

## PLAYGROUP – AN OUTREACH MINISTRY TO PARENTS.

There was a photo of our very first Playgroup on the front of our church notices this week. It caused me to reflect on how this ministry has grown in the last 14 years and how God has touched people's lives.

I remember being an exhausted young mum with 2 small boys' just 18 months apart. Back in 1988 our routine was: Monday, Tuesday, Grandma-day, Thursday, Playgroup-day. It was Friday, our Playgroup-day, and we had to drive to another suburb. It was my turn to supply the craft activity, and I was on fruit duty. As I prepared the fruit, balancing one son on my hip while my other son held onto my leg, I began to think that it would have been easier just to stay at home.

A few weeks later I rang two mums with young children that I had never met. I don't know how I let our Pastor talk me into that one! After a brief chat they both invited me to drop in on them with my lively boys. When I did so, thankfully nothing got broken, and we immediately became friends. I began to think about ways to meet regularly.

Around this time I began meeting some friends weekly at 6am to pray in a car. We talked about where we should meet, and asked God to give us wisdom to establish the work He intended.

As a result we began the Eltham Baptist Playgroup in the cellar of a mud-brick home in 1989. We sat at tables and chairs donated by another church. With the support of the BUV Early Childhood Committee we had lots of ideas. There was no religious content in our program, except for at Easter and Christmas time. The children were happy even in this small space with no outdoor play and the mums loved to talk! We worked to a plan and it was always a relief to pack up the messy play, have a snack and enter into some free play. What a mess we made!!!!

There were four Christians in our first Playgroup and we invited four other mums to join us, including my new friends. With just twelve children between us we spent a lot of time together. We'd visit each other at home, go to parks and out for coffee. As we loved them and laughed and cried together our friendship grew.

As we came alongside them they actually recognized God in us. As we lived out our faith, loving them as Jesus does, they began to ask questions and to take an interest in what we believed. Eventually each of them made the best choice anyone can make: two became Christians for the

first time, and two who had Sunday School backgrounds rededicated themselves to God. We formed a Friday night discipleship group. There is no greater joy than baptising a friend, even when you are 8 months pregnant!

God's family continues to grow as a result of the Playgroup Ministry. We have now have eight Playgroups and still work to the same plan. 'Earning the right to present Jesus' remains our goal. This takes confidence in knowing who we are in Christ, faithful prayer, and commitment to developing our relationship with God, our church family, and our community.

I am convinced that Playgroup is a fantastic outreach ministry to parents of young children. It is no coincidence that we are mums and dads, or that we live where we do. God has placed us exactly where He needs us to be. We just need to trust Him, no matter what.

We are so privileged to be part of God's chosen family, so we can bless others and point them to Jesus, for their sake and for the Glory of God.

Helen Telfer