

Avril considers

I find it interesting how my mind is at its most creative, most thoughtful when challenged with something that I can't easily know the answer to. For instance when watching a good film, it is during the suspense that I do the deepest thinking, trying to work out for myself what the outcome might be.

Last year Simon asked me to write down why I do what I do. Trying to convey this in a sentence was not easy but this is what I came up with;

To afford the opportunity for each child to be released into the richness of who God is in an open and non-judgemental way.

To ensure that the children I meet are given this opportunity it is important that space is left to allow them to think, to wonder, to work things out for themselves. Often our default is to want to tell children the answers, the outcome as we see it. It is easy to think that we have achieved our aims and objectives just because a child can tell us a few facts and figures. Faith runs so much deeper than this. When I think of my faith journey, my deepest thinking was done on my own, challenged by something I had read or heard. Even now when preparing an assembly or RE Day, a struggle will often take place in my mind as to how I feel about the subject I am preparing. It is during these times however that the most dramatic learning takes place.

I was astonished the first time I took part in a Godly Play session at how little the storyteller actually said, but because of the space given for my own inner thoughts to be released, how much deeper the impact that the story had on me. At FACT we have just been given a labyrinth. Christian labyrinths can be found in churches in the Middle East and Europe. Ours is portable and printed onto vinyl! You walk the labyrinth stopping at various focal points where you give yourself time to wonder, to work something out for yourself. We are excited about the prospect of using the labyrinth with children in our KS1 Time To Wonder to help them think about their self-esteem. We have some brilliant new songs to use which use everyday issues. Through the beautifully written lyrics and catchy tunes children will be offered opportunities to reflect for themselves.

So, for me the challenge is to give space for children to wonder, to work things out for themselves, to ask the question, 'So what does that mean for me?' I don't need to tie up all the loose ends, to see a show of hands. Going back to my first example of the film, how annoying it is when you are at that crucial point in the film when you are totally engrossed and someone interrupts your train of thought by giving you their interpretation of what is happening, their answers. We benefit much more when the story is allowed time to unfold.

Diary:

November

- 1st Meath assembly
- 1st Grange infants assembly
- 1st Gerrards Cross infant and junior assemblies
- 2nd Grovelands infant assembly
- 2nd Thorpe CE infant assembly
- 2nd Ashford CE infant and junior assemblies
- 2nd St Ann's Heath INSET
- 3rd Littleton CE infant assembly
- 3rd St. Paul's CE infant and junior assemblies
- 3rd Meeting National Children's advisors for the Coff
- 4th Oakfield First School assembly
- 4th The Hythe infant and junior assemblies
- 4th Town Farm infant and junior assemblies
- 5th Training day @ St Georges Campden (attending)
- 7th Thorpe Lea infant and junior assemblies
- 7th Cardinal Newman RC infant and junior assemblies
- 7th Staines Cong. Children's workers review meeting
- 8th Buckland infant and junior assemblies
- 8th Staines Prep infant and junior assemblies
- 8th Fordway assembly
- 8th Christ church CE infant assembly
- 9th Riverbridge assembly
- 10th St Anns Heath junior assembly
- 10th Echelford infant and junior assemblies
- 11th Trumps Green infant assembly
- 14th Ashford Park infant and junior assemblies
- 15th Stanwell Fields infant and junior assemblies
- 16th St Anns Heath INSET
- 16th Riverbridge assembly
- 17th St Annes RC infant and junior assemblies
- 17th Christ Church RE day
- 21st Time to Wonder @ St John's - St Judes Y4
- 21st Ashford Park Y6 planning meeting
- 22nd St Ignatius RC infant assembly
- 22nd Time to Wonder @ St John's - St Judes Y4
- 22nd Gerrards Cross Y4 planning meeting
- 23rd Time to Wonder @ St John's - The Hythe Y4
- 24th Time to Wonder @ St John's - The Hythe Y5 and 6
- 25th Ashford Park RE day Y6
- 26th FACT retreat @ Englefield Green Village Centre
- 29th Gerrards Cross Y4 RE day

December

- 6th Fordway RE day
- 10th Strictly Dads @ The Lawns

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Faith Awareness in Children Trust

Help my Sunday School doesn't work!

If I were to sum up the numerous conversations with clergy and leaders in churches over the past few months it would be the statement above. The desire in churches to engage with children remains strong but there is a growing realisation that what worked even five years ago doesn't cut the mustard today. The idea of Sunday school is very much up for grabs at this time with questions about whether the most helpful way to nurture children's faith is best done via a Sunday morning class based session.

I have been thrilled to have been able to work with Walton Baptist Church recently, aiding them in their understanding of children today, as they ask big questions about the way forward with their children's work. I am also supporting Staines (on Thames) Congregational Church in a similar quest. There has been a growing number of requests from churches for training in this area including; St Mary's Hampton and Horsham Methodist. They are all very keen to understand what makes children different today from previous generations; how can we create opportunities for awe and wonder and how does a child's faith develop? We offer plenty of stimulating thinking in these training sessions with a healthy mix of hands on approaches. The need for children to experience God rather than be instructed about Him is becoming more evident and is a significant shift in thinking of churches. There is generally a willing band of volunteers who often feel ill equipped and unsure of what they are trying to achieve with children on a Sunday morning. They are keen to be part of the training that releases their passion to see children's faith grow and blossom.



There is also a growing desire and requests for help from churches that are seeking ways to engage with their local primary schools.

They can recognise the need to support schools and that they have a lot to offer.

Churches, however, unfortunately struggle to find the time or have the expertise to effectively serve these schools.

This is where FACT can act as a bridge by being the link between the church and school to the benefit of both. If this is something you think your church could benefit from then do get in touch.



A newsletter to keep supporters informed, inspired & involved.

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FACT enabling children to reflect on the Christian Gospel

RE Days

Since the beginning of term, 3 schools have received FACT led RE days.

Year 3 pupils at St. Annes Catholic school studied "Why is the Bible a best seller today?" while Year 1 pupils at Gerrards Cross looked at "What makes a church building different from other buildings?" They produced Stained glass windows as one of their activities and ended up with a superb display.



Finally, Year 2 pupils at Grange infants looked at "How can I make a difference in the world?"

All 3 days allowed pupils to experience **reflective activities** that not only made them think about the subject matter, but also allowed them to consider their own faith and feelings.

Pupils at the Grange used the parachute to engage with a story and reflect on how the issues affect them.



Last half term's assembly

One of the big film releases over the summer was the Disney Pixar film *Cars 2*. Knowing that many of the children would go to see the film during the summer holidays, Simon and Avril felt it would be good to take a trip to the cinema themselves to watch the film and ponder on whether it could be used for the first assembly of the new academic year.

The film covers many themes but one that struck a chord was **'Valuing a person for who they are.'** The underlying story of the film is about the friendship between a rusty old tow truck 'Mater' and a shining racing car 'Lightning McQueen'. Although best friends, when it is suggested that McQueen takes Mater to the posh party being held for the 'Big 3 Races, Grand Prix' he is reluctant, feeling that Mater would not fit in because of the way he looks and sounds.



This attitude is extremely relevant to our culture which so readily judges us by appearance and status. However, the Bible cuts through this premise, being egalitarian in its teachings.

To emphasise this point the KS2 children look at James' letter to the early church **'you must never treat people in different ways, according to their outward appearance.'** The younger KS1 children hear about the disciples argument over who is the greatest and Jesus' answer **'whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be servant of all.'** By the end of the film the racing car Lightning McQueen realises what a good friend he has in Mater. Not only does Mater always put his friends first, helping them and sticking by them, he also has a hidden talent and this talent saves his friends from the bad guys. This allowed us to think about how, if we only judge a person on their outward appearance, we might not see their hidden talents. The two songs chosen for the theme reinforced the point that we all have something to offer God and each other, whatever we look like.

The way forward ?

Since Becky left us at Easter we have been considering how we might **develop and broaden** the ministry of FACT.

There are growing opportunities for Avril to deepen and develop work in schools and Simon is supporting this work. His role has continued to grow and change allowing him to have a greater engagement with churches and their work amongst children as well as seeing the opportunities with pre-school children increase through nurseries, toddler groups and Children's centres.

However this isn't the limit. There are even more things to consider but with a finite number of hours in the day and days in the week they cannot be looked at. The need for FACT to strengthen their administrative base, relieving Simon of many routine tasks and to build in some more capacity to deliver front line services, has been a desire for some considerable time.

With all this in mind we have considered whether the creation of a new role of Operations Director with an element of frontline ministry might be one way forward. We have collectively considered this need and idea, bringing our plans before God in prayer. God's guidance is never straight forward to understand or interpret but there seem to have been some positive indicators including a scripture given by a supporter who had felt that God had illuminated it for us.

Isaiah 54:2 - Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.

It was the phrase, **'strengthen your stakes'** that was considered to be important with the idea of firming up our back room support to allow for further frontline ministry.

However at a recent trustees meeting it was decided that this post was not for this moment particularly as FACT's finances could not support another worker.

Please continue to pray about this matter and if you feel that God is calling you to financially support this role, please let us know.

Other News

Retreat

Saturday 26th November will see members of the FACT team, Trustees and the prayer group on retreat at the Englefield Green Village Centre.

The aim of the retreat is to enable the team to spend time out of the office while reflecting and preparing for Advent. It will be a time of **personal refreshment and corporate reflection** on the ministry of FACT.

Playgroup work

Simon has led harvest celebrations at Christ Church toddler group and St. John's pre-school group. Both have invited Simon back to lead their Christmas celebrations. He is also visiting the Caterpillar Nursery in Hanworth.

It is encouraging to be able to use the pre-school packages that we prepared last year for the benefit of pre-school pupils. The children and staff **value the simple approach** of a story, song and puppet. If you would like Simon to visit your setting do get in touch.

Time to Wonder

The team are very excited that two schools will be benefiting from Time to Wonder sessions in November.

St John's, Egham are hosting the event which will be attended by pupils from The Hythe Primary school, Egham Hythe and also St. Judes, Englefield Green. We will report on this event in the next newsletter. Development work continues on the KS1 Time to Wonder which we hope to launch later this year. So if you have an infant dept. Watch this space!

New Cleaner?

When we moved offices to Staines one of our faithful volunteers, Wendy, stepped up to the challenge of cleaning it each week. Wendy has had to step back from this support for FACT and we are looking for someone else to pick up the baton. Could this be you? Give Jill a ring to find out what's involved and see how you might be able to help.

Apology

We would like to apologise for the lateness of this newsletter, which should have been sent out at the start of October. Unfortunately with the busy start to the year for Simon and Avril, and Kay visiting schools in Botswana, the deadline was overlooked. Ooops!

Thinking: The talking of the soul with itself. Plato