**‘Little Seeds’ Policy and Guidance Document**

**‘Little Seeds’ Resource**

Research has shown that many families who have attended a church-based baby/toddler group have an expectation that the church will include in the programme something about the Christian faith. By not talking about our faith, we are not fulfilling these families’ expectations.

Research also shows that some toddler group leaders feel anxious about how to share their faith within their toddler group settings and are unsure where to start. Toddler groups are very busy environments and can require a lot of planning and preparation; we, therefore, have designed this resource to aid in that task.

This project has arisen from a need to help toddler group leaders be more intentional as church-based groups, enabling them to share the love of Jesus Christ with their community. The resource is also a tool to help leaders in their planning of under 5’s ministry.

To disciple families, we all need to go out amongst our families and practice our faith. Through these sessions the teachings of Christ are shared with the children and their parents/carers.

**The Aim of the resource**

The resource has been created to equip churches to lead intentional, Christian themed toddler groups.

The sessions are intended to help children and parents become more familiar with the teachings of Christ. It is important therefore that leaders and helpers know what the Christian theme is for the session and have talked about how it relates to the story book which is to be read during the session. It is also advisable that the team have discussed ideas for the further development of the Christian theme or story or activities.

**Purposes of the resource**

1. To equip toddler group leaders to share the love of Jesus Christ with the children and their families in a way that expresses how being a Christian affects your life.  By using a secular story to build a link between the Bible, the resource then picks out a Christian theme to focus on within the group session. In this way the leader is able to assist the families on their discipleship journey.

2. To enable families to see that God is everywhere, in everything and how faith affects the life of a Christian.

3. To encourage parents/carers to engage with their little ones through questions.

4. To encourage free play that links with the Christian theme.

5. To aid with the planning of Christian based toddler groups, as a whole group session or as a springboard for a leader’s own ideas.

**Assumptions**

For these resources it has been assumed that

1. the toddler group has been established in a church setting.

2. the church hosting the toddler group has an intentional under 5’s ministry.

3. for the toddler group there is at least one person ‘the leader’ who is responsible for the coordination and preparation of the activities for the group.

4. the leader has a Christian faith and is reasonably secure in the teachings of Christ so that they can answer questions.

5. the children’s story book (as indicated by the guidance sheet) is available for the session.

6. the parents/carers of the toddlers are present with the children and are taking part in the activities.

7. there are ‘helpers’ e.g. parents, carers, grandparents, who are willing to engage with their children during the free play and craft sessions and talk to them about the story and/or the Christian theme.

**Processes for the Parish**

This resource is free to use and available on the Diocese of Worcester website. It can be used to support toddler groups in the way that the leader and team deems appropriate. The leader can choose to use the whole resource or some parts of it depending on the group.

For each Christian theme there is a different secular children’s storybook and the resource sheet to support the session. The success of the resource is dependent on the story in the secular book being read out aloud to the children before the children carry out the activities.

This resource has been developed in coordination with the Your Baptism Journey resource therefore, if the Parish uses Your Baptism Journey the leader should be aware of the book that is being sent out each month as the books and themes are very similar. It may be a good idea for the toddler group leader to have the book sent to them by their Baptism coordinator or check the Diocese of Worcester website for that month’s book.

This resource can be used for one week or two as the guidance sheets provide enough material for more than one session. The story can be read at more than one session; using the same Christian theme for more than one session helps to reinforce the Christian message.

It is important for children and adults to realise that the sessions are not ‘stand alone’: that the children will be expected to go away from the session and ‘do something’ and that at the next session they will talk about what they did and how they felt.

**Introduction to the Resource sheets**

For each session: there is a story from a secular children’s storybook and there is a link to a Christian theme. The story from the book is read to the children near the beginning of the session. The leader then links this to the Christian theme. The activities support either the Christian theme or the story. It is important that all leaders and helpers who have contact with the children, understand which strand is being followed at the different stages throughout the session. Sometimes it will be the story from the book and at other times it will be the biblical Christian theme and sometimes it may be both (See free play suggestions).

This resource provides material for 45 sessions. The resource can be used weekly with a different storybook and different Christian theme being addressed. Alternatively, the materials can be used over two sessions and they will then provide enough material for 2 years.

**Resource sheets**

For each session a resource sheet has been provided. It is important that the leader and helpers are fully familiar with the guidance.

The resource sheet is set out in sections in boxes. Most of the sections are self-explanatory.

The boxes have a hierarchy of importance: the notes/suggestions in the boxes outlined in red are the most important and MUST be followed as they form the basis for the session.

Boxes outlined in yellow are recommended to be done and leaders should try to include the suggestions made whenever possible.

The notes and suggestions in the green boxes could be used if the leader wants to develop the theme further. As leaders know their groups well, they may have better ideas to use to develop the Christian theme.

**Book (Red)**

The book is read aloud to the children near the beginning of the session so that everyone knows the message and theme. Children often want to hear the story again and the leader can decide whether or not to do this.

If there is an asterisk beside the book name on the guidance sheet – this indicates that it is a long story and only a relevant part needs to be read. It is important that the leader has read the story prior to the session so that they can decide which part of this book to read. There is no need to read the whole book if it is marked with an asterisk.

At the beginning of the following session the leader will refer to the book read in the previous session and ask the children some questions (See Reflection on last week’s faith in action, with the families, What? How? Why?).

**Theme Introduction (Red)**

In this section (box) the Christian concept is identified and the reason the theme has been chosen.

**Theme Exploration (Red)**

In this section the Christian theme is identified and further expanded. The leader, having read the story to the children and parents/carers, explains the Christian theme which is part of the story. The words in this box can be read out to the group. The children can be given time to talk about the story and the Christian theme.

**Faith in Action (Red)**

To help the children (and parents/carers) learn what the Christian theme has been, they need to go out from the session with an idea of something they can do (with or without their parents/carers) to help them better understand the Christian message. Other ideas, generated by the team can also be used.

**Reflection on faith in action, with the families (Red)**

The questions in this section are used at the beginning of each session. They are designed to help the children and their families reflect on the previous week’s story and theme and the actions they were asked to do since the last session.Leaders are encouraged to ask the families what they did, how the activity made them feel and why that made a difference to them or someone else.From the feedback the leader can (hopefully) reinforce the Christian message of the book.

This session is a key part of the leader’s discipleship role. The leader will have previously shared Christ’s message and during this session will seek to further develop the child and parents’/carers’ thinking.Even if the parents/carers go away from the session and do nothing further, the leader has carried out the role of a disciple - giving the Christian message for the families to hear.

**Prayer time (Yellow)**

The prayer in this box is to be read out at the end of the session when the children have become familiar with the Christian theme. If the leaders have other appropriate prayers or can include the children and parents in offering their own ideas, then these can be used instead of the one provided.

**Free Play and craft suggestions (Yellow)**

The suggestions for free play and the craft activities have been chosen to support and develop either the Christian theme or the story in the book. For each section the link is stated: the link is either to the story or to the Christian theme.

During the session it is expected that the helpers – parents/carers, talk to the children and help them to see the link between the suggested activities and either the story or the Christian theme. Some questions have been suggested: these have a large green question mark close to them.

**Bible Reference (Green)**

This section gives details of passages in the Bible where the Christian message for this session is given. The leader could use these passages to further develop the theme.

**Snack time (Green)**

The foods and drinks which are suggested can be changed to suit the group setting or the story or the Christian theme. Try to have some foods which are mentioned in the story or can best exemplify the Christian theme.

**Songs (Green)**

The songs, musical instruments and linked activities that are suggested can be changed to suit the group setting or the story or the Christian theme. Try to have some songs with words that are mentioned in the story or which can best exemplify the Christian theme.

**Additional resources (Green)**

This box can contain information about further reading for the leaders and/or parents/carers about the Christian theme, other related stories which can be watched on YouTube and templates for the craft suggestions.

**We hope that you enjoy using this resource and find it useful in your ministry to the children and their families.**