

PLAYGROUP PROFILE: OCEAN GROVE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Ocean Grove Church of Christ has a largely elderly congregation, and only one family with preschoolers (the Beasleys) attends the church. Cate Beasley has a heart to minister to children and families in her local community, and three years ago, began running a playgroup at the church. Over time it has expanded to 30 families attending 3 sessions. A feature of the group is a team of dedicated child-free helpers (the “Grannies”) who attend regularly to build relationships and help out where they can. Cate uses some bible stories and Christian songs as part of the program, and the children always sing “The Superman Grace” before snack time.

David Wanstall (the minister), his wife Chris and Cate Beasley all have a heart to reach playgroup families for Jesus. For some time they have held a children’s service once a term, where children have been involved in leading the Sunday service. Only a few playgroup families have attended this service, so they developed the idea of running “Playgroup Church” on a Friday night once a month. This is a “hands on” activity-based service pitched at children. The night begins with tables set up with activities as people arrive. Then there is a song/dance session for the children, often using Colin Buchanan’s music. Then everyone sits at tables in family groups to complete a hands-on learning activity. For example, at a recent service, the theme was “forgiveness”. The families had to construct a bridge made of icy pole sticks, linking together blocks with the phrase “I’m sorry” on one side, and “I forgive you” on the other. David wrapped up each family group with wool, and tied up all groups together, while explaining the kinds of things that can bind up our lives, such as anger, misunderstanding, or jealousy. He then took scissors and cut through the tangled wool, as a picture of forgiveness. A “Food for thought” handout with a reflection for adults related to the theme of the service is also placed on the table. Some adults take this home at the end of the night.

After the 45-minute service, the families enjoy a fish and chip dinner. The children watch a “Veggietales” video while the adults chat.

40 people attended the first two “Playgroup Church” services, although numbers were down at the last service for a variety of reasons.

Another initiative of the church has been to run a seminar for playgroup parents based on the book: “The 5 love languages of children”. This was enthusiastically received.

Although no community families have become Christians yet through the ministry of playgroup, Cate firmly believes that God can do great things through those who are obedient to Him, and that we may never know the impact we are making. She heard a story recently of a family of ardent atheists who shielded their daughter from all Christian influence. However, this daughter was strongly drawn to Christ and became a Christian as a young adult. She later discovered that an itinerant Methodist preacher had scooped her in his arms and prayed a blessing on her when she was a 3-month old baby. “This story gave me goose bumps” Cate said. “It reminds me that God is sowing seeds into the lives of young children through our ministry, although we will probably never see the results. I’m absolutely passionate about ministry to children, and it’s easy to do when God lights the fire!”

CATE IS HAPPY TO VISIT GROUPS BY INVITATION, AND IS ALSO MORE THAN HAPPY TO SHARE ABOUT “PLAYGROUP CHURCH”. SHE CAN BE CONTACTED ON 5250 3327.