

KUCAnews Christmas at the Grass Roots

Henley-Fulham UC— connecting with their local schools

Christmas storytelling at Henley Fulham UC

Our church had established a relationship with the principals of two local primary schools through the Christian Options program and through music programs. We have several children's programs at our church and wanted to reach out to the local community. So we offered a Christmas story 'experience' to the schools as we wanted to share the Christmas story in a way that would appeal to primary age children with lots of sensory content and not just reading from a book.

We contacted the schools through the principals in the first week of term 4 and planned the event for the last week of term. We invited classes to book into a time slot on either the Monday or Tuesday for periods of 30 minutes. Eleven classes booked, mainly younger children from reception to Year 5. Playgroup children with their mothers also came along and some church families, and even grandchildren were brought to share the experience.

The format we followed was welcoming the class into the church foyer where they were stopped from entering the church by a sword wielding Roman centurion in full costume.



Each child was issued a 'passport' to enter 'Bethlehem' and the church doors had been covered with a set of cardboard 'gates of Bethlehem'. The children wrote their names onto the passport and were given some instruction then allowed to enter as their passports were stamped 'enter'.

Once into the church building, there was a colourful tent and half the class were ushered into the tent and greeted by a 'wise man'. The adult storytellers were



wearing appropriate costumes and the tent was decorated with rugs and cushions. The children were shown a map and how far the wise men travelled to see the special baby. They decorated a page in their passport with glitter and passed around wooden boxes containing 'gold', frankincense (real) and 'myrrh' (real). We found myrrh essential oil and burned incense to add to the atmosphere, but we checked if children were asthmatic.

The other part of the class were welcomed into another room where sheets had been draped over rough timber to create a makeshift shepherd's shelter. A fake fire burned in the centre and sheepskins were on the floor and some toy sheep. The children sat on the floor while the 'shepherd' told their story of the angels visit and the children decorated another page in their passport.

Then each group changed places. When they had all heard the wise man and the shepherd, they were brought into another area where there was a manger with a doll. Behind the cradle was a bale of hay. The nativity scene was talked about and the story finished and questions asked. Two children were chosen to be Joseph and Mary and given the head wear and sat on the bale of hay, then the rest of the class sat in front of the manger and a photo was taken. These photos were printed and taken to the schools the following day.



Next the children went through to our children's area and decorated an angel shaped biscuit with icing. When they had finished, they moved outside to a courtyard to eat the biscuit and were offered cordial or water to drink. Each class took about 30 minutes, so we kept things moving.



Lots of people from the church were involved making decorations and providing props, making biscuits, assisting



with the cleanup, but only 5 people needed to be there at any time during the story telling as the teachers and some parents were also present. So we had two story tellers, a Roman guard, an 'MC' who also took photos and someone in the kitchen.

The response from both schools was overwhelmingly positive with teachers, parents and students enjoying the experience. Nearly 300 children took the passport home and on the back of it was an invitation to our Christmas services. We hoped that they shared the story, the experience and the invitation with their families.

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