

Children matter to God

Catherine Butcher reviews a DVD that aims to put children more firmly on the Church's agenda.

How do you stem the tide when 1,000 British children leave the church every week? To help churches buck the trend, leading children's ministry providers have teamed up to produce this resource for small groups.

This six-session, interactive course is designed for every adult church member. Its message is that we all need to be those who bring children to Jesus because children matter to God. Inspired by God's passion for children, the series highlights the role of children in church, promotes a deeper understanding of their world and spiritual lives, challenges us to value children as Jesus did and to set out clear strategies to give each child in our community the opportunity to encounter Jesus.

I can certainly imagine the reluctant conscripts to the Sunday school rota taking part in the course and finding it encouraging, inspiring and practical. But I think it would need a three-line whip to get every church member to follow a course focusing on children. Some people – even church leaders – simply don't see children... full-stop! However, if a church was to issue such an ultimatum, the whole church would benefit and become a

more welcoming and nurturing environment for children.

As a parent, the series reminded me about the unique role parents play in introducing our children to Jesus; the Family Matters session would be particularly helpful for parents new to faith, who want to learn how to demonstrate and speak about faith as a family. As a Sunday school rota member, the series encourages me -- those sessions spent with church kids when all the other adults are elsewhere can be life-changing – for the children as well as for me! For every church member, there are salutary lessons for those who ignore or draw back from children. For parents, particularly with primary school contact, the video takes a challenging and thought-provoking look at the

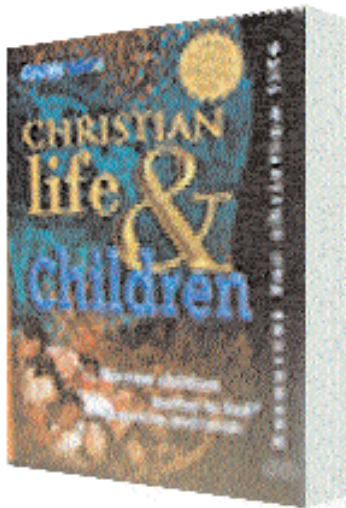
world of a child and the spiritual lives of children. I wear each of these hats from time to time and found a welcome emphasis throughout the series: we are all in this together; parents have the primary role in bringing their own children to Jesus, but the whole church family plays a vital part.

The standards set by the course are high. Each session is broken up into short, clearly defined parts suitable for different learning styles with opportunities for reflection, feedback and real-life research with children in preparation for the next session. The creative Bible readings could stand-alone in church services as a contemporary and visual method of presenting scripture using cartoons and dramatised reading. Even the 'talking heads' on the course are set in interesting surroundings: a children's activity park, toy shop, swimming pool, a Playmobile nativity scene and a classroom. Interviews with unchurched children root the series in reality helping adults to enter the child's world with questions like: What do you talk about most with your friends? Who do you go to when you have a problem? Or, what do you fear most? The vital issue of child protection is not forgotten, and a CD-Rom provides extra resources, which are also available as copyright-free session outlines on the web-site www.christianlifeand.com.

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A Leader's Guide gives a step-by-step outline of each two-hour session; course leaders need no special knowledge or theological background. Although the presenters are almost all white, both men and women take part, sharing their insights and experience and there is a wider ethnic mix among the participating children. The church settings are varied too and include a traditional pews-and-stained-glass Anglican setting, a less formal charismatic meeting style, a dedicated KidzKlub format and small groups in homes. All types of church could benefit from using the series, though the expectation that children might pray for healing or prophesy might challenge some churches' theology and structures.

Catherine Butcher is a parent and freelance writer/editor.



Christian Life & Children

– a resource for small groups

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