

Welcome to the Circuit News sheet for the Children and families work.

Spring is here! As I write this edition of the newsletter the sun is streaming through my front window through the daffodils and lighting up my home working space. After a difficult and long winter, its wonderful to see the sun shining. God is here, The spirit lifts us and there is hope ahead. It has been a busy spring term for me – lots of time spent making up activity bags, supporting our Lifted spirits and Full of Spirits groups, recording videos for both circuit Lent and Easter services as well as for the YouTube channel, reconnecting with God In Love Unites Us report, planning a Pentecost Vlog and a celebratory Mother's day weekend – all whilst home-schooling until the 8th of March and helping my Father move to a new house phew....

My thanks must go to the circuit who have agreed to continue funding this role for the next three years, allowing me to continue to support our churches with children's and youth work as well as our local schools, baptism families, Supporting families and groups on the fringes of church and there are plans in place to start up some new projects once we are safely able to meet up again. I am also aware that things will have changed on our return to church and volunteers who may have previously helped with children's work may no longer be able to do so – I am here to support, so please ask. As our churches reopen towards the end of May, I will be joining you for worship in the various buildings across our circuit.

To see regular updates of the work being carried out, head to Facebook Vale of Stour page – or head to our Circuit Website the Children and Families tab

**A focus on.... Activity Bags**

We have spent the last year being creative with our family ministry – Children's events in church have been on hold and life has been very different. One of the ways we have continued to maintain contact with families is through offering our holiday and activity clubs in a bag – but how does that happen? And how much work does it involve?

Putting activity bags together does not just happen. There is a prayerful thought process to the construction of each bag and its contents. Here is a brief outline of the stages and time involved in putting them together

- Prayerful thoughts and ideas come together between leaders and volunteers.
- Themes and activities are discussed, and creative ideas explored and agreed.
- Purchasing of materials and paper-based creations such as colouring/puzzle and activity sheets are resourced or created.
- Materials are prepared into individual bags or envelopes to allow each child to receive an activity – each bag could contain up to 5 craft activities, that is a lot of prep!!
- Cards are written and personalised where possible.
- Bags are labelled/addressed, filled with content – this task always takes longer than planned.
- Arrangements made for collection and delivery of bags which can sometimes be over a couple of days.

Thanks to everyone who has been involved in this process in reaching out to families.

Forthcoming events:

Join us on Sundays through the Vale of Stour Website for our online services (check web page for times and links)

March 31st – Holy week reflection and story for children on the Vale of Stour YouTube channel

April 22nd – Lifted spirits recommences face to face at Kingswinford Methodist church

April 25th – Monthly Family worship on the Vale of Stour YouTube channel

Praying for Children and Youth

I appeal to you to keep our children and young people in your prayers. As they have returned to education settings, the transition has not been easy for all. There are children who have been unable to return due to shielding, support not in place or just not mentally ready. There are children who have returned for a few days/weeks and then been sent home in bubbles where positive tests have occurred.

As the children break up for two weeks at home the process of returning starts again soon and this constant in and out is where their mental health will suffer so much.

We wish all our children and young people a happy Easter break and pray for a successful return to education in April.



Mother's day Weekend: In March we celebrated Mother's day and whilst this is a time for paying tribute to all that our moms do for us, it can also be a difficult time for many people. I felt called by God this year to do something for our Lifted Spirits moms who have been unable to meet for 12 months and although their support has been ongoing online, it does not make up for the human interaction. Over the weekend, 20 moms were delivered a pamper pack including, candles, prayer books, tea and coffee, chocolates, face packs and daffodils to help give them some time and space for self-care. We held a coffee morning on the Saturday for moms to attend and a service was dedicated to mothers in this group on the Sunday evening in our VOS worship online. Feedback has been positive, and the mums were grateful to receive their bags and to be prayed for during such a challenging year. Thanks to all who were involved in this event.

What have we been up to across the circuit?

Since our last newsletter in January our churches have:

GigMill – Continued to provide Sunday school themes as activities and challenges to their families (as far as Canada!) through email, They have had other churches join their mailing list which is open to all – please let me know if your church would like to be a part of this

New Road – phoning their Youth club children to check in and help them look forward to meeting again

Overend – Nearly 50 activity bags distributed for Valentine's weekend (Feb half term) and again for Easter to church and local families

Kinver – Continued online Sunday school on their YT channel, Hot Cross Buns (safely) sent into the 3 schools for staff to enjoy in Holy week

Kingswinford – Supported Lifted Spirits in being able to recommence after Easter by offering use of the Hall. Families sent activity packs, did a sponsothon in something they were good at, sent out holy week wheels to tell the story and encourage the creation of an Easter garden

Birch Coppice – distributed opportunities for nominations of prayer and recognition for those in need and those who have contributed to community life – 'A gift from an Angel'

United Church Lye – Have been decorating church windows ready for Easter and distributing a Lent challenge

Brierley Hill – Distributed Easter activity bags in place of holiday club with lots of activities and crafts for children to enjoy

Thank you all for your continued creativity and connection with families. I really hope to gather us together soon to share in more ideas as we move forward and reopen churches in the summer. If you wish to share in what your church is doing, please let me know and I can share across the circuit.

Claire

Bible Bytes:

"Rejoice always. Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances" Thes. 5:16

A simple message today – after what has felt like an exceptionally long winter we still have so much to rejoice and be thankful for. Find something to celebrate and pray for those who may be struggling with this thought.

I especially include our NHS and keyworkers, our community volunteers, church pastoral teams and teachers and educators along with many more – we are ever thankful and pray for you in all that you do.

Reconnecting with Safe Families UK.

We connected with The Christian charity Safe Families late 2018 but were not quite in the right place to pursue this relationship, however we recently reconnected and have sent some of our Easter activity bags to families in their care local to our churches within the Stourbridge and Brierley Hill areas. The Safe Families team were extremely grateful and hope that these families will come and join us at some of our church events when we reopen. I know we will be ready to welcome them when they walk through our doors.

And finally.....

As always, I want to thank all those involved with Children's Ministry for their hard work and dedication especially at this time of uncertainty and remind you I am here to help with family pastoral care. drop me an email at: cafvos@outlook.com MB 07542062603

Claire