

# CUT and Paste

A forum for sharing children's ministry ideas

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September 2002

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### We'd love to hear your ideas

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## Welcoming Our Children

### Take a Deep Breath

It's crazy time! Time to get everything ready for a new program year — time for planning, time for meetings, time for organizing. It's enough to make us forget about those summer holidays we just had!

In this issue, there is a review of Boyce A. Bowdon's book *The Child Friendly Church*. Apart from the ideas he has collected, his final chapter entitled "Leave the Miracles to God" really struck a chord with me. Too often in the busy-ness and high energy levels associated with our programs, we forget one essential thing — that God's spirit is very much a part of the equation. I wonder if, in our careful organization, we leave enough room for God to enter! At the same time, perhaps we are hard on ourselves, measuring our successes in concrete ways, not knowing how the spirit may move in a child's life.

Bowdon relates very simply the experiences and wisdom of a pastor in an inner-city congrega-

tion. "I keep reminding myself that I'm not responsible for miracles," says the pastor. "Miracles are God's department. All I'm responsible for is my own life and living it as a faithful disciple." Bowdon concludes by saying "Even though we may never see all the seeds that we plant take root and grow, most of them will produce abundantly some day, some where and some way. God works in and through us, using our encouraging words, our kind acts, and our supportive spirits to heal people and to help them experience inner peace and joy."

As we begin a new program year it is good to be reminded that we don't work alone. God is very much working alongside of us all, but often in surprising and unknown ways. We couldn't ask for a better companion!

So relax, take a deep breath and have a blessed September! ♦ CF

## Welcoming *Children With Special Needs*

Jesus' life was a living example of what it means to reach out to people in need. Regardless of their gender, financial or social status, ethnic background or state of health, He was a model of love and compassion. As followers of Christ, we are called to reach out to others with that same love and compassion.

We can begin in our own church communities as we minister to children in our congregations who might have special needs — whether of a physical, emotional or learning nature. Opening our doors and our hearts to such special individuals benefits everyone involved. The individual themselves have the chance to feel valued and cared for. The child's family receives much needed support and understanding. And, best of all, the whole congregation becomes more aware

of and comfortable with the needs of all of God's children which they can, in turn, extend into the whole community. In short, everybody wins!

*Find out more, starting on page 5*



## September Kick Off Ideas

**This program served to involve the congregation ... and made the children feel more comfortable in the service.**

### ***The Lord's Prayer Challenge***

*Elizabeth Chapman of St. George's, Georgetown, Ontario shares an excellent learning idea that has the added bonus of connecting the children with the older adults of her congregation:*

We implemented a program at our church, which was an idea put forward by one of the senior members of the congregation. It had come to her attention that the children were not able to say the Lord's Prayer when they came in for the Eucharist. What started as a suggestion that we teach the children the prayer turned into the *Lord's Prayer Challenge*.

This very active lady rallied her friends to contribute to a fund to provide the children with a small 'reward' for learning the prayer. Another gentleman found lovely little gold angels holding a tiny crystal with the prayer written inside.

We practiced every Sunday during the opening of Church School and then when the children were ready, they recited the prayer. The lovely lady who started this program became a new friend for the children and they searched her out each Sunday to tell her they were ready. One child even stopped her in a store!

Three times during the year we celebrated the children's accomplishments in the church and presented them with their angel. In all, 28 children met the challenge and we still have enough angels to continue the program again starting in September.

This program served to involve the congregation with the children's teaching and made the children feel more comfortable in the service. We were happy to honour our benefactor with a special presentation at the close of Church School in June.

### ***The Angel Bear***

*Lori Bryant of St. Mark's in Orangeville, Ontario writes:*

Last September I started a special little activity with the children. I purchased a little stuffed "Angel Bear" whom we named T.A.B. - short for Travelling Angel Bear. At gathering time, I pick someone to take T.A.B. home with them. He travels in a little bag with a notebook. The child shares his/her week with T.A.B. and records it in the book. The next week the child has the opportunity to share with the group T.A.B.'s adventures. T.A.B. enjoys listening to prayers or helping someone when they are sad. One little boy gave T.A.B. to their neighbour whose dog had just died. You can only imagine some of his adventures! It has been a hit at St. Mark's.

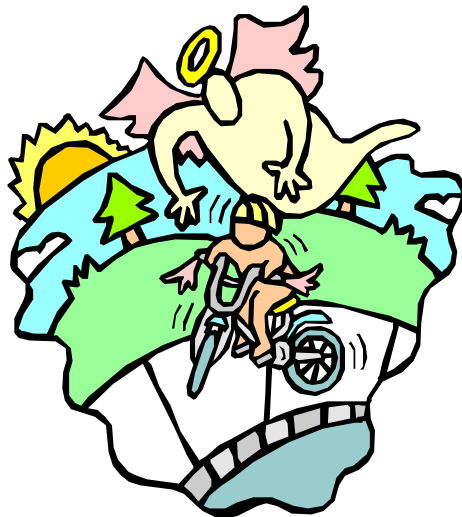
### ***Welcome Mat***

*Olivia Crowe of St. Philip's in Burlington, Ontario shares this idea for the first day back after the summer. It is an excellent way to affirm each child and remind them that they are special in God's eyes — and important to the group.*

This welcome mat idea is one that I adapted from *Youth* magazine and it went over well. Each student in turn stands on the Welcome Mat and you welcome them back, saying something like, "Sally, welcome. I am so happy that you are part of our little group again this year. You bring such a great sense of humour and imagination to our group. It is such a pleasure to be around you. Welcome". Or, "Joey, welcome. It is so great to have you with us again. You always seem to have such interesting stories to share and it's so much fun just being around you. Welcome." For children who are new to the group you could say "Chris, welcome. I am so happy to meet you. It's wonderful that you are going to be part of our group. It will be great to get to know you better and to learn about God together. Welcome."

The children seemed to really lap up the praise and compliments - who doesn't? And everyone seemed to enjoy the special recognition.

◇



## Family Friendly Churches

### **What's In A Name?**

THE TERMS WE USE IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY ARE CHALLENGED.

#### "Sunday School"

*Olivia Crowe of St. Philip's, Burlington writes:*  
At a children's ministry conference I attended last year, a suggestion was made to change the name from "church school" or "Sunday school" to something else. The rationale is that no child likes to go to school six days a week! Makes sense doesn't it? And so we are changing our church school this year to either "Kids Club" or "Sunday Club" — something a little more "user friendly" and appealing than "church school"!

#### "Teachers"

I also have thought a lot about the words we use at church. For example, I prefer to talk about children's ministry *leaders* rather than *teachers*. The word "teacher", again, sounds like school - and what child wants that on Sunday?! Rather, the focus in our children's ministry programs is, first, on creating an atmosphere where children and adults share time together, learn from one another and journey in faith together. The words *teacher*, *class* and *classroom* all portray an image of imparting knowledge in a 'top-down', 'teacher knows everything' way. And, at the very least, the word 'teacher' implies that the adult possesses a great deal of knowledge and can be stumbling block to recruiting future volunteers. CF

#### "Registration"

*Cy Pitman of St. John's Newfoundland* shared with us his thoughts about registration for Church school. He feels that for parents who are new to church, they hear the word 'registration' and immediately associate it with school and other mid-week groups. In the 'secular' world, if you miss registration time, then your children have to wait until the next year. He certainly didn't want parents to think that applies to church!

Cy reports that this year they are planning 'community gatherings' to reinforce to families in the neighbourhood that children are welcome to join church programs at any time at all. Their plan is to host two or three fun events spread over the calendar year, similar in structure to the vacation bible school model (VBS) with games, crafts, snacks and music, and advertise them with

flyers sent to every household in the area. Their vision is that the community will see the church as an exciting place for families to be and that curious families can 'register' any time at all!

What are your thoughts and ideas? Do words and names make a difference? How do you think families that are new to church interpret the words we use? What have you done to make your programs more accessible to families who are new church-goers? We'd all love to hear about it ...

### **Are You Family Friendly???**

Over the last several months I've had the privilege of being able to worship in a number of very different churches. One of the many benefits was the reminder of how important and lasting first impressions are! (You can probably imagine some of my experiences - negative and positive!)

As we prepare to welcome new families to our congregations this September it is good to think about the first impressions we might be making. Put yourself in the place of a new family with young children. How welcome are families made? If there is a children's program during worship how are they helped to join in? Is the routine that the children are to follow clear and well explained so the whole family knows what to expect, allowing them then to worship comfortably? Is the children's program space colourful and appealing? What about families who prefer that their children stay with them during the entire worship service? How are they made to feel? If there is nursery care is it somewhere that the parents will feel is safe and nurturing? Is it easy to find? Do the new parents receive a warm welcome?

Jesus reminded his disciples to "Let the children come unto me". Are we truly letting the children come to God? By our actions, spoken and especially unspoken, are we doing anything that may be putting up barriers that may be keeping them away?

Do an experiment this Sunday. Use your imagination and put yourself in the shoes of the very people who you're trying to welcome. You may discover a lot! ◇

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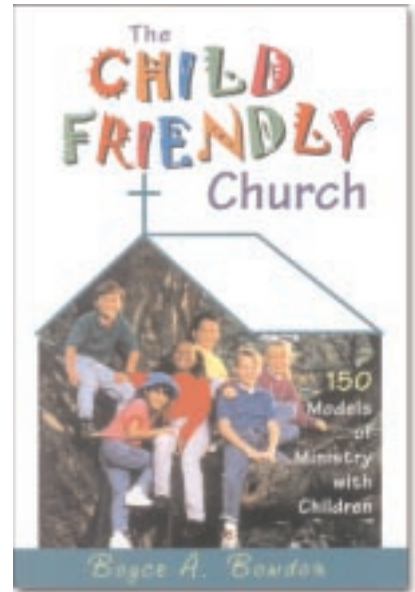
**Book Review**

**“The models of ministry to children that he illustrates are tested and true and certainly provide food for thought.”**

*The Child Friendly Church: 150 Models of Ministry with Children*, by Boyce A. Bowdon. Abingdon Press, 1999.

The concept behind this book is powerfully simple. The author writes about 38 congregations from his United Methodist denomination and, in doing so, identifies 150 ways to minister to children. The churches he describes represent urban and rural, large and small congregations. Many of the ideas may not be totally new to any of us and some would certainly not translate well into our Canadian church ‘scene’. However, the models of ministry to children that he illustrates are tested and true and certainly provide food for thought. I personally benefit from reading about other church’s programs and experiences and then modifying them to suit my own situation. It would be great to see a Canadian equivalent!

Bowdon concludes with a summary section entitled ‘Characteristics of a Child-Friendly



Church’. Not surprisingly, he emphasizes the need to be a congregation that, first, loves and respects children and, second, responds to children’s needs. It is affirming to see that in print! ♦ CF

We thank Lori Bryant of Orangeville, ON, Elizabeth Chapman of Georgetown, ON and Cy Pitman of St. John’s, NF — our first out-of-province contributor in a long time — for sharing their ideas this issue. A small gift from *Cut and Paste* is in the mail to each of them as a way of saying thank you.

What about YOU? What ideas would you like to share? What concerns about children’s ministry do you struggle with? Read a good book lately? Let us know! Any ideas, suggestions or questions will be most welcome! Jot your ideas down and send them by e-mail or fax.

No idea is too simple — no question is too foolish. Remember, we are here to help one another. So, go ahead and contribute to the discussion. If you do, a *Cut and Paste* surprise may find its way into your mail box! ♦ CF

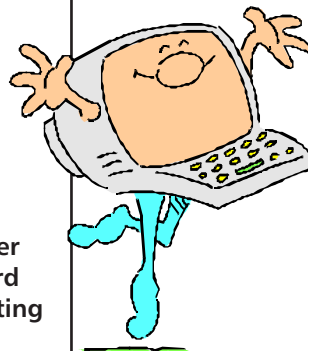
**SPECIAL THANKS!**

Special recognition goes to Olivia Crowe who has graciously offered to help with *Cut and Paste*, beginning with this issue. Her insights and terrific passion for children is invaluable?

**Read us on-line!!**

*Cut and Paste* is now available over the web through the Diocese of Niagara’s website at [www.niagara.anglican.ca](http://www.niagara.anglican.ca). Be sure to tell all of your children’s ministry leaders where to find us. Back copies of *Cut and Paste* can be seen there too! Print them off so you can share them with others.

People who subscribed to *Cut and Paste* before we got ‘wired’ will continue to receive a paper copy of this newsletter until their subscriptions run out. We can continue to mail hard copies to anyone, provided they contribute towards the printing and mailing costs.



# Children With Special Needs

There is no doubt that we all have special needs! We are all unique, we all have life circumstances that at times become difficult to manage. In short, we all are in need of TLC. If there is one place in our lives where that TLC should be available, shouldn't it be our church communities?

At a seminar about special needs children held several years ago, participants listed the following 'special needs' that each of us come with. The list is an excellent starting place as you discuss and ponder what it means to minister to each unique child of God that enters your place of worship.

What special needs do we each bring to church on Sunday morning?

- To learn about God
- To see a smiling face
- To be accepted for who we are
- To have fun together
- Fellowship
- To be consulted
- To feel included
- To see friends
- To make friends
- To have differences recognized and valued
- To be safe

When Jesus invited to children to come to Him and not be kept away, perhaps he had many of these same ideas in mind!

## **Children with Significant Special Needs: Some Practical Ideas**

Welcoming children who have significant special needs into our faith communities does need careful thought so that the experience will be positive for everyone involved. Here are some ideas to help you along the way ...

Speak with the child's parents to discover how you as a church family can best help them on Sunday mornings. After all, they know their child best!

Speak positively about how excited you are that their child will be participating, rather than dwelling on the practical obstacles.

Consider asking an older teenager to be the child's 'special friend'. That child becomes their responsibility on Sunday mornings, giving the parents a well-deserved chance for worship and increasing the child's chance of having a positive

time. Provide that teenager with the information they need to do a good job and stay in touch with them to be sure things are going smoothly. Many teens would love the privilege of being the 'designated helper'!

Depending on the circumstances, it may be impossible for the parents to attend church with their child. Providing childcare at their home during the Sunday service may be helpful. ◊

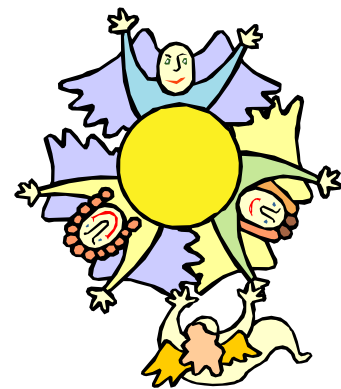
## **Celebrating Differences in Worship**

"Draw the Circle Wide" by Gordon Light is one song that speaks powerfully to the call to reach out to everyone — regardless of their abilities and disabilities. Worshippers of all ages can learn it easily. Make this hymn a part of your congregation's regular repertoire. Use it as the theme song on a Sunday that is dedicated to the theme of community. Feel the song's message through dance and movement. Let the words resound in the hearts of every member of your congregation!

Draw the circle wide, Draw it wider still  
Let this be our song, No one stands alone  
Standing side by side, Draw the circle wide  
(*Common Praise*, #418)

Here's how we used the song one time. During the children's focus we started with just a few of the children holding hands in a circle. The rest of the children were asked how they felt at being left out. They were then invited in. Everyone in the circle was then asked to invite someone from the congregation to join the circle with them. After the singing of each verse of the song, those in the circle were invited to welcome more people in. Very soon, the entire congregation was in one big circle, singing with smiles on their faces — including the ones who don't like anything different to happen at church! I really didn't expect it to grow to take in the whole congregation, but everybody commented on how moving it had been. CF ◊

**Welcoming children who have significant special needs into our faith communities does need careful thought.**



### Sunday-by-Sunday : Dealing with Difficult Behaviour

**When wiggling, talking out or silly behaviours start it could be a clue. Are we asking them to sit still for too long?**

Every one of us has had 'one of those mornings'. And, admit it, there are always one or two children that are more difficult than others. (Isn't it amazing how 'those' children never miss a Sunday!?) Like it or not, 'behaviour management' is something we all have to know about. What can be done?

Be very clear with regards to the behaviour that you expect at church. While we want to demonstrate a very welcoming attitude to children on Sunday mornings, that does not mean that we need to welcome their difficult behaviours! One child's behaviour should not negatively affect everyone else in the group. The phrases "Be kind" and, when necessary, "We don't do that here", have become buzz words in our congregation, repeated mantra-like by our leaders! We need not apologize for expecting respect, politeness and kindness. Clear and consistent expectations are helpful for everyone.

Plan programs with your group of children in mind. Establish routines that are consistent from week to week. Too many surprises and last minute changes may un-nerve some children. Offer a variety of activities that will meet the needs of each child. When wiggling, talking out or silly behaviours start it could be a clue. Are we asking them to sit still for too long? (A guideline of one or two minutes for each year of their age is a good starting point.) Are we prepared and ready for the activities or are they having to wait? Are we giving each of them a chance to be active and involved? Are the activities appealing to children of that age or is the boredom factor a real possibility? Are we 'catching them being good' and praising their good behaviour or expecting the worst? (The Sunday school scenes in the excellent video *Simon Birch* provides a classic and humorous picture of what not to do!)

Use your voice effectively as a calming device. It's amazing how quiet children can become when they are trying to hear your whispers! Over-exaggerate your voice and gestures to capture and keep their attention.

Seat children who have difficulties paying attention near you so little reminders can be given subtly when necessary. Be proactive — never be afraid to separate children who you suspect might get themselves into trouble. Begin by calmly asking the entire group to move to a seat where they can do their 'very best listening.' Then, make your own suggestions.

#### **When discipline problems do arise,**

- Use consequences that are logical, immediate and definite.
- Speak to the child alone if necessary.
- Say positives first, then problem solve, then end with positive statements that show you believe in the child.

Don't impose school-like tasks as punishment. The children probably get enough of that during the week!

Don't react too strongly by yelling, arguing or punishing the entire group. Stay calm.

In larger churches have an adult 'rover' if possible who can wander from group to group, assisting where necessary. At the very least, have an extra person on call that a child can be sent to get if necessary.

Make use of the talents of your church's members. An adult who teaches school during the week may not wish to be involved with children's programs on Sundays. But, they may be willing to offer ideas or help with children who are making group times difficult.

Use peers to guide and model appropriate social skills and be a "buddy" who will befriend and guide the child with special needs.

Designate a special area of your children's program space where children who cannot manage in their groups can play safely while still being supervised. This could be thought of as a 'time out' area where children who are being disruptive can go. The 'last resort' for a child who is being difficult would be to have them return to their parents in church.

Speak carefully and delicately to the child's parents about your concerns. Parents whose children who are difficult to manage likely encounter complaints *wherever* they try to take their children. Church may be the very refuge they need most! Be positive and emphasize your wish to be of help. Conversations may be best left to the pastoral staff of your church who may know better the specific family circumstances.

And, if all else fails, there's always a fresh start next week!!! ♦ CF

### Learning About Differences

Labels, medical words and diagnoses are not always helpful. Often, they serve to keep us away from one another, whether by emphasizing our differences or increasing our wariness. But can it be possible that labels like 'autism', 'Down's Syndrome', 'blindness' or 'depression' could lead us to a better understanding of someone else's unique needs and abilities? Is there a way to use terms that describe a person's difficulties in order to help us take the next step of acting towards them in ways that are more appropriate, compassionate and respectful?

Educate the congregation and, especially, the children about people with special needs. The more we are aware of people with different needs and abilities, the better we can understand, accept and value them. Post newspaper articles on bulletin boards, promote and participate in the fundraising efforts of community associations, honour members of your congregation who work with special needs individuals in your community, include the needs of people with disabilities in your prayers.

Model acceptance and respect, beginning in small ways. Praise children for their unique abilities. Emphasize that everyone is special to God — God's masterpiece! Remind them that everyone is good at something. Help them to discover what their unique and God-given talents are, then give them ways to use them! (Once again, the picture book *You are Special* by Max Lucado is an example of a story to share that emphasizes this concept.)

There are many advantages to incorporating sign language into your music program. Signing along with songs looks very beautiful and keeps active bodies focussed. Signs are also a very concrete way to teach abstract concepts. For example, take a look at a sign language dictionary for the translation of 'forgiveness'! But, even more significantly, the use of sign language can help promote an awareness and acceptance of disabilities and differences.

Broaden your children's concepts of compassion, community or God's creation by speaking often about children who are 'different'. Include stories about children with disabilities in your library collection, especially if children with those disabilities are a part of your community. Your public library may have many titles on their shelves. Monarch Books of Canada (800-404-7404) and ParentBooks ([www.parentbooks.ca](http://www.parentbooks.ca)) are both good sources for these kind of books. If you

purchase posters, toys or books, select ones that portray children in all their variety of abilities.

Too often we think of ministering to others. What about letting people minister to us? In our efforts to be helpful, we forget that people with disabilities and their families have just as much, if not more, to offer us. Invite them to meet with your children, allow them to tell their stories and share their insights, let them share their own faith stories of how God is working in their lives, give them chance to get to know you. Let their lives touch ours!

Isn't it great that people with disabilities and their families no longer feel that they have to stay hidden from the mainstream of the community? We, as church communities, are in a unique position to welcome and include them. And, as we work to ensure that these experiences are positive, we may soon have a generation of children who regard special needs as normal!! Wouldn't that be miraculous! CF

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN IN YOUR COMMUNITY? WHAT ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU OFFERED THAT HELPED YOUR CONGREGATION BE MORE WELCOMING? YOUR EXPERIENCES WILL BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL TO THE REST OF US!

**The more we are aware of people with different needs and abilities, the better we can understand, accept and value them.**



## Welcoming Our Children

### Disability is NOT Inability — Help Change Attitudes

DAWN ALEXANDER-WIGGINS, CONSULTANT IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FOR THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA, OFFERS THE FOLLOWING PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRATION IN A CAMP SETTING...

One of the joys of directing Camp Canterbury, Niagara Diocese's Children's Camp, from 1996-2000, was the integration of campers with special needs. The camp worked with an organization called Reach for the Rainbow, which assisted in staff training and camper support.

My experience of full integration was profound. I saw campers learning patience, appreciation and deep care and understanding for their fellow campers who had special needs. Each camper interacted in their own way which taught children that anyone can enjoy a camping experience regardless of a physical or cognitive develop-

mental challenges. Campers with special needs had much to offer our Christian camp and helped the community adhere to the core values and philosophy they held so dearly.

Campers and staff learned to be creative, flexible, and adaptable in their programming so that everyone was included and had the opportunity to participate. This goal helped to bond cabin groups in their friendships and heightened their awareness of loving and respecting their fellow person. At camp we learned to never put labels on people - to always put the noun, the person first, then the challenge if we must. For example, a child with Down's Syndrome was never called the "Down's Syndrome child," but the "child with Down's Syndrome" (if we needed to explain the development need). In your church school settings, I encourage you to practice this sign of respect. ♦ DAW

### Supporting Parents

*Dawn reminds us that parenting a child with a disability is a tough job. It is important as children's ministry leaders to be aware of the challenges parent face. In that way we can be as helpful and supportive as possible. She offers the following list for our consideration:*

#### **Tasks that Parents of Children with Disabilities May Face**

1. Surviving without sleep.
2. Dealing with the feelings of grief.
3. Getting adequate information.
4. Securing needed services and treatment.
5. Informing others.
6. Coping with stigma.
7. Maintaining other primary relationships.
8. Maintaining self-esteem.
9. Getting adequate support/avoiding isolation.
10. Coping with financial hardships.

• Next Issue •  
Let's share ideas about:

**New Approaches for Advent and Christmas  
DVDs and Videos at Church**

### POKER CHIPS ANYONE?

Self Esteem is so valuable!!! As children of God, we must help each child to know that they are valued members of our group — in spite of how they may behave! Dawn suggests we use the image of poker chips.

- Self-esteem is sort of like poker chips. The child who has lots of poker chips has good self-esteem and is willing to take risks, and the child who has few poker chips has low self-esteem and tends to become. Suicide, gangs and drug can make sense to the child who has very few poker chips.
- Be a talent scout and find ways to build the number of poker chips our children collect.
- Be an advocate against those who take poker chips away and do not give any back.

The book *You are Special* by Max Lucado is a powerful story that is written from this same perspective. It is wonderful to share with the entire congregation as well as children and their leaders!

**CUT and Paste**  
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Editor: Cathy Fairley, with help from Olivia Crowe and Dawn Alexander-Wiggins

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