

NEXUS

Researching the spiritual flourishing
of the youngest children

CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL MOMENTS: WHAT DID THE RESEARCH TEAM SEE?

Autumn 2022

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH

 Canterbury
Christ Church
University





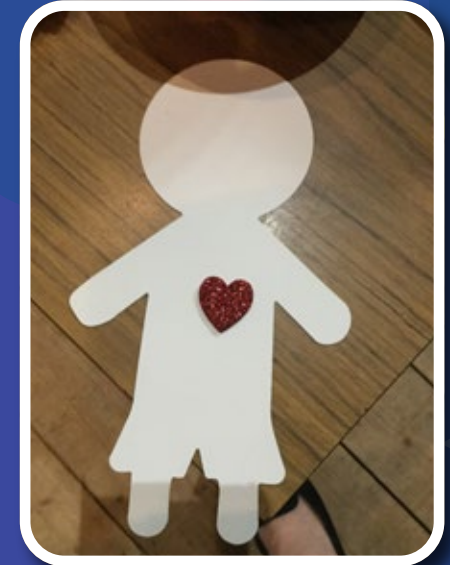
INTRODUCTION

This book captures some of the rich activity the NICER research team were privileged to encounter during our visits to 3 church toddler groups in the South-East of England during autumn 2022.

UNDERSTANDING SELF: WHO AM I? WHAT DO I LIKE?



'Look around, children interacting, caring, sharing, using their imagination – this is the beginnings of faith'
(Minister)



'My daughter can't play like this at home as there isn't the space.'
(Parent)

Children used the activity resources in 'loose parts play' - showing an interest in sensory qualities -fluffy material, the feel of pebbles - and the potential these items offer for open-ended creative play.
(Researcher)



INTERACTING WITH OTHERS: WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER?



'Toys are set up to encourage sharing'
(Researcher)



'Relationships are the starting point for faith'
(Minister)



The toddler group leader *'buys lovely snacks for the children including fresh fruit and when it is their birthday, they all get a present'*
(Parent)

Children played with the wooden birthday cakes all morning. They decorated cakes, shared slices and counted candles.

One little girl makes a birthday card which she fills with kisses and her mum says "Nanny will love that"
(Researcher)



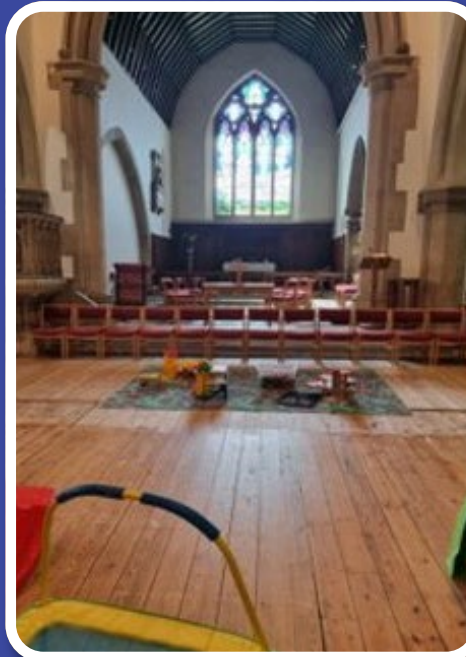
NATURE: HOW DO WE ENGAGE WITH NATURE?



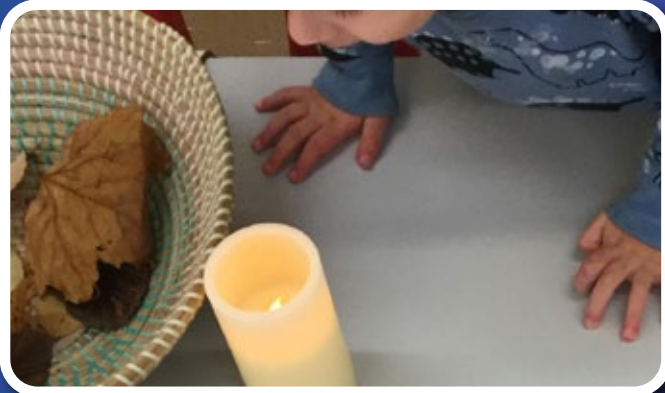
One three-year-old boy looked for the leaf under the paper stating, "where gone". There is a small moment of wonder when its image appears on the paper, and Mum shares her memory of doing this activity as a child as she helps him.
(Researcher)



When he came back, he climbed onto the chairs and looked up and said 'wow' – when I looked up, I could see the roof & the small skylight stain glass windows. He said, " look a web". Looking up again I could see a huge web in the window – he went on to tell me a spider lived there
(Researcher)



TRANSCENDENT: ENCOUNTERING FAITH



The group 'shows their faith by how they are, caring, friendly, kind etc'
(Grandparent)



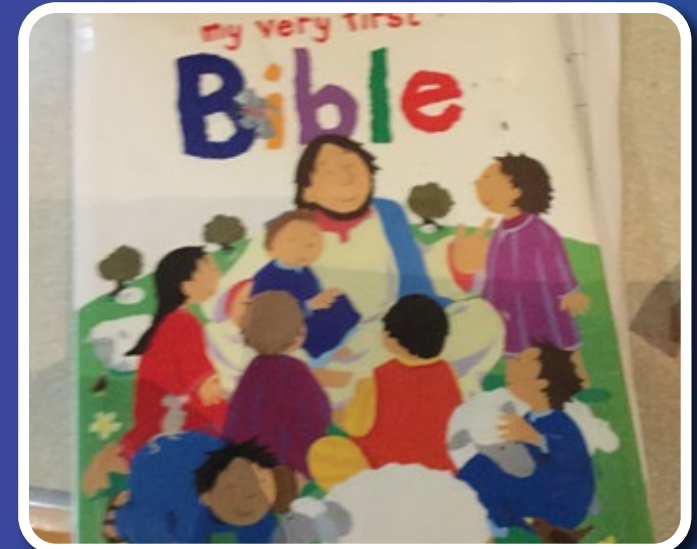
'Toddler group ministry is all part of loving our neighbour – that's what we are called to do, no strings attached just reaching out and loving people'
(Minister)



'I came to the kids zone worship in the park last weekend. I am not religious, but I am thinking I would like my child baptised'
(Parent)



'The Church building is not Church. It is simply a place to bring us together in worship, this [the toddler group] is where you can see church in action'
(Minister)



A NEW RESOURCE



Sammy's **BIG** questions



A resource to encourage continued nurturing of a very young child's spirituality.

This resource is designed to encourage very young children to question, imagine and share their thoughts with others.

For links to this, and other Nexus resources including our Nexus animations please visit:

nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus

nicer.org.uk/toddlers-in-the-nexus

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THANK YOU

The research team at the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) wish to thank the leaders, volunteers, parents and children who welcomed us into their church toddler groups.

The hospitality and welcome we received was overwhelming and we came away learning much from each of you.