**Dig Deep: an event for congregations who have few or no children**

**Saturday 28th January 2017**

In the very hospitable surroundings of South Wishaw parish church, a group of around sixty people from congregations across Hamilton Presbytery and beyond gathered to hear a range of speakers tell their stories and recount their experiences of working in situation where there were few or no children.

The day was opened by Helen Pope who drew on what she has done in several congregations as the New Connections development worker and emphasised the importance of putting children and young people in the centre of all that we do. She encouraged everyone to learn from their enthusiasm, spontaneity, playfulness and joyfulness and not to allow these to be stolen from us as we seek to develop our work with them. To pursue the values of the Kingdom we are required to take “venturesome steps of love”, which we can be assured will be followed by “cascades of grace.”

**Intergenerational worship**: Karen Harbison (previously minister of Hamilton:Trinity, now Greenock & Paisley Presbytery))

Having given a bit of a tour of the places she has worked and what she has been able to do there, Karen introduced us to a straight forward four point plan to ensure good levels of engagement across congregations, regardless of age.

* Conversation
* Reflection
* Activity
* Take away

She illustrated her plan using the lectionary reading of the call of the fisherman from the previous week.

**Messy church:** Jen Robertson

Jen introduced the idea of Messy church for those not already familiar with it and showed an explanatory film, featuring Lucy Moore, the originator of the concept. She had brought with her a range of resources as part of the bookstall and encouraged people to look at those and to get in touch with her for help and support.

**Engaging with local schools and community**: Karen Nicol (Forth St Paul’s, Lanark Presbytery)

Karen spoke about the development of the Planet Earth club which had its more modest beginnings in a garden project in a polytunnel. Building a good relationship with the local school has been key to the increasing numbers of children involved with the project and more recently tapping in to their interest in the computer game Minecraft has added an extra dimension.

Children are now coming about the church more and are getting involved in practical tasks such as ringing the church bell and uplifting the offering. Although this is all very labour intensive, there is still potential for development.

**If not Sunday school, what else?:** Dorothy Russell (Shotts Calderhead Erskine Parish Church)

It may be that there is little desire to include children and young people in the life of your congregation, but as Dorothy explained to us, that doesn’t mean that nothing either can or should be done. Working from the starting point of a holiday club, a monthly kid’s club has developed that has taken part in a range of activities e.g. a “Meet the cast” nativity (<http://www.sgmlifewords.com/uk/resources/details/meet-cast> ) and more recently a session in a recording studio with Christian reggae singer Claudius England (check out the video on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_o2cLmH7Yg> As Dorothy pointed there’s lots more going on in the community!

**Making small groups excellent**: David Clipston (regional worker for SU Scotland in Ayrshire)

David told the story of a small group he had worked with and from that experience he pointed to some of the guiding principles. Starting from a very informal base and a shared love of good coffee David worked to ensure that the young people had ownership of the group and explored with them what they were interested in doing. He had no doubt that small is beautiful given that he had experienced a major shift in the group when a few other younger people were added arbitrarily. He was firmly of the conviction that “small things give great opportunities”

Over coffee at the beginning and a short break for lunch participants were able to chat and share as well as look at the resources on the bookstall. The event was closed with the use of the “participative” grace – which involves movement and the use of arms.

The congregations represented were:

Airdrie: St Columba’s

Bellshill Central

Blantyre Old

Blantyre St Andrew’s

Calder

Chapelhall

*Christ Church Episcopal church, Lanark*

East Kilbride: Mossneuk

East Kilbride: West

Hamilton: West

*High Blantyre Baptist Church*

Holytown linked with New Stevenston: Wrangholm

Kirk o’Shotts

Larkhall: Chalmers

Larkhall: St Machan’s

Larkhall: Trinity

Motherwell: North

Newmains: Bonkle

Wishaw: Old

Wishaw: South Wishaw

The event had been organised by Sarah Ross, minister at Blantyre Old and Convenor of the Mission and Discipleship Committee and Jen Robertson the Schools/Churches Development Worker, to whom, along with Team Wishaw South, everyone owes their thanks for a great day.