

# TOGETHER

[NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk](http://NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk)

## National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups

Article by **Katie Hibberts of Southwell Methodist Church**

**D**id you know that in the UK, on average a child has just 1,277 days between birth and starting nursery school education? It is also a fact that the Christian Church as a whole, is the leading national provider of parent and toddler groups (research shows that 52% of under 4's in England, and their parent/carers, attend a church-led toddler group). I am involved with an organisation called '1277... make them count' which is a national network of church-based toddler groups, and, as well as supporting/resourcing toddler group leaders, they hold an annual month of prayer for toddler groups in June. I thought I'd share some of my experiences of toddler groups and encourage you to join us in prayer this month.

As you may know, I am currently employed as the Families Worker at Southwell Methodist Church. I am a passionate advocate for toddler groups and the amazing ministry and witness they can have in our communities. However, I haven't always felt that way. On the contrary, when I was returning to work part time after having our second daughter, I deliberately worked on the day that our local toddler group was running so that I could avoid the expectation that I would take my daughters to toddlers every week! I found it so intimidating walking into a room full of people who already seemed to know each other, I felt like an outsider even though the group was held at my church.

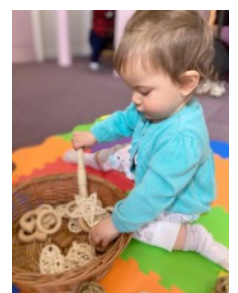
However, when my family moved to Southwell, our son was 2 years old. One Tuesday morning I bravely found myself walking into Holy Trinity Church in Southwell for their toddler group. I was warmly welcomed and Joseph loved playing with all the toys and socialising with other children. I also attended our own toddler group at the Methodist Church and met yet more lovely people. I quickly came to realise what a lifeline toddler groups could be for someone who was new to a town and hoping to make some friends.

Now that I lead a toddler group myself, I can honestly say it is a privilege to support families through this ministry. Yes, we set out toys to provide a safe place to come and play, but did you know that we've also been there to watch babies taking their first unaided steps? We've been able to identify families who could do with some extra support and arranged food parcels, meals and even Nursery Equipment to be delivered; we've been a shoulder to cry on when a parent is having a bad day; we've been able to offer a hot drink to a mum who has had to battle to get their older child through the school gates; we've provided a safe space for parents to come and weigh their baby; we've provided a breastfeeding counsellor to help new parents with feeding; we've prayed with a parent who had a terminal cancer diagnosis, and another whose brother was dying; we've welcomed families who are new to the area and connected them with other families; we've held Christmas parties; we've signposted families to support services; we've supported and safeguarded parents in abusive marriages; we've invited beauticians in to offer free massages to mums on Mothers Day week; we've delivered online singing times, craft packs; we've told people about Jesus and demonstrated God's hospitality... we've laughed and cried together through the ups and downs of life.

The missional opportunities presented to the church by toddler groups are massive, but we need to make the most of this unique opportunity. May I encourage you to make a commitment to pray for your local toddler group during June's national month of prayer? There are some ideas below to get you started.

Please pray for...

- ◆ The families & communities served by the toddler group
- ◆ Parents who had babies in lockdown with very little support available
- ◆ Toddler group leaders and volunteers
- ◆ Decisions about how and when to reopen if groups have been closed due to the pandemic
- ◆ The opportunity to share the gospel with the families we serve.
- ◆ Parents returning to work after maternity/paternity leave





## 1. Online Service

**Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week led by Rev Peter Hibberts.**

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email!

## 2. Circuit 'Zoom' Coffee Time

Join folk from across the circuit from 11:30am each Sunday morning - you provide the coffee - we'll provide the fellowship! pop in for 5 minutes or half an hour - we'd love to see you!



**Please join us afterwards**  
Come with a drink and a biscuit to share in conversation after the service.

[www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)  
Meeting ID: 885 3100 7185  
Password: Tog3ther

Phone: 0131 460 1196  
Meeting ID: 885 3100 7185  
Password: 48647472

If you'd like help to 'Zoom', please get in touch!

## 3. Radio Services

**BBC Radio 4** (Also [online](#).)  
08:10am - 30th May 2021

### Doing Justice

Doing Justice: A Service of Reflection on the Anniversary of the murder of George Floyd from NTCG Brixton Community Church in South London.

## 4. Radio Nottingham

Listen every Sunday, at 8am, to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. (Online or on 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.)

# Three is the magic number

Trinity Sunday Sermon | Reflections from Genesis 1:26 | Rev Peter Hibberts

Ever wondered why pylons are designed the way they are? It's because the triangle is the strongest shape (or at least the strongest tessellating shape). 3 (sides) really is the magic number. You'll probably have heard it said, 'safety in numbers', 'economy of a sizes', 'being part of a team', 'a chord of three strands is not easily broken...' And here in Genesis, right at the beginning of creation we hear that God is 'us'. It's what the church calls The Trinity - God as three in one (developed from the observations of God as Father or Creator, Son/Jesus and Holy Spirit).

The trinity is incredible really. In God the creator, we can fully acknowledge the vastness of the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present God that far surpasses our understanding but there will always be a distance, an otherness, a mystery that can leave us struggling to relate. Then in the God the Son we get to see God with skin on - fully God but also fully human; in Jesus we can see humanity exemplified but also know that God understands what it is like to be us, we see a person we can imagine having a relationship with, talking to, walking with. But then Jesus can only be in one place at a time and it's not here or now. Enter the Holy Spirit - God present, abiding with us, comforting us, directing us, empowering us. In the Trinity we have God in every level of power and proximity, magnitude and minutia immeasurability and intimacy. To fully understand God we need to understand (as best as we can) the Trinity - the perfect 3 way community!

Folks picture the trinity, the three persons of God each separate but also one in different ways. Some use an egg (yolk, white and shell) some imagine water as solid liquid and gas, I personally like a mars bar (caramel, fondant and chocolate)! But all of these ideas are far too limited to fully illustrate what is often called the *mystery* of the trinity. How can God be three persons and yet one God? I can give you no solid answer as it is bigger than our capability to comprehend but the Greeks had an interesting idea. If you have ever been to a Greek wedding, you may have seen their distinctive way of dancing.

Jonathan Marlowe describes the dance of love where there are not two dancers, but three: they start to go in circles, weaving in and out in a very beautiful pattern of motion. They start to go faster and faster and faster, all the while staying in perfect rhythm and in sync with each other. Eventually, they are dancing so quickly (yet so effortlessly) that as you look at them, it just becomes a blur. Their individual identities are part of a larger dance. The early church fathers and mothers looked at that dance (called perichoresis) and said, "That's what the Trinity is like." It's a harmonious set of relationships in which there is mutual giving and receiving. This relationship is called love, and it's what the Trinity is all about. The perichoresis is that dance of love.

Imagine a relationship so close that the participants can anticipate the others' every move. Imagine a relationship so devoted that each participant exists to complement the others. A relationship so close that the individuals are only occasionally seen and never fully understood in isolation - they are three and yet one.

John Bunyan the 17th century author of Pilgrim's Progress said, "[The Trinity] shows us the love of God the Father in giving His Son; the love of God the Son in giving Himself; and the love of the [Holy] Spirit in His work of regenerating us, that we may be able to lay hold of the love of the Father by His Son." This is perfect community, modelled by the perfect Triune God - the three in one God.

If you read just a few verses after the revelation that God is 'us' you hear (in Genesis 1:26) God say, 'Let *us* create man in *our* own image.' So it stands to reason then that the best thing we can learn from God the Trinity is how to be community. We too are not to be *me* but *us*.

One of the cruelest things about this pandemic is the way that it has isolated us. Prior to the pandemic we each had tough times, but in those times we turned to our support networks - in C19 we couldn't fully do this. Prior to the pandemic we faced challenges but when we it looked like it was bigger than us, we surrounded ourselves with folk who could support us. Prior to C19 we lost loved ones but we've mourned together and comforted each other; in the last year we've lost them and not being able to fully gather to mourn together or even comfort through embrace. We were never meant to do life alone - actually the only time in the creation story where God describes what he is creation as *not* good is Adam's loneliness and so God creates a companion. We were meant to be together. Contrast this with the points we were most together during the pandemic. For me it was the walks around a deserted town looking for rainbows in windows. I couldn't see folk but I knew their very different boats were in the same storm. It was standing at the end of the driveway clapping for our carers - we couldn't be there but somehow it felt like we were.

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organised like that?"

(Of course I hope our togetherness can be something less threatening or destructive!)

Last week we celebrated the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit and one of the things that struck me this year, more than anything, was how God chose to pour out the Holy Spirit in a gathering. God could have poured out the Holy Spirit to all those individuals, wherever they were, yet for some reason he instructed them to be together (probably around 120 of them) and poured out the Holy Spirit on them together. Not only that but the many nations confused at Babel found they heard the message of what Christ had done in their own language - barriers were being removed, human its was coming together again.

I think the hardest thing for the church has been its inability to gather physically. We have (where possible) utilised technology beautifully and reinvented ourselves in so many ways but I think the vast majority of us still crave being in the same room together, gathered. Even when I have been able to gather with folk, the social distancing has made us feel distanced and masks made us feel separated. I can't wait for the end to the restrictions so that we won't need to feel this way and can share fully as the body of Christ - many, yet one body. As every day goes by I am (with a few blips) feeling more optimistic about the future of the church. The task of coming back together is immense. Our experiences have been so disparate and our hope and dreams may not yet be aligned. But as at pentecost the God of community, the God of togetherness will do what he did at Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit - we can be of one accord. We must only gather, make space and wait.

## Prayer Space

*One of Prayers today is adapted from the Lectio 365 devotional app\* which, on Monday, focussed on John Wesley (Methodism's founder) on the anniversary of his 'heart being strangely warmed' by God. John Wesley was committed to reaching out beyond the Church to share God's love with all - to reach community regardless of setbacks or difficulties...*

Lord may we take inspiration and challenge from John Wesley's warmed heart, your Holy Spirit, compelling him to reach out with your love to those around him. Warm our hearts with your Holy Spirit and send us out to our communities.

When disappointments and setbacks come - and we know they will - we choose not to withdraw from you or our community. We choose to continue to show up and open ourselves up to You.

God, we are inspired by John Wesley's example for whom no person or place was off limits to the gospel. I ask you to give us extra courage today.

**Amen**

\*You can find more details about the Lectio 365 App, including how to download it here: <https://www.24-7prayer.com/dailydevotional>

### EMAIL PRAYER CHAIN

*If you would like to join a prayer chain and receive prayer requests or to submit a prayer request (with permission of the recipient) please get in touch with Colin Beckett [colin1244@gmail.com](mailto:colin1244@gmail.com). It is for those of any church or none!*

## Reach appeal:



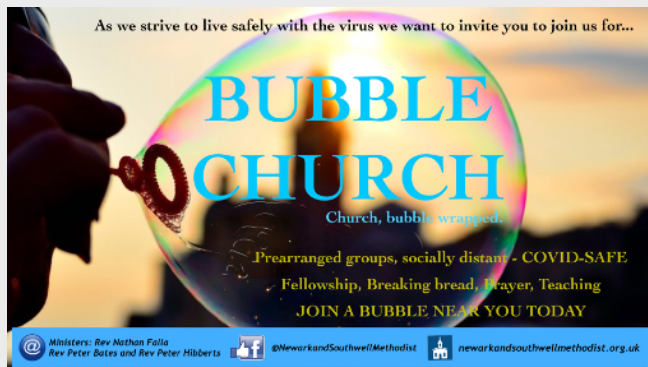
We have news of a very important appeal from 'Reach Learning Disabilities' sent to us by of Nick Turner (Marion Turner is a member at Southwell Methodist Church and Nick worships at Southwell Minster. Reach has a wonderful ministry in Newark and Southwell and they are aiming to raise £1.4million to provide specialist accommodation for 12 people in Southwell. They are well on the way to their target but are aiming to raise e £250,000 locally. If they can raise £125,000 from small donations then a larger local donor has pledged the other £125,000! Please consider if you are able to support this.

More details can be found on the circuit website:

[newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk](http://newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk)

Be still, for the presence of the Lord (StF 20) [LINK](#)  
Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty (StF 11) [LINK](#)  
You give rest to the weary (StF 657) [LINK](#)  
Love divine, All Loves Excelling (StF 503) [LINK](#)  
God to enfold you (StF 648) [LINK](#)  
*Click LINKs to access YouTube clips of each song.*

## Bubble Church Questions



**As things become safer, many of our Bubbles will be reopening. Would you like to be part of Covid-Safe face-to-face church? Join a bubble today by getting in touch with your minister.**

1. How you ever thought about the Holy Trinity? How do you picture it? Which of the illustrations in the sermon do you find most helpful?
2. Which person of the Trinity do you picture most often? Which one do you feel closest to?
3. Are there any persons of the Trinity that you don't picture often or struggle to understand?
4. What do you think the Trinity teaches us about Community?
5. What can we learn from God the Trinity about being church and particularly about Church Unity?

For more information checkout the Bubble Church guide with risk assessment on the Circuit Website: <https://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk/newsroom/bubble-church.html>

## Face to face Worship in the Circuit...

If you would like to join a face-to-face worship opportunity in the Circuit, **you will almost certainly need to book in locally in advance**, but do head over to the Circuit Website for details of where they are happening:

[NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk](http://NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk)

**Families:**  
[families4SMC@gmail.com](mailto:families4SMC@gmail.com)

by **Katie Hibberts**

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES



The activity today involves some creative thinking! Your challenge is to find objects from around your house that could represent the Trinity or any one part of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Once you've gathered the items, put them all in a basket and take turns to pick a symbol and describe what you think it means in relation to what you know about God and the three persons of the Trinity - there are no wrong answers!

Grown-ups, this activity can seem daunting at first as it is so open-ended and we don't know what our children might say! But it also allows children to express their relationship with, and thoughts about God in ways we might never imagine. Have fun together!

Although it can be hard to get our heads around the fact that God exists as the three persons of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, what we can understand is that God speaks as One person to us. We can be reassured that there is no division between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The challenge for us therefore, is to ensure that there is no division between us either!

### Prayer time

Dear God

This Trinity Sunday help us to come to know all of who you are. Help us to connect with you as our loving parent, our Saviour and our helper guide.

Give us wisdom to share what we know about you with others and to answer their questions just like Jesus did.

Amen

## TOGETHER contributions needed!

As Nathan is on his sabbatical in the next few months, we need your input into TOGETHER more than ever. Could you write a front page article (around 500 words) for one of our editions? Perhaps you could contribute a prayer, an encouraging or even a challenging piece. **Perhaps you can share an experience of God the Holy Spirit that you've had in your life!**

If you would like to join the team or make a one-off contribution, please get in touch with Revd. Peter Hibberts by email ([peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk](mailto:peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk)) or telephone (01636812166).

Contributions must be received by Monday of each week for Tuesday editorial and Wednesday distribution.