focus group was with a group of four children, aged 5-8, who all attended the same church regularly, so were able to feed off each other in the necessary way. This was conducted with parental consent, with one of the parents present at the time, in a place where they were all familiar with and comfortable in.

### *Use of Interviews*

Due to the small numbers in my constructed focus groups, I did not need to individually interview a participant from each. I did conduct follow up interviews with a participant in the pre-existing group, and one of the constructed groups.

All of the interviews I conducted were short, 'unstructured interviews' (Bryman 2011:110). I started with a number of topics or open questions, often with new questions prompted by their answers. I conducted these interviews after conducting my focus groups, and as a result chose some specific experts, such as leaders of Kidz Klubs and stay and plays, who would be able to answer some questions which arose within the groups.

As the majority of my previous research was gathered from adults, I chose to interview more children than adults. These interviews tended to have more of a focused approach, with closed questions or options to choose from.

### *Data Analysis*

#### Focus Groups:

The overwhelming theme throughout my focus groups was that 'relationships are so important' to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God. This referred to intentional relationships with leaders and intergenerational relationships within the entire church. While there were suggestions such as 'mentoring programs' and 'small groups', which may facilitate these relationships, my research suggests that the most effective way to communicate value within relationships is to treat children as individuals. As such, the use of learning styles and the importance of understanding and accommodating differences, including additional needs, were highlighted.

My focus groups also brought up the importance of equality within churches: understanding that everybody, adult and child, is a child of God. While this fits in with treating children as individuals, it was often connected to the issue of power within churches and the need to change the understanding that adults only teach children and cannot learn from them. As such, the church should provide opportunities for children to be included within the church, in serving on teams and within services and events.

The research suggested that the church needs to value children who attend Sunday morning services, and those who are within the community, or attend other church events. Two of the focus groups commented on the importance of valuing fresh expressions of church; such as stay and plays and Messy Churches, which meet the needs of children and communicate the Gospel. By valuing these events, the church would display the worth of the children within the church and community.

#### Interviews:

The results of the interviews I conducted echoed the primary importance of investing in relationships with children, because it communicates to them that they are worth speaking to and getting to know as individuals. They highlighted the importance of good relationships, not only with adults, but between the children themselves. Stay and Plays and Kidz Klubs, were suggested as good resources to develop relationships and communicate value to children inside and outside of church. They also suggested that giving children the opportunity to serve alongside adults, as they can in these models, is another effective way to communicate this.

#### *Initial Findings*

Overall, my research suggests that the primary way for the church to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God, is to invest in relationships with them. This feeds into the importance of treating children as individuals, and therefore catering to all of their learning styles. Fresh expressions of church, such as stay and plays, Messy Church and Kidz Klubs, are seen to be good at communicating value, and in themselves should be appreciated.

#### Evaluation

##### *How helpful was my research design?*

The focus groups, which I conducted prior to my interviews, were most effective in giving me a clear direction to my research with appropriate topics and questions for my interviews. As I needed more

focused questions for the interviews with children, already having an idea of the main themes helped me attain more accurate and helpful data from the children.

For this topic, I think that it was helpful having the input of a wide range of experts who have been involved in children's work in different churches. As it is not a straightforward question, using qualitative research was most helpful. However, had I time and access to a larger group of experts and children, I would have attained more accurate data.

### *Problems*

Due to unfortunate events, my focus groups were smaller than anticipated. While this worked to my advantage because of the experts within the focus groups who could therefore contribute more, I did have to change my plans for my interviews. As there were smaller numbers, it was no longer necessary to hold follow-up interviews for additional information.

### *Issues of Reliability and Validity*

Facilitating both constructed groups and a pre-existing focus group, meant that I was very much aware of the existing power dynamics, and the difference that made to the control I had over the discussion and the inclusion of all members of the pre-existing group. As I knew all members of the pre-existing group already, and had conducted a similar group in my pilot study, I was able to record a natural debate and discussion. The more dominant members of the group did tend to take over, and other members had less of an input. The use of the post-its to note down their own thoughts did mean that I could read all of the views represented. I was conscious of the weakness of using a pre-existing group, however, I knew that this group was not a homogeneous group (of likeminded people) (Liamputtong, 2011:34), and did not lack the diversity of views seen in the constructed groups. I decided to use this one pre-existing group, as they all had shared experiences, which made for a keen debate.

All of my research with children was conducted with their parent, or their peer's parent present, which may have affected how the children answered. Parents did sometimes prompt or repeat questions in a way that they might understand; but by doing so inadvertently cause the child to answer the question in a way that the parent desires. However, it was most important that the children were safe and comfortable, and they were all in environments where they felt able to be themselves.

### *Ethical Issues*

When asking children in a group, whether they understood their right to walk out, say no, or not answer certain questions, it is difficult to ascertain that every child fully understands what they are signing or



committing to. Thus, I gave plenty of opportunities for the children to change their minds, or ask questions about my research, until they understood and were happy to participate.

### *Conclusions*

As a result of my personal research study into how the church can communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God, I will continue to examine three key areas highlighted within this study. It is apparent that relationships are the fundamental aspect, alongside treating children as individuals and understanding fresh expressions of church. I will therefore examine in the next three chapters, how the church can facilitate relationships, cater for learning styles and use fresh expressions, to communicate value to children.

# Chapter 3: Relationships

## The importance of relationships in communicating value

The most prevalent theme throughout all of my research, was the importance of relationships in communicating to children their value in the Kingdom of God. 'Relationships are so important', is a phrase used within two different focus groups and inferred throughout the majority of my research. In this chapter, I will try to understand the importance of relationships to communicating value, and unpack some of the ways in which churches can foster relationships.

Lamont comments that 'human beings are relational beings': as we are made in the image of a relational, trinitarian God (2007:45). A natural conclusion therefore, would be to assume that being in relationship with children, would communicate value and worth to them. Nouwen similarly states that a person's 'sanity' and ability to live is reliant upon their relationships with others (1994:66). Westerhoff claims that 'we all grow by being with others' and that relationships are fundamental to faith development in adults and children (1980:27).

Lamont goes on to suggest that these first relationships for children, have a lasting impact on their lives and future relationships (2007:45). McGrath also notes the importance of both relationships between Christians and God within Churches, as a vital role in faith development and understanding God (2017:369). Thus, relationships not only play a pivotal role within a child's physical and mental development, but also their sense of belonging within the church and their faith development. Consequently, it could be inferred that if the church were to value children, they would consequently place value on intentional relationships between and with children.

## Intergenerational Relationships

One focus group mentioned Sticky Faith and the importance of children having relationships with Christian adults outside of their family. A member of a focus group suggested that stories of faith from adults around them means that 'they can see faith at work in them and not just 2000 years ago', so faith 'becomes real to them'. Therefore, I would suggest that adults taking a child's faith seriously, communicates to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God- also confirmed by the initial research from my pilot study. Richards would support this statement with her own research demonstrating that God does find children worthy of a relationship with Him (2013:28) and prompting churches to consider how they value children. As

O'Aleshire recognises, both Hendricks and Westerhoff highlight the necessity of identifying children as 'believing people'; who can learn about God and understand His love (1988:113-123).

Powell and Clark examine Luke 9v28-36, to discern Jesus' attitude towards intergenerational relationships (2011:95-6). From this passage, they comment that the Greek phrasing that Jesus used, communicated to his disciples an element of servanthood towards children (96). They go on to explain that Jesus sees the outworking of greatness, or "great" Christian living, in adults welcoming children (96). As a result of this, they suggest that intergenerational relationships are an essential element of the Christian faith: that relationships with children are key to Christianity, agreeing that there is 'no theology without the child in the midst' (Willmer,White,2013:13).

A children's worker from my pilot study research highlighted that each adult within the church should take some responsibility for communicating to children their value and faith. Griffiths would agree with this, referring back to the Deuteronomy 11v18-19 where directions for passing on the Jewish faith were written in the context of 'mish-paw-khaw', a community very similar to our church (2017:50). He clarified that it was the responsibility of all members of this community or church, to communicate this to children in all that they do (51). Similarly, it is the responsibility of the entire church to communicate to children their value and worth to God.

One practitioner commented on the impact of 'intergenerational relationships' in communicating to children that they are 'worthy of relationships'; and therefore communicating part of their value in the Kingdom of God. They suggested that adults simply having a genuine interest and engaging children in conversations can have a lasting effect. Another commented that 'one of the biggest resources is learning their names' and remembering key facts about them, as it makes them 'feel loved'. Sticky Faith also suggest 'intentional' and 'explicit' investment from adults within the church can have a vital impact on a child's development (2011:102-5). Beckwith comments on the importance of understanding that children can contribute to the community and that in order to value children we must recognise and encourage their gifts (2004:86-7). By providing opportunities for children to serve within the church, our research suggests that it is not only a benefit within itself, but also is a perfect setting to foster these intergenerational relationships.

### Mentoring

One of the ways that Sticky Faith encourages churches to foster these intentional intergenerational relationships, is by setting up mentoring relationships between trusted adults within the church and children. This was also mentioned during one of the focus groups, as mentoring is a people-focused approach (Wright,2004:25), it was suggested as a useful resource that 'enable relationships to be built'.

Mentoring relies upon mentors seeing children as God sees them. This means they must confirm their worth as they are, as well as being able to 'recognise and affirm potential' (Wright,2004:21; Parsloe,1998:33). Jesus saw the potential in Simon to be Peter: "the rock" on which the church was built (Matt 16v18). In the same way, churches are called to see the potential in each of its members, adults and children.

Mentoring shifts the power from the adult to the child. This is because, it requires trust (Parloe,1998:33), where the mentor follows rather than leads (Wright,2004:25-52) child. Consequently, causing the adult to place value on the child, to recognise their thoughts and validate them. Mentoring therefore allows other adults 'to speak into your kids' lives in a way that you cannot as their parent' (Powell,Clark,2011:105), and adults to similarly learn from the children, as my research suggests.

### Small Groups

Another resource that my research highlighted as a form of relationship building and therefore communicating to children their value in the Kingdom of God, were small groups. One children's worker commenting on how vital it is to get the children 'to do the theology, because they learn so much more than that'. Thus, this setting allows not only intergenerational relationships with the leaders and members of small groups to grow, but also allowing them to form their own theology communicates to the children their ability to have their own relationship with God.

A focus group also suggested the use of resources such as Youth Alpha (which could be adapted for children), can enable the leaders to focus on the development of relationships rather than the content of the session. They also encouraged a change in the power dynamics between the children and adults similar to that of mentoring: that they are all there to learn together from God and one another.

Another professional commented on the importance of 'intergenerational relationships' in helping 'children in finding their place within the community'. However, reflecting upon the overall research, I would concur with White, that 'children are not only part of that life together; they are vital clues to how God would have the community live' (2008:137). By conducting small groups, and general interaction with children in this mind set, the church communicates to children the true value that they have in the Kingdom of God.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, my research correlates with the findings and comments of children's researchers and practitioners, such as Richards (2013:xiv), Mercer (2005:50-51), Griffiths (2017:50-51), and White (2008:129), in advising the church to focus on fostering relationships with children, in order to communicate to them their value in the Kingdom of God. It is clear that intergenerational relationships throughout the entire church are fundamental to conveying worth to children, as well as nurturing their faith development. Treating children as individuals with valid thoughts and theologies is essential: as equal members of the church. While this can be communicated simply through conversations, establishing mentoring programs and small groups throughout the church are explicit resources to encourage these relationships, if done in the right way. In my next chapter, I will examine how the church can validate children and treat them as individuals, with the use of learning styles in group contexts and all age services.

# Chapter 4: Learning Styles

The importance of learning styles to relationships and treating children as individuals

Learning styles was another area highlighted within my research, which was linked to the importance of relationships and the importance of understanding that all children are different, to communicate to them their value in the Kingdom of God. One children's worker put it like this 'to value people you have to treat them as individuals'. This statement was seen in light of aiming to communicate value to all children, including those with additional needs; which was brought up in three of our focus groups.

LeFever states 'teaching to style enables teachers to begin reaching everyone God gave them to teach', and as a result, those adults and children will become aware of their strengths and gifts (1995:14). This therefore communicates to the children that they are all worth getting to know, sharing the gospel with, and bring value to the church community. When we don't take into consideration a child's learning style, we are communicating to them a lack of value, that they are not worth teaching (16). However, there are many learning styles theories from different researchers, which all differ vastly, calling this theory into question and making it difficult to work in accordance with them

(<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/courses/ceredocs/oldwikis/8.Arelearningstylesafallacy.pdf>).

For this study, I will focus on Honey and Mumford's identified learning styles: activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist (Whitehead, 2013:123), that they believe every adult and child have. There has been a lot of emphasis placed upon producing materials which are 'child-focused', but to actually truly communicate value to children, we need to appreciate their differences from one another. Learning styles is a resource which validates each child. As mentioned within one of our focus groups, the stereotypical children's groups do not always suit all types of people, personalities or learning styles. By catering for the different learning styles when planning sessions, churches are far more likely to be able to communicate to each child in a way that they understand, their value in the Kingdom of God. This is communicated more clearly, not only by valuing each child's preferences, but also because each child will be able to understand the message of the sessions.

Activist learners tend to learn best through doing; they enjoy 'small groups... craft activities... role play, trips and practical projects (123). They enjoy challenges and variation, and often find it difficult to sit still and listen for a long period (123). Reflectors on the other hand are often initially quiet, though they are engaged they like to have time to think about their contribution. They often enjoy 'discussions, debates... researching, quiet space to think' (123). Theorists tend to enjoy exploring questions and issues, they like to

be challenged in their thinking, and get frustrated with 'things that are not explained sufficiently or backed up rationally' (124). Pragmatic learners learn best when the content is relevant to them, so they enjoy relevant 'down-to-earth discussions' as well as practical activities' (124). While most people have a combination of learning styles they can learn from, we usually have one stronger preference, where we find it easiest to learn.

Jesus adapted His style and the content of His teaching in order to suit the learners that He was interacting with (Sturdevant,2015:8). Sturdevant exemplifies this through Jesus' discipleship of Simon Peter and John, both of whom Jesus prepares for leadership but in very different ways (2015:10). Jesus' teaching is done in the context of relationship and he understood each of their different learning styles knowing that he could be more heavy-handed with Peter compared to the more subtle and empowering techniques he uses with John (10). I would suggest that being aware of your audience, and adapting teaching to suit all members of those you are interacting with; whether adult, child, pragmatist, or theorist, communicates to them their value. As Beckwith claims, as the church, we need to 'expand our thinking' and 'think creatively' about our children's strengths (2004:86-87), to bring them into a relationship with God, the church, and empower them to contribute and serve with the rest of the church. Within this chapter, I will examine how the awareness of learning styles in churches can more effectively communicate to children their value.

#### Catering for Additional Needs/ Inclusion

When taking into consideration different children's learning styles, and individual needs, it is important to think about how the church can meet the needs of those children with additional needs, and therefore communicate value to them too. The difficulty and importance of doing this was highlighted in three of my focus groups.

While there are a wide variety of disabilities and individual children, Reid writes on learning styles in light of those with disabilities and how we can include those, especially those with perhaps less noticeable or physical disabilities. He acknowledges the need for consolidation (2005:5); for example within a church context, the importance of communicating the Bible passage or message in a variety of contexts, in order for the children to be able to familiarise themselves with the message and retain it.

Attention to the church environment was considered within our focus groups, but Reid suggests that it is particularly vital to consider when communicating and including those with ADHD and dyslexia (23). Children with dyslexia usually process information visually and holistically (23), so the environment is an important aspect of learning. He advises the use of a 'quiet corner' and a 'range of... layouts', as well as 'a sense of ownership' (23). Children with specific learning difficulties can be very sensitive to both physical

and emotional space, and have a stronger need for positive feedback and encouragement (24). Kilvington and Wood also place considerable weight on assisting the child in creating and owning their own environment and content of learning or play (2010:4-5). Ownership of learning is especially important for those with disabilities. Reid suggests that children should be encouraged to guide their own learning and 'self-question' (2005:24).

## Church and learning styles

### Children's Groups

From this research, I would therefore suggest considering learning styles when planning and leading children's group sessions. If it is possible to include all four learning styles, as well as considering the use of space and repetition of the message, then it will be an inclusive session where each child has the opportunity to engage in their comfort zone. This would therefore communicate to each child that their individual learning style is valid and they are considered valuable to God, whatever their preferred learning style.

### Godly Play

Godly Play is a resource that could be used within church, either in age group sessions, or in intergenerational worship. It has a set structure, which has been 'carefully devised down through years...to facilitate indirect learning' (Lamont,2007:87). While it's primary aim is to enable and facilitate worship (96), it also aims to address the children's needs (Nye, 2009:66). I view Godly Play as an excellent resource to communicate value to children, owing to the equal relationship between the adults and children, who are there 'to learn from each other' (Lamont,2007:95): the importance of which was discussed in the previous chapter.

While Godly Play does have a set structure, script and room layout (Berryman,1995:21-2), which does not suit the activist learning style, it does provide a variety of activities and responses. This time to wonder, respond and discuss, would typically cater for reflectors, theorists and activists; giving time to think, be challenged, or discuss in a group. The 'I wonder' questions following the story would also cater for the needs of those with disabilities or educational needs; allowing them to come to their own conclusions. They may also transfer the story to the children's lives, which would suit the pragmatists needs, which would be otherwise neglected. By acknowledging and providing for each style and those with additional needs, the church would communicate a sense of worth and value to each child. The time, and acknowledgement of both physical and emotional space that Godly Play allows, encourages 'deep learning and reflection': giving time for the children to be transformed in their relationship with God and turning 'head knowledge' to



‘heart knowledge’ (Whitehead,2013:119). This validates a child’s ability to have a relationship with God and therefore communicates the value that God places on them: that He desires to be in relationship with them.

### All Age services

Sticky Faith also comments on the dangers of separating the children from the adults to worship during church services; claiming ‘that segregation is causing kids to shelve their faith’ (Powell and Clark, 2011:95). As examined in the previous chapter, intergenerational relationships are vital to communicating to children their value, and all age services are a good opportunity for these to develop. Not only do ‘children learn best when they interact with other people’- both adults and children (Mooney,2000:4); but adults also benefit from intergenerational interaction (Payne,2016:20). Learning styles are useful when communicating with adults and children, and are a good way of ensuring that all types of people, indiscriminate of age, are included and understand the topic- and therefore feel valued.

While it is important to focus on catering for all of the learning styles within the content of a service, I believe that it can also be helpful in encouraging intergenerational involvement and opportunities to serve within the church. My research, especially that conducted with children themselves, highlighted the importance of giving children the opportunity to serve alongside adults within the church. Understanding learning styles can assist in understanding the best way in which a child can serve, whether that be practically setting up, doing something up front, planning, or decision making. These acts of service together with the adults not only provides opportunities for relationships to develop, but also communicates to children that we value their contribution, and that they are able to contribute.

### Explore Together

As explored within my research, using learning styles is a way of including the whole church in worship. Scripture Union’s Explore Together resource is designed to provide a structure for All Age services that fulfils the different needs and learning styles of the congregation. After presenting the Bible passage and praying together, the congregation is invited to ‘explore’, during this section, they can engage in the Bible passage at one or more of the six different zones. Each zone is suited to a different learning style: ‘colour zone- learn by seeing’; ‘listening zone- learn by hearing’; ‘chat zone- learn by thinking aloud’; ‘word zone- learn by reading’; ‘busy zone- learn by doing’; and ‘quiet zone- learn by reflecting’ (<http://www.exploretogether.org/the-explore-zones/>). The congregation then have the opportunity to

share their discoveries and a prayer of thanksgiving (<http://www.exploretogether.org/six-essential-steps/>). This therefore aims to provide for the needs of the entire congregation; placing equal value on each member, adult and child, mature Christian and new Christians, of all learning styles (<http://www.exploretogether.org/introduction/>). However, this resource does have the danger of alienating certain members of the congregation who have mobility limitations and thus would not value all of the congregation. I would suggest that some of the different activities could be adapted to be completed without moving around; even if you are not expecting aged, or disabled people to attend, it is important to cater to the needs of those who may attend.

## Conclusion

Overall, I would suggest the use of learning styles and awareness of the needs of certain individuals, especially those with special needs, in order to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God. It is a way of valuing their individuality and viewing them equal to adults; accepting their differences and therefore accommodating them. It also communicates their ability to learn and have a relationship with God themselves. Using learning styles as a church, can be useful not only for service or group content, but also for seeing the potential areas in which children can serve, alongside adults. However, learning styles are not universally acknowledged, and even Honey and Mumford's questionnaire has been under review (<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/courses/ceredocs/oldwikis/8.Arelearningstylesafallacy.pdf>). Despite this, I think the important message that these theories tell us, is that every adult and child learns differently from one another, and it is important to take into account and respect. By forming relationships with the individuals, you begin to understand how they learn and from that, can teach in accordance to this. In the next chapter, I will examine fresh expressions of church, which often provide an alternative setting to a church service, which can accommodate different learning styles and personalities than the traditional church service.

# Chapter 5: Fresh Expressions of Church

The importance of recognising fresh expressions of Church to communicate value to children

Another clear theme from my research was the importance of recognizing that church is not always a Sunday morning service. Three of the focus groups talked of the differing behaviour shown to those children within the community and those who attend Sunday morning services. Two of these groups went on to suggest that children within the community who attend events such as Messy Church, Kidz Klub and stay and plays, should be viewed as church members. Whether this should be the case or not, it is imperative that churches reconsider their behaviour and attitude towards children within the community who do not attend church. Not only is this neglecting to communicate value and love to those children, but it also communicates to the children within the church that their only value is in their faith. According to my pilot study research, another common dangerous attitude towards children is that their value is only found when they are an adult or young person, who is able to commit to the faith.

Within this chapter, I will discuss the use of Messy Church, stay and plays and Kidz Klub, in communicating to children who do not attend the Sunday morning church service. 'Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church' (<https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>). My research shows the importance of treating children as individuals, and addressing their different needs, and Fresh Expressions bring church to 'un-churched' or 'de-churched' children and families in a culturally relevant way ([freshexpressions.org.uk](https://freshexpressions.org.uk)). Meeting children where they are and communicating with them in a way that they understand, the truth of our faith, is showing that we value them, and that God desires relationship with them. Fresh Expressions is a move from expecting people to come to the church, to the church going to the community (Anglican-Methodist Working Party,2012:26): meeting the children where they are at. By doing this, the church communicates to children and the community that they are worth reaching out to: they are worthy of hearing the gospel and coming into a relationship with God.

## Messy Church

Messy Church is one of the most common family-orientated fresh expressions of church. As Paul Moore explains, the aim of Messy Church is 'to be church for non-churched families' (2013:16). They decided to

bring church to the families, rather than expecting them to attend their Sunday morning services (16). It appreciates the differing needs of modern day families, and aims to teach them the Good News in a way that is relevant to them, and in a way that they will understand. As such, Messy Church communicates to children and families that they value them, where they are at, and treats them as valid individuals.

Hollinghurst clarifies that Messy Church, as a fresh expression, may be seen as church by some who attend, and not to others (2013:31-32). He suggests that what is important, is that the hosts are clear whether they lead it as a 'fresh expression of Church' or a 'fresh expression of mission' (34). The purpose of Messy Church, is to purposefully evangelise and disciple children and families individually; valuing where their faith is and treating them appropriately (Paul Moore,2013:17;20-15). Messy Church is a good model to use for this, as it provides time for relationships to develop and the children and families to engage with the faith-based materials at whatever level they choose. However, I think that it is important, that as a church, you need to be clear on your purpose in setting up Messy Church; whether you will view it as a separate congregation or aim for families to eventually join your main Sunday morning congregation (Griffiths,2017:54).

Another aspect of Messy Church that truly communicated to children their value in the Kingdom of God, is the creation of an all age community: with intergenerational relationships encouraged. This contact with parents within Messy Church was also praised within my research and highlighted as an element that other areas of church could learn from. Messy Church says to children and the rest of the church, that children can and do hear from God, and that children and adults can learn about God from one another (Payne,2016:20). My research revealed the importance of children serving and learning together with adults in the church; that shift of power that Messy Church promotes. 'Children are in the midst, both to open our eyes to the wonder of the world and to keep our feet firmly on the ground in the realities of life' (21). Payne suggests that this is the perfect environment for faith development and discipleship (22); where families can learn from one another and see faith modelled and passed on (32-36).

Payne comments on the dangerous rut that the church has fallen into: of communicating the gospel 'in age-related and homogeneous social groups'. I would therefore suggest that Messy Church does create a healthy community where children are valued, but it would be ideal if this could be integrated into the life of the entire church. I believe that it is not only important for the whole church to call these children their own, and to value what happens within Messy Church, but for these principles to be the foundation for all of the church's gathering. As Griffiths comments, many intergenerational services do use the format of Messy Church, 'repackaged... to be used in the "main" worship service', which could look similar to Explore Together (2017:54). While it may prove difficult, the ideal situation would be for those families from

outside of the church to integrate into the church community, where both the church attending children and those un-churched children are valued as people who can have a relationship with God.

### Stay and Plays

It was suggested within my research that stay and plays could be viewed as a fresh expression of church. One focus group suggested that because stay and plays are 'not on a Sunday morning people don't think of it in the same way, but it's trying to do all of those same things that you would on a Sunday morning'.

While not all of my research agreed that stay and plays should be seen as a fresh expression (see Appendix 1), because carers and children do not come to them with the purpose of worshipping or hearing the gospel, and there is not always a clear telling of the Gospel; they are a place where children are valued. One of the leaders of a successful stay and play, suggested that it was welcoming both the adult and child by name and encouraging children to help alongside the adults, which communicated this value. This facilitates relationships to be built with children, and views children as people with something valuable to bring to the community. Thus, while stay and plays are infinitely valuable in themselves, these are aspects which communicate value, that can be transferred into any church service or event.

One professional mentioned research showing that '52% of under 5s go to a church based toddler group' (backed up by jubilee-plus.org) and the importance of viewing them as 'being part of the church's ministry' and 'our toddler congregation'. While 60% of churches provide parents and toddler groups (www2.cuf.org.uk), the general lack of acknowledgment or appreciation of them within the church as a whole, does not communicate to children their value. Stay and plays are 'a natural mission field', where relationships are formed and the gospel can be spread. When the church starts to value them and invest in them, then they will communicate to children and families the importance of serving children and of bringing them into a relationship with God.

### Kidz Klub

I interviewed two Kidz Klub leaders in my research, after Kidz Klub was brought up within one of the focus groups as a 'fresh expression of church for kids or families that don't come to church'. The children's workers commented on how not only the variety of session material, but also the home visits during the week, communicate to the children their value and worth. Kidz Klub are weekly children's groups provided by churches for children within the community to have fun and come into contact with the Gospel (life-tribe.com). They 'work to meet the kids where they are at' (www.kidzklubleeds.org.uk); bringing church to

them, and communicating to the children that they are worth having relationships with, and that God finds them valuable to have a relationship with too.

The practitioners I interviewed highlighted the importance of relationships. While Kidz Klubs are often large groups of children, they split into small groups for discussions each week, with an adult volunteer in each group. Within these groups, whatever the children input should be seen as valid and valuable. They commented on the importance of committed volunteers who the children are able to form real relationships with. The regular home visits by these volunteers reinforce these relationships, not only with the child, but also the parents and family as a whole. This shows real effort and therefore communicates a great level of worth.

Kidz Klubs can take a lot of effort, time and volunteers, which many churches lack, but the intergenerational relationships and allowing children to form their own theology are two key elements that can be taken from this model into any service or relationship.

## Conclusion

Overall, whether we view services such as stay and plays, Messy Church, or Kidz Klubs, as church is not the focus of my research. I believe that, as my research suggests, by valuing these services to children, we are communicating to the children within the church and community, that we value them: that they are worthy of effort and relationship. While not every church has the resources to provide all of these groups, there are things that each church can learn from them. They all facilitate strong, intergenerational relationships, they all value a child's input, and they can all provide opportunities for children to grow and serve. By learning children's names, visiting them, listening to them and making the effort to tell them the Good News, every church can communicate value to children.

Equally, while all of these enterprises can be fruitful and healthy, and can be church, it is beneficial for all age congregations and for the children who attend them, to become a member of the multi-generational church eventually. This is for their discipleship, and for the rest of the church to be shaped and changed by different children and families from within the community who attend them. Keeping these congregations completely separate would not be communicating to children their value within the church as a whole.

# Conclusion

## Relationships

To conclude, my research would suggest that the most effective way for churches to communicate to children the immeasurable value they have in the Kingdom of God, is to invest in relationships. The importance of relationships, is supported by respected writers such as Lamont (2007:45), Nouwen (1994:66), McGrath (2017:369), and Westerhoff (1980:27). Fostering intergenerational relationships with children conveys to them that they are worth listening to and getting to know. Jesus clearly places value not only on children, but on welcoming and serving children; which defines “‘great” Christian living’ (Powell and Clark,2011:95-6). As the church, it is our responsibility to welcome children into the church community (Griffiths,2017:50-1). The most effective practical resources that support the development of relationships, are mentoring and small groups. These provide adults with the opportunity to communicate to children their worthiness to have a relationship with God. They recognise that children can contribute to the church community (Beckwith,2004:86-7), and ‘recognise and affirm potential’ (Wright,2004:21).

## Learning Styles

In order to fully recognise the strengths of the children that you are working with, understanding and applying learning styles, can be most beneficial. My research suggests that one of the most effective ways that the church can communicate to children their value, is to treat them as individuals. Learning styles not only enables the church to tell the gospel to all people more effectively, but also demonstrates that the church values all people (LeFever,1995:14-16).

Jesus adapted His teaching style and content, dependent on the people He was interacting with (Sturdevant,2015:8). Similarly, as the church, we need to adapt our teaching styles dependent on our congregations, in order to show each child their individual value. It is important to note that not only are the needs of different learners essential to respect, but also the needs of those children with disabilities. The needs of all of the children, must be recognised, not only in the children’s groups, but also in all age services, where resources such as Explore Together may be helpful (<http://www.exploretogether.org/>), dependent on the mobility of your congregation. By highlighting the strengths of children, the church also acknowledges their ability to contribute and serve within the community: seeing them as equal members of the church.

## Fresh Expressions of Church

Meeting the children where they are at, and sharing the gospel with them in a relevant way in which they will understand (Anglican-Methodist Working Party,2012;26), is another essential element of communicating value to children. Groups or events such as toddler groups, Messy Church and Kidz Klub, need to be respected as church services; where relationships can be developed and Christ's love can be shared. Whether they are seen as church groups or churches in their own right, what is important for communicating worth to children, is valuing these groups and realising their potential. As the church, we are carriers of the gospel, and 'we dare not allow an ineffective presentation of that truth to hide what we have to say' (LeFever,1995:16). To communicate to children the value that they have in the Kingdom of God, we must go to them, and tell them about the Kingdom of God in a way that is accessible.

Messy Church can be a useful resource to communicate both the gospel and value to children in the community. It is an appealing event for families, with a variety of activities to suit different learners, and allows families to engage with faith at a relevant level for them. It provides good opportunities for relationships to be developed, between children and intergenerational relationships; where children's contributions are respected and accepted (Payne,2016:20). There is a wealth of diversity, where all 'children, like adults, are fundamentally children of God' (Westerhoff,1980:17).

Stay and plays, or toddler groups, provided by churches, recognise a need within society, and communicate to the community that the families who attend are worth building relationships with, they are worth serving, and they have the potential to communicate that God finds them worthy of relationship too. It is important for churches to value stay and play groups, and invest in them, invite them into the church community, and take the opportunity to spread the gospel.

Similarly, while the Kidz Klub model may not fully represent church, placing value upon those children, volunteers and event, the church communicates to children that they are valuable. It provides opportunities for faith to grow and relationships with entire families to develop. There are elements of these groups, or fresh expressions of church, which communicate value to children: investing in intergenerational relationships; encouraging children to serve and contribute; listening to and making the effort for children. In order for the church to communicate value to children, we must integrate these values into each service or activity we embark on.

Overall, while this is a limited study, and each church is different in terms of resources, style and congregation, there are prominent themes from my research which I believe will assist the church in demonstrating value to children. Fundamental to this, is investing in relationships; learning children's



names, listening to them and recognising their strengths and contribution to the church. Making the effort to try to include all children, whatever their learning style or ability, and recognising the importance of family events; all communicate a strong message of love and worth.

Word Count: 10986

# Appendices

## Appendix 1- Definition of a Fresh Expression

Fresh Expressions are keen to communicate that not all clubs or new ideas should be described as a Fresh Expression, but that those which are, get the support and understanding necessary (<https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>).

The given definition is: “Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily to those who don’t ‘go to church’” (<https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>). They clarify that a fresh expression of church, is a new idea, which has a separate identity to the local church. Fresh Expressions are aimed at those who don’t go to church, and hope to walk alongside them on their own faith journey (<https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>).

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Richards (2013), *Children in the Bible*, London: SPCK

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Wright, Budiardjo and Yewangoe and friends (2003), in Miles and Wright (eds), *Celebrating Children*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press

# Ethical Clearance

## RESEARCH ETHICS

### Full Ethical Review Form



- Full ethical review must be used for research involving above minimal risk and therefore necessitating a more thorough ethical review prior to approval.
- Further guidance on projects which involve above minimal risk is provided within the University's Ethical Review Policy.
- Relevant professional body ethical guidelines should be consulted when completing this form.
- Please seek guidance from the Chair of your Faculty Research Ethics Committee if you are uncertain about any ethical issues arising from this application.
- There is an obligation on the researcher and supervisor (if applicable) to bring to the attention of the Faculty Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not identified by this form.

### PART A: TO BE COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

Name of Researcher:	Melody Rachel Pearson
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Student/Course Details (If Applicable)			
Student ID Number:	15029138		
Name of Supervisor(s)/Module Tutor:	Ruth Hassall/ Dr Sally Nash		
PhD/MPhil project:	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Taught Postgraduate Project/Assignment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Award Title:	BA (Hons) Children and Family Work and Practical Theology
Undergraduate Project/Assignment:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Module Title:	Dissertation

Project Title:	See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God?		
Expected Start Date:	December 2017	Expected End Date:	10/04/18

Application Checklist			
Have the following documents been supplied alongside this application?	Yes	N/A	
Participant information sheet(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Participant consent form(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Letter/s of invitation to participants in language appropriate to the recipient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Questionnaires (only attach questionnaires that have NOT been validated previously)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Health related projects only: Letters giving permission for access to participants or confirming that full LREC ethical approval is not required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other relevant information (e.g. tests or product information)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>Submission Guidance (for completion by Faculty):</b>

<h2>1. Project Outline</h2> <p>Please provide a brief paragraph indicating answers to the following questions where relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) The aims and objectives of the project.</li> <li>ii) Its rationale and justification.</li> <li>iii) The research question or specific hypotheses to be tested.</li> <li>iv) The background to the project.</li> <li>v) Where the research is to be carried out.</li> <li>vi) Names of other individuals or organisations involved in the project.</li> <li>vii) Whether other approvals have been gained or are to be sought.</li> </ul> <p>The aim of this study is to discern how churches can communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God. Having conducted a small-scale pilot study on the topic the extent to which the church value children, the results suggested that most churches understand children’s theological value, but do not always practically demonstrate that. This study therefore, would be an aid to those churches who desire to value children, but need some practical guidance. There appears to be a recent rise in the number of theologians recognising the role of children, with theologians such as Bunge advocating the importance of a theology of the child (2008:xv). In correlation with this, I believe there is a call for a practical assessment of how the church can live this out.</p> <p>Willmer and White’s <i>Entry Point</i>, initially highlighted the importance of this particular verse in Matthew 18v10; which has shaped their child theology, and in turn influenced my own viewpoint (2013:11-17). I believe that this verse is essential to demonstrating to the church the theological backing behind the move to communicate to children their value- and to see what value they have in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, this study aims to suggest how Matthew 18v1-14 can be lived out in church.</p> <p>While there are certain sources to suggest ways in which this is possible, such as <i>Messy Church</i> (Bayes, 2013:96-100), I would seek to listen to children themselves, and a wide range of children’s practitioners to see how we could integrate this theology throughout the life and community of the church.</p> <p>I will be conducting this research with children and children’s workers who go to church, and so are aware of the setting and can then look to how it can be changed or adapted to communicate to children their value. I aim to conduct research with people who have a wide breadth of knowledge and experience of working with children, in order to obtain valid and insightful results.</p> <p>Bayes (2013), “Chapter 5: Messy Theology”, in Lings (eds), <i>Messy Church Theology</i>, Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship</p> <p>Bunge, “Introduction”, in Bunge (eds) (2008), <i>The Child in the Bible</i>, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans</p> <p>Willmer, White (2013), <i>Entry Point</i>, London: WLT Publications</p>
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<h2>2. Research Procedure</h2> <p>Please provide a summary of the procedures that will be followed when carrying out the research project under the following headings.</p>
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a) The design of the project (including, where appropriate, issues of statistical power):

I will be carrying out a research study using qualitative data, in order to gather data on a number of different ways in which churches can demonstrate the biblical value they place on children.

I will facilitate at least 5 focus groups; one pre-existing groups, and three constructed groups, two of which the participants already know each other, and two where the participants are strangers. I plan on facilitating one focus group for children.

I plan to ask the focus groups their initial thoughts on the question, followed by a number of other questions which unpack the original question, in order to fully understand their thoughts. I will use different coloured post-it notes for each question, and will ask each participant to use the same coloured pen throughout. The focus groups will also be audio recorded, so the post-it notes are there for those who prefer to write down their thoughts. The focus groups will last no longer than an hour and a half.

I will conduct a semi-structured interview with someone from each focus group (a nested sample), where they will have the opportunity to build upon their responses from the focus group (APPENDIX 5).

I will also conduct interviews with someone from each focus group conducted within my research module, and a number of specialists in this field (APPENDIX 6). These interviews with adults will last no longer than an hour.

I plan to conduct interviews with children, both one-to-one interviews, and group interviews with other children (APPENDIX). These interviews will last no longer than 30 minutes.

Research will be tested by asking the initial participants to complete feedback forms or give oral feedback. This will help inform my further research methods.

b) The procedures to be followed:

All participants will be required to read an information sheet (APPENDIX 1,2,3) in advance of the interview or focus group, and have completed the relevant consent form (APPENDIX 1,2,3).

All of the focus groups and interviews will be arranged beforehand for a suitable time and place, in a neutral environment welcoming to all parties. At least two of the focus groups will take place at Elmdon Church, with one pre-constructed group which will be at their regular meeting place, and another meeting at St John's School of Mission. The children's focus groups may also take place in a different place, such as their homes or somewhere where they meet regularly and feel comfortable.

All children will have given oral and written consent from themselves and their parents, before any involvement.

I will outline that any participant can leave at any time and can withdraw their data.

All data collected will be analysed and conclusions made will be outlined in my dissertation.

c) The participation of subjects in the project:

Each focus group will have between 4-12 participants.

The adults chosen for these groups, will be church-goers with experience and knowledge in children's work, in order to gather helpful and appropriate data.

One of the focus groups will be for children from within church. The parents will also have the option to be present for this.

I plan to interview specialists in the field of children's work and children's work practitioners, who will be able to give me informed and relevant data.

I plan to interview children, in both one-to-one interviews (where the parents can choose to be present), and group interviews. Where interviews are carried out with children without a parent or guardian present these will be done at a place where there are people in the building and the door to the room left open. They will be with children who go to church and are able to tell me what does and doesn't make them feel valued.

I plan to conduct up to 5 focus groups and 15 interviews.

d) How the design of the project and the procedures followed are likely to assess the research question or test the hypothesis in question or establish some significant result:

Each focus group and interview will provide me with qualitative data, which can be summarised and analysed.

Both sets of data will be combined to draw conclusions as to how churches can show value to children.

The data will be representative of both children and children's workers with a wide breadth of knowledge and experience, and therefore give the most valid and helpful conclusions.



e) Availability of facilities/resources/equipment to enable the project to be carried out:

Manually collected data from the interviews and focus groups will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Electronic data will be typed and stored on a password protected laptop.

I will choose an appropriate location and space for all of my focus groups and interviews, which are welcoming and accessible for all participants. The majority of the focus groups will be held in Elmdon Church, where I work, other venues for formed focus groups and child focus groups will be chosen appropriately.

f) Procedures that will be followed if any adverse event occurs:

While it is unlikely that the study would cause any adverse effects, they are directed towards appropriate pastoral support in the information sheet, which will be edited depending on the participant's setting. If I am aware of this, I will personally direct them towards the support that they need. The information sheets also guide participants towards my module supervisor, who can give appropriate advice, and participants can talk to if they are unhappy with the process.

The organisation's procedures will be followed in the event of a fire or other emergency.

### 3. Participant Recruitment & Characteristics

Please provide clear information regarding the recruitment of participating subjects and their appropriateness to the project:

*(NB: Student researchers must also ascertain from their Supervisor whether or not they require a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in order to enable this project to proceed. If this is the case the application must make clear whether or not it has been undertaken. Any data collection or other activities requiring this clearance must not begin until it has been obtained.)*

a) The number of subjects involved in the study (including the adequacy of the sample size for both qualitative and quantitative research):

I will conduct at least 5 focus groups of between 4-12 participants: 20-60 participants in total. 5 of these participants will also be interviewed following the focus groups.

I also intent to interview 10 other people, a combination of adults and children.

I will be recording all of this data for qualitative research, as the majority of those involved are experts in this field, and will have a lot of useful data to form my conclusions. The data collected from the experts will help to form the basis of the more specific questions for the children.

b) How participants will be identified, approached or recruited:

I will be using a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling (Bryman, 2001: 84-104). I initially ask a number of children and practitioners that I know to be involved, but may ask those within certain leadership positions whether they know anyone else appropriate to either be involved a focus group or to be interviewed.

Bryman (2001), *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

c) Whether there are any inclusion or exclusion criteria, together with their justification:

It would be most helpful for this question, for those who are involved, to be church-goers, as they would be able to give first hand experience of what does or does not communicate worth or value to children within the church setting. For the adults involved, it would be most appropriate and helpful, if they had experience and knowledge of working with children and families.

d) The age range of subjects; the gender balance of subjects; and the subjects' state of health:

Participants will be aged 5 upwards, with an ideal of a balance of gender. The participants' health will not have an effect on the research.

<p>e) Whether there is any inducement to participate in the study:</p> <p>There will be no reward offered for taking part in the research project.</p>
<p>f) How participants will be informed about the right to withdraw from participation the study (and whether time limits will be established during which a participant can request for their data to be withdrawn from the study):</p> <p>Participants will be informed verbally and via the information sheet they must sign prior to taking part, of their right to withdraw. They will have the right to withdraw their data until 1<sup>st</sup> March.</p>
<p>g) Whether the project involves any special groups requiring some additional justification or permission (e.g. children and young people under 18 years of age, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, patients, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking), or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship):</p> <p>The project involves research with children as well as adults. I will ask both the children and their parents to sign a consent form to confirm their willingness to take part in the study.</p>
<p>h) Will informed consent be obtained from research participants?      Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>      No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please give details of who will obtain content and how this will be undertaken.</p> <p>Consent forms will be attached to the information sheet. These will be given out in advance of the research and returned in order for the participants' responses to be included in the research.</p>

<h4>4. Information and Data</h4> <p>Please provide answers to the following questions regarding the handling and storage of information and data:</p>
<p>a) How will research data be stored (manually or electronically)?</p> <p>Focus group and interview research data will be gathered manually and recorded electronically. The manual copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The electronic data will be stored on a password protected laptop. The questionnaires will be gathered manually and kept in a locked filing cabinet.</p>
<p>b) How is protection given to the subject (e.g. by being made anonymous through coding and with a subject identifier code being kept separately and securely)?</p> <p>All participants will remain anonymous by the use of a pseudonym, with a subject identifier which will be stored separately on password protected laptop for my personal benefit. Any churches or organisations referred to will also be kept anonymous.</p>
<p>c) What assurance will be given to the subject about the confidentiality of this data and the security of its storage?</p> <p>My information sheets will explain confidentiality and anonymity, which I will also explain in person at the beginning of interviews or focus groups. This will include details of data security and protection.</p>
<p>d) Is assurance given to the subject that they cannot be identified from any publication or dissemination of the results of the project?</p> <p>Confidentiality and anonymity extends to vague descriptions of people, churches, or organisations involved or referred to during any research. The information sheet also informs participants that the research may be included in my dissertation and other printed or online publications. The consent form allows the participants to consent to this.</p>

e) Who will have access to this data, and for what purposes?

My dissertation supervisor may be given access to some of this data for the purpose of verifying conclusions only.

f) How will the data be stored, for how long, and how will it be discarded?

Manually collected data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected laptop. All data will be deleted from the laptop, or paper copies shredded, after being stored for a maximum of 12 months.

## 5. Risk, Harm and Other Ethical Considerations

Please provide an estimate of the perceived benefits or outcomes of the project weighed against the possible harms caused to the participating subject.

Please identify any potential risks or hazards that might be caused to subjects or the researcher, in addition to any discomfort, distress or inconvenience to them, together with any ethical problems or considerations that the researcher considers to be important or difficult in the proposed project.

It is unlikely that this study would cause any adverse effects. However, it is imperative that to read assent and dissent in children's verbal and non-verbal communication, in order to ensure that the children are comfortable and consent to being involved in the research. Children will always have the option of having their parents/guardians with them in any interview.

Taking part in this study may help children's practitioners and adults involved in the study, to consider their role in valuing children in the church, and reflect on their own church.

The research will benefit churches which desire to value children, but are unsure what that may practically look like in their church. Therefore, this study will benefit many in the long term.

There is a small possibility, as we all have different trigger issues, that there may be something in discussion that trigger issues for children or adults. This may also lead to a disclosure.

It is important that I am aware of my own influences on results, and that I actively remain neutral, so that all participants remain comfortable and honest.

Please explain how any potential risks or hazards will be dealt with, along with any justificatory statements. This information should highlight any remaining ethical considerations and to respond to them in a way which may assist the Research Ethics Committee in arriving at some judgement upon the proposal.

While the likelihood of any risks or hazards are low, as a researcher, I am intruding into participant's lives 'and hence.. have the utmost responsibility to safeguard their health and wellbeing' (Liamputtong, 2011: 29). Should any issues arise from my focus groups or interviews, participants will be encouraged to seek appropriate pastoral support. This information is provided on the information sheets, though I will also be able to directly take them to the appropriate pastoral care, which may be their pastor if they are in a church setting, or may be their children's worker or parents/guardians if they are a child.

If any participants have any issues with myself or with the way that I have conducted the research, they are able to contact my module supervisor, the details of which are given on their information sheets.

In the case of any disclosures, as outlined within the information sheet, while the research is otherwise confidential if there is any information I feel imperative to share with the relevant safeguarding officers or organisations, then I will be obliged to do so. This will be done in cases where the adult or child is at risk of harm themselves, or to others.

All participants will be entitled to informed consent and voluntary participation, with the option to opt-out clearly available to all adults and children involved. They will be reminded of this at the beginning and end of each focus group and interview. The parents and carers of the children involved will also be made aware of this in both written

and verbal formats. No participant is obliged to answer all of the questions or take part in any or all activities they do not wish to, or feel comfortable doing so. This in turn, will safeguard the participants' autonomy. I will protect the participants' privacy throughout the research, both with the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of the research, and by informing them of their choice to give only as much information as they choose to.

I will also be aware of protecting the data collected from my own influence, by keeping a certain neutrality in my responses and the questions that I ask in the focus groups and interviews. I will use active listening, and the outcomes from one focus group or interview may affect the questions asked in the following ones. All of the research I will conduct involves very open questions, which should protect against any bias. My role within focus groups will simply be as the 'moderator', observing the group interaction and keeping it focused on the topic (Krueger in Liamputtong, 2011: 47). Those within the focus groups who have more to say on the topic, are able to have a one-to-one interview with me to further discuss it.


Liamputtong (2011), *Focus Group Methodology*, London: SAGE

## 6. Supporting Information

Please attach the consent form, information sheet, and questionnaire/interview questions to this application. Further guidance on the design and content of consent forms and information sheets can be found on the University's Research Ethics website.

### Researcher Declaration

I undertake to carry out the project described above in accordance with ethical principles. I have completed the application in good faith. I accept that providing false information constitutes scientific fraud and will be subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures.

Signature of Researcher:		Date:	21/11/2017
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**NB:** Any departure from the protocol for this research project may mean that the ethical approval decision made by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee is no longer valid and a new ethics proposal will have to be submitted. It is the responsibility of a student researcher to discuss proposed changes to the agreed protocol with their project supervisor as soon as possible so that a revised /new ethics application can be submitted. Research based on any revised / new protocol **MUST** not proceed unless and until the protocol has ethical approval.

### STUDENT RESEACHER: NEXT STEP

- **COMPLETE AND SAVE THIS FORM IN THE FOLLOWING FORMAT FOR THE FILE NAME**
  - **FAMILY NAME FIRST NAME, STUDENT, DISCLAIMER E.G. WHIZZ BILLY STUDENT DISCLAIMER**
- **E-MAIL IT AS A WORD ATTACHMENT, ALONG WITH ANY RELEVANT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, USING THE FILE NAME AS THE SUBJECT [IN THE SUBJECT BAR OF THE E-MAIL] TO YOUR SUPERVISOR.**

**\*THERE IS NO NEED TO PRINT THIS FORM\***

### STAFF RESEACHER: NEXT STEP

PLEASE FORWARD THIS FORM TO FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE [ethics-FACT@staffs.ac.uk] WHO WILL ARRANGE FOR IT TO BE CONSIDERED BY AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

\*THERE IS NO NEED TO PRINT THIS FORM\*

**PART B: TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR (If Applicable)**

I have examined this proposal and confirm that the rationale and methodology is appropriate and that it can proceed to the stage of ethical consideration.	Y <input type="checkbox"/>
I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire and interview schedule).	Y <input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of Supervisor:	<i>Ruth Hasall</i>	Date:	23/11/17
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**SUPERVISOR: NEXT STEP**

- READ AND CHECK WHEN RECEIVED FROM THE STUDENT; IF SATISFIED ADD YOUR NAME AND DATE WHERE INDICATED
- SAVE AND SEND AS A WORD ATTACHMENT BY E-MAIL, USING THE FILE NAME AS THE SUBJECT [IN THE SUBJECT BAR OF THE E-MAIL] TO [ethics-FACT@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:ethics-FACT@staffs.ac.uk)

\*THERE IS NO NEED TO PRINT THIS FORM\*

**PART C: TO BE COMPLETED BY CHAIR OF FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

This research proposal has been considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and <b>RECEIVED</b> ethical approval.	<input type="checkbox"/>
This research proposal has been considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and was <b>REFUSED</b> ethical approval on grounds detailed below:	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Children's Participation Information Sheet

We want to find out how the church can care for children and show them how valuable they are to God.

What will you need to do?

If you would like to take part, we would just like to ask you a few questions, either on your own or in a group. It shouldn't take long!

What if you change your mind about taking part?

If this happens, don't worry, you don't have to take part. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to. You can also ask us to throw away any answers if you don't want us to keep them.

Who can you talk to about this project?

You can contact Melody Pearson, who is researching this topic for her degree.

Email: [melrachover@gmail.com](mailto:melrachover@gmail.com)

Could anything bad happen?

Sometimes, if you get asked questions about something that upsets you, you might feel unhappy. If this happens you can stop answering questions and I can take you to someone you can trust.

What will happen to your answers?

I will keep your answers to your interview in a safe place. I won't use your name, and I won't share your answers with your name unless I am worried about you. You will be able to read what I have written down and can ask us not to use it if you want.

When I have finished asking lots of people questions, hopefully the church will be able to show children their true value.

What happens if you want to take part?

If you want to take part, you need to tick the answers to the questions below. If you are happy, your parent or carer will need to read some more information and sign some paper agreeing to it.

## Child's Consent Form

When you have read everything. Answer the questions below:

-Have you read the information?

Yes

No

-Did you understand it, or ask for help if you didn't?

Yes

No

-Do you know that you can change your mind at any time?

Yes

No

-Is it okay for us to tell other people about your answers, without telling them who you are?

Yes

No

-Do you know that you do not have to answer questions if you don't want to?

Yes

No

-Do you want to take part?

Yes

No





## Participant Information for Parents

My name is Melody Pearson, I work as the Children and Family Worker at Elmdon Church, “The Church in the Park”, and am currently completing my third year of study for my degree with the Institute for Children Youth and Mission (CYM).

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study that will form part of my dissertation for a BA(Hons) in Children and Family Work and Practical Theology with CYM at Staffordshire University. Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, it is important that you read the following information carefully.

The purpose of the study:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

I am seeking to recruit several children and children’s workers, from different church traditions, to take part in the study. It is up to you and your child to decide whether or not your child can take part. If you both decide that your child can take part, you can keep this information sheet, and will be asked to complete the attached consent form. If you and your child do decide to take part, you or your child will be free to withdraw their information at any time and without giving any reason, up until 1<sup>st</sup> March. If your child does take part, they will be given appropriate anonymity, and their name and church will not be disclosed. You will also have the option of being present during any research your child takes part in.

Taking part in this study, would include answering a number of questions. Your child need only answer the questions they feel comfortable answering. If being involved in this process brings up negative emotions and memories and your child would like someone to talk with them to help them process what has arisen, I can refer you both to an appropriate source of pastoral care.

The benefits of taking part are exploring reflective practice, and helping children to realise their value. In the long term, this may also help churches to be able to practically show children their Biblical value.

Information that they contribute to the study will be kept securely on a password protected computer and in a secure location in my study. The data generated will be used in my assignment

and my dissertation. Participants will be given pseudonyms and there will be no material used that could identify those who have taken part.

If you require further information, please contact me.

If you have concerns about the way in which the study is conducted the contact my supervisor- Dr. Sally Nash at [s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk](mailto:s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk).

If you would like your child to take part in the study then please complete and return the attached consent form.

Blessings,

Melody Pearson

[melrachover@gmail.com](mailto:melrachover@gmail.com)

07531235256

## Parent's Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title of Study: See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

Researcher: Melody Pearson

Thank you for agreeing for your child to take part in this research project detailed on the Information Sheet. If you still have questions regarding this study, then please clarify them with me before you decide whether to participate. You will have a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I understand that my child's identity will be kept anonymous in this assignment and dissertation, and any related publications.
- I have understood the Information Sheet
- I understand that my child can withdraw from this project at any time by notifying Melody
- I consent to the processing of my child's personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998

Participant's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_

Agree for my child to take part in this research study, which has been fully explained to me. I have read the Information Sheet and the entirety of the consent form. I understand what the study involves.

Signed:

Date:

### APPENDIX 3- Adult Focus Group Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form



## Participant Information Sheet Focus Groups

My name is Melody Pearson, I work as the Children and Family Worker at Elmdon Church, “The Church in the Park”, and am currently completing my third year of study for my degree with the Institute for Children Youth and Mission (CYM).

You are being invited to take part in a research study that will form part of my dissertation for a BA(Hons) in Children and Family Work and Practical Theology with CYM at Staffordshire University. Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, it is important that you read the following information carefully.

The purpose of the study:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

I am seeking to recruit several children, and children’s practitioners and those with experience working with children, from different church traditions, to take part in the study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can keep this information sheet, and will be asked to complete the attached consent form. If you do decide to take part, you will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason, up until 1<sup>st</sup> March. If you do take part, you will be given appropriate anonymity, and your name and church will not be disclosed.

I am seeking to recruit people to take part in focus groups to explore my research topic. You need only answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. The focus group will involve spending at least 30 minutes with up to 8 other people, responding to and discussing different questions surrounding the value of children within the church. The session will be audio recorded. If you do decide to take part, you are free to not join in with any of the activities and leave at any time during the session.

If being involved in this process brings up negative emotions and memories and you would like someone to talk with you to help you process what has arisen, I can refer you to an appropriate source of pastoral care.

The benefits of taking part are exploring reflective practice, and reflecting on how you value children within the church and how the church could reflect the Biblical value of children.

Information that you contribute to the study will be kept securely on a password protected computer and in a secure location in my study. The data generated will be used in my assignment and my dissertation. Participants will be given pseudonyms and there will be no material used that could identify those who have taken part.

If you require further information, please contact me.

If you have concerns about the way in which the study is conducted the contact my supervisor- Dr. Sally Nash at [s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk](mailto:s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk).

If you would like to take part in the study then please complete and return the attached consent form.

Blessings,

Melody Pearson

[melrachover@gmail.com](mailto:melrachover@gmail.com)

07531235256

## Focus Group Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title of Study: See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

Researcher: Melody Pearson

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project detailed on the Information Sheet. If you still have questions regarding this study, then please clarify them with me before you decide whether to participate. You will have a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous in this assignment and dissertation, and any related publications.

- I agree to the session being audio recorded
- I have understood the Information Sheet
- I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time by notifying Melody
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998

Participant's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_

Agree to take part in this research study, which has been fully explained to me. I have read the Information Sheet and the entirety of the consent form. I understand what the study involves.

Signed:

#### APPENDIX 4- Adult Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



### Participant Information Sheet

My name is Melody Pearson, I work as the Children and Family Worker at Elmdon Church, "The Church in the Park", and am currently completing my third year of study for my degree with the Institute for Children Youth and Mission (CYM).

You are being invited to take part in a research study that will form part of my dissertation for a BA(Hons) in Children and Family Work and Practical Theology with CYM at Staffordshire University. Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, it is important that you read the following information carefully.

The purpose of the study:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

I am seeking to recruit several church attending children's workers, parents and children, from different church traditions, to take part in the study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can keep this information sheet, and will be asked to complete the attached consent form. If you do decide to take part, you will be free to withdraw at

any time and without giving any reason, up until 1<sup>st</sup> March for my dissertation. If you do take part, you will be given appropriate anonymity, and your name and church will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study, would include answering a number of questions. You need only answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. If being involved in this process brings up negative emotions and memories and you would like someone to talk with you to help you process what has arisen, I can refer you to an appropriate source of pastoral care.

The benefits of taking part are exploring reflective practice, and reflecting on how you value children within the church and how the church could reflect the Biblical value of children.

Information that you contribute to the study will be kept securely on a password protected computer and in a secure location in my study. The data generated will be used in my assignment and my dissertation. Participants will be given pseudonyms and there will be no material used that could identify those who have taken part.

If you require further information, please contact me.

If you have concerns about the way in which the study is conducted the contact my supervisor- Dr. Sally Nash at [s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk](mailto:s.nash@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk).

If you would like to take part in the study then please complete and return the attached consent form.

Blessings,

Melody Pearson

[melrachover@gmail.com](mailto:melrachover@gmail.com)

07531235256

## Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title of Study: See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project detailed on the Information Sheet. If you still have questions regarding this study, then please clarify them with me before you decide whether to participate. You will have a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous in this assignment and dissertation, and any related publications.
- I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time by notifying Melody
- I have understood the Information Sheet
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998

Participant's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_

Agree to take part in this research study, which has been fully explained to me. I have read the Information Sheet and the entirety of the consent form. I understand what the study involves.

Signed:

Date:

#### **APPENDIX 5- Adult Interview Questions**

My interviews will be mostly in the form of an semi-structured, thus, while I have the following questions available, the majority of the interview will be led by the responses of the participants, which will influence the questions that I ask.

- How do you think churches could communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God?
- What do you think are the most effective ways to communicate to children their value?
- Where have you seen children valued most in the church?
  - o What areas are the church good at?
  - o What practices in certain churches have you been impressed by?
- In what ways have you seen churches fail to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God?
  - o What is the most detrimental practice/failing?
  - o What is the most common failing/gap?
- What do you think is the most important practice to maintain in order to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God?
- What do you think is the most important aspect of a child's value for the church to communicate? – and how can this be done/how isn't it done?

#### **APPENDIX 6- Adult Focus Group Plan**

Write the answers on a different colour post it and stick onto a big piece of paper with the main question on. A guided discussion on each question will follow with a time for each participant to explain their answers if they want to.

If it is an unformed group, use a quick ice breaker at the beginning.

At the beginning and end, reiterate their right to withdraw their data, or to leave any questions unanswered, or to leave at any time.

- See that you do not despise one of these little ones: how can churches communicate to children the value they have in the Kingdom of God?
  - Initial reactions to the above question on first post it. Followed by group discussion
  - What do you think are the most effective ways to communicate to children their value?
  - Where have you seen children valued the most in church?
  - In what ways have you seen churches fail to communicate to children their value in the Kingdom of God?
  - Rank the following in importance of communicating value and explain in discussion/in writing:
    - Use of space
    - Use of resources
    - Use of material
    - Choice of leaders
    - Intergenerational relationships
    - Integration into community
    - Opportunities to grow and serve
    - Amount of effort put into their resources
    - Relevance of All Age material to children
    - Relationships with leaders
  - What do you believe is the most important aspect of a child's value in the Kingdom of Heaven?
  - How can this be communicated in church?



**APPENDIX 7- Copy of my DBS**



STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL



0000043336012106010100

0 12 106  
MELODY PEARSON  
FIELD VIEW 30 MAIN ROAD  
BIRMINGHAM  
LE14 2DU

# Enhanced Certificate

Page 1 of 2



**DBS Fee Charged** Certificate Number 001532495418 Date of Issue: 07 JUNE 2016

## Applicant Personal Details

Surname: PEARSON  
 Forename(s): MELODY  
 Other Names: OVERTON, MELODY  
 Date of Birth: 11 DECEMBER 1996  
 Place of Birth: BIRMINGHAM  
 Gender: FEMALE  
 Registered Person/Body: OCPAS  
 Countersignatory: JOHN ATKINS

## Employment Details

Position applied for: STUDENT PLACEMENT PLAY WORKER - CHILD WORKFORCE  
 Name of Employer: ST GABRIEL WEOLEY CASTLE

## Countersignatory Details

**Police Records of Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings**  
NONE RECORDED

**Information from the list held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002**  
NONE RECORDED

**DBS Children's Barred List information**  
NONE RECORDED

**DBS Adults' Barred List information**



# Enhanced Certificate

Page 1 of 2



Disclosure &  
Barring Service

**DBS Fee Charged****Certificate Number**

001532495418

**Date of Issue:**

07 JUNE 2016

**Applicant Personal Details**

Surname: PEARSON  
Forename(s): MELODY  
Other Names: OVERTON, MELODY  
OVERTON, MELODY  
Date of Birth: 11 DECEMBER 1996  
Place of Birth: BIRMINGHAM  
Gender: FEMALE

**Employment Details**

Position applied for:  
STUDENT PLACEMENT PLAY WORKER - CHILD WORKFORCE  
Name of Employer:  
ST GABRIEL WEOLEY CASTLE

**Countersignatory Details**

Registered Person/Body:  
CCPAS  
Countersignatory:  
JOHN ATKINS

**Police Records of Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings**

NONE RECORDED

**Information from the list held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002**

NONE RECORDED

**DBS Children's Barred List information**

NONE RECORDED

**DBS Adults' Barred List information**

NOT REQUESTED

**Other relevant information disclosed at the Chief Police Officer(s) discretion**

NONE RECORDED

**Enhanced Certificate**

This document is an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate within the meaning of sections 113B and 116 of the Police Act 1997.

THIS CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY

033 Disclosure and Barring Service, PO Box 165, Liverpool, L69 3JD Helpline: 03000 200 190

Continued on page 2

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## Ethical clearance



Inbox x

 Gill Benson <g.benson@stjohns-notm.ac.uk>  
to me ▾

13/12/2017 

Hi Melody


We have heard from Staffordshire University your **Ethical Clearance** has been approved subject to:

1. clarification that for the interviews that the option for parents to be present during the interviews is given to the parents i.e. it is not the child to make that decision;
2. clarification of where the focus groups and interviews will be taking place and that the venues for these are safe and appropriate.

The student meeting these conditions can be signed off by the supervisor – the form doesn't need to come back through the **ethical** approval process.

Blessings

**Gill Benson**

Midlands CYM Administrator  
St John's School of Mission  
Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS  
 0115 9683222  
 [mcym@stjohns-notm.ac.uk](mailto:mcym@stjohns-notm.ac.uk)

Find out about Midlands Institute for Children, Youth and Mission courses! Just go to [Youth Ministry Courses](#)