



PARENTS' HANDBOOK

Welcome

You and your family are very welcome here at St Leonard's. At church we aim to help people of all ages and backgrounds to worship God and grow as Christians. We provide opportunities for everyone coming to St Leonard's to learn more about their faith and to grow spiritually. This handbook aims to help families discover what we offer so that you can participate in the life of the church.

Sunday Mornings

Our main service is at 10 am on Sunday Mornings. On the first Sunday of the month we have *Celebrating Together*. This is a more informal Eucharistic (Communion) service than on other Sundays. It enables members of the congregation of all generations to worship together. The service lasts for 50-60 minutes.

On other Sundays at 10 am we have a more formal style of worship that is aimed primarily at adults, with groups for our children and young people taking place in other areas of the church. (See information about the Crèche, Sunday School and 9-13s group on pages 4-5).

Practicalities of bringing babies and young children to Church

Bringing young children to church can be a stressful experience and we want to do all we can to help you and your child participate fully in the worship of the church.

- ◆ Please feel free to keep your child with you during the service or to take advantage of the crèche.
- ◆ If your baby is upset or restless please feel free to walk about with them during the service if this will help to settle them.
- ◆ Please do not feel that you have to keep your toddler sitting still for the whole service. If they want to move about, this is often a better option than insisting they sit still.
- ◆ We understand that children under five years cannot be expected to be quiet during a whole service, so please don't be anxious about this.

- ◆ If your child starts to make noise that disrupts, or prevents other people from participating, in the service then you may like to take them out for a short while until they calm down.
- ◆ You could take them up to the crèche, a monitoring system allows you to hear what is going on in the service.

Nappy changing facilities

If your child needs their nappy changing you will find a mat and sink in the crèche. Please put dirty nappies in the main bins outside the front doors of the church.

Breastfeeding

You are welcome to breastfeed your child during services and at other times. If you would like some privacy while feeding you can go up to the gallery where you will still be able to participate in the service but won't be seen. Please note, because the balcony of the gallery is quite low it is not safe for children once they are toddling.

Snacks in church?

We would prefer the church to be a snack-free zone, however we understand that sometimes children need to eat something during the church service. Please consider other members of the congregation when thinking about what to bring and when to give it to your child.

It is not appropriate to have children eating food as they come up to be blessed during communion. Please make sure that they have finished eating before you come up for communion.

Things you can do to help your child get the most out of Church

Several strategies may help your child get the most out of coming to church, including:

- ◆ Point out what is going on; the processions, the colours, what the clergy are wearing and the actions that are taking place.
- ◆ Show them how to pray and talk to God.

- ◆ Point out the different parts of the church and what they are for. There is a leaflet in the Narthex with some useful suggestions.
- ◆ Help them to follow the order of service if they can read, and encourage them to join in with the hymns and responses.
- ◆ When you go up for communion, say ‘Amen’ with your child when they are blessed.
- ◆ Help your child to take an active part in the service by shaking hands at the Peace and receiving a Blessing – they tend to enjoy doing this.
- ◆ Above all remember that we were all children once and don’t worry if they get restless! However if you and your child needs a break during the service, do wander in the Narthex or use the crèche. You can come and go as you please.

How to engage with worship yourself

- ◆ Relax! If your child needs a break or time out to settle, feel free to take them to the crèche where they will be well cared for while you return to the service.
- ◆ Talk at home about what might happen in church – make it a game “ I wonder what colours we’ll see?” “ I wonder what words we might hear?” Then quietly point these out during the service and see who guessed right!
- ◆ Even if your child can’t yet read, hold them as you follow the service and sing the hymns. Point out where we are, and look for easy words that are often repeated – Amen; alleluia; God; thanks; etc
- ◆ Take home the sheet with the readings and hymns. Worship spills out from when we are in church, so if you have found it hard to engage on Sunday, grab five minutes (or more!) on Monday or Tuesday or
- ◆ Share your child with others! As you get to know people in church, sit near them so that they can share with you some of the care during worship.
- ◆ Above all know that your children are a gift from God - and your role in parenting and modelling the Christian way is in itself part of your worship.

Activities for Children and Young People

We have several activities for children:

- ◆ Toddler Church
- ◆ Crèche
- ◆ Sunday School (for children aged 3-8 years)
- ◆ 9-13s group
- ◆ 14+ group
- ◆ Lenny's Singers
- ◆ Uniformed Organisations (Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Guides, Explorers)

Details about each of these activities are provided below.

Toddler Church 0-5yrs

- ◆ Toddler Church is a service especially designed for babies and pre-school children.
- ◆ Toddler Church meets in church from 10.30-11.30 am on Mondays during the school term.
- ◆ We start with a short service which includes songs with actions and musical instruments for the children to play.
- ◆ A short bible story is told, often using dolls and other toys to illustrate it, followed by a prayer time. The service lasts about 20 minutes.
- ◆ After the service there is a time for free play in the church with suitable toys, including some borrowed from the toy library.
- ◆ While the children are playing together there is a chance for a cup of tea or coffee and a chat for parents/carers.

The service is designed to introduce the children to worship and prayer. We have found it helps the children understand better what is happening on a Sunday. You may also find it gives you some ideas for praying with your child and sharing your faith with him or her.

Toddler Church is a very friendly group, and new families are always welcome. Toddler Church can be a good way of getting to know other members of the congregation who have young children and provides an opportunity for both adults and children to make new friends. Please make sure you and your child sign in when you come.

The Crèche 0-3yrs

Parents can bring babies and young children into the crèche at any time during the service. There is a register to sign, a name label and we like to know roughly where the parents are sitting in case they are needed.

The crèche is available during the 10.00 am Sunday service and is located on the 1st floor, above the kitchen area. Access is via the stairs to the right of the main doors as you enter the church – please ask the churchwardens or sidespeople for directions if you are unsure of where this is. The crèche normally closes in time for the children to join their parents for a blessing at the altar, so you need to come and collect them by the end of the Eucharistic Prayer.

The crèche is staffed by two members of the congregation who are CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked; except for the 1st Sunday in the month when we have *Celebrating Together*. We open the room on the 1st Sunday of the month in case parents wish to use the facilities themselves.

We feel the crèche is an important aspect of our worship because it enables:

- ◆ parents to fully participate in most of the service.
- ◆ children to meet new friends with whom they can progress through the various age-related activities in the church.

The crèche has a range of age-related toys. Should parents need to stay in the crèche initially to settle their child, an intercom system relays the service to the room. Carers will not feed children and do not normally change nappies. If parents are needed to attend to their child they will be asked to return to the crèche by one of the volunteers.

Sunday School 3yrs –8yrs

The Sunday School runs during the 10.00 am Sunday service for children aged 3-8 years. Sunday School takes place in the Church Hall which is located past the Glebe (the grassy area beside the church) down Tooting Bec Gardens – please ask the churchwardens or sides people for directions if you are unsure where this is. Entrance is through the double doors at the front of the hall. Parents are asked to register their children on arrival. It is helpful if you can arrive promptly for the start of activities.

The Sunday School returns to church in time for children to join their parents for a blessing or communion at the altar. The children are brought back to church from the hall across the Glebe by the Sunday School leaders and attending parents. If the parents are already in church their children can join them in saved seats with less likelihood of families being separated for the conclusion of the service and Blessing.

There is a team of CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked leaders who take it in turns to lead the children in age appropriate worship and activities. The results of their activities are often displayed in the Narthex.

The Sunday School provides an opportunity for young children to hear bible stories, to pray and to worship. Children meet their friends and make new friends with whom they can attend church through their formative years and meet together to share Christ's love. Following a period of worship together activities are provided for children aged 3-5 years and 6-8 years. A collection is taken during Sunday School; you might like to give your child a coin to put in.

A number of parents choose to remain with their children as they settle into Sunday School and help with some activities, but once this phase is over parents are encouraged to leave their children and enjoy worship in the main body of the church. If a parent stays in Sunday School they are required to complete a self-disclosure form to comply with our safeguarding policy.

For further details about Sunday School please contact the Sunday School Co-ordinator. Contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

The 9-13s Group

The 9-13s group is held during the 10.00 am Sunday service in the Unity Chapel, off the Narthex – please ask the churchwardens or sides people for directions if you are unsure where this is. The group begins after the clergy and choir have left the chapel and processed into the main church. Participants are asked to register at the start and it is good if all arrive for the start to ensure they contribute to the discussion of plans for the session. Members of the group join the main congregation at the Peace in order to participate in communion.

Sessions are run by two from a team of CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked leaders who take it in turns to lead the children in age appropriate worship and activities.

The 9-13s group builds upon friendships established in Sunday School, and welcomes young people new to church and helps them feel part of the congregation. The group provides an opportunity for young people to explore their faith using a range of activities.

For further details about the 9-13s group please contact the group co-ordinator. Contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

The 14+ Group

This group usually meets on a Sunday outside the times of church services. The group determines its own programme. Activities are often of a more social nature, enabling young Christians to share in fun as well as more worship focused gatherings. To date we have been skating and had trips out or a pizza accompanied by like-minded older members of the congregation.

Whatever activities are undertaken, at least two of the accompanying adults will be CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked.

For further details about the 14+ group please contact the group co-ordinator. Contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

Uniformed Organisations at St Leonard's

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts are open to boys and girls.

Beavers (*currently not running Sept. 09*)

is for children aged 6 - 8 years. Beavers meet in the church hall on Tuesdays between 6 - 7 pm during term time.

Cubs

is for children aged 7½ -11 years. They meet in the church hall on Tuesdays between 7 - 8.30 pm during term time.

Scouts

is for children aged 10½-14 years. They meet in the church hall on Fridays between 7.15 - 9.15 pm during term time.

If your child would like to join any of these groups please either bring them along during one of the sessions in the Hall or contact the Group Scout Leader. Contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

Guides

is for girls aged between: 10 - 14 years. Guides meet in the Church Hall, Wednesday 6:45 - 8:15 pm during school term time.

If your child would like to join guides then contact the Guide Leader. Contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

Explorer Scouts

is for young people from 14-18 years.

The Explorer Unit has close links with St Leonard's although they are not part of our Scout Troop.

They meet at Julian's School, Leigham Court Road on Thursdays between 7.30 - 9 pm.

Contact the Explorer Scouts leader via details on the St Leonard's website.

Lenny's Singers

The Junior choir sing with the Adult Choir on the first Sunday of the month and at other special services.

- ◆ Children are welcome to join Lenny's Singers from the age of 7 years.
- ◆ Lenny's Singers have a weekly rehearsal.
- ◆ Lenny's Singers wear choir robes when they sing with the Choir and are considered part of the Church choir.

Our Director of Music leads Lenny's Singers. If your child would like to join Lenny's Singer please speak to the Director of Music after a service or give them a ring –contact details are on the St Leonard's website.

St Leonard's Baptism Policy

- ◆ We baptise or christen people of any age.
- ◆ You or your child can be baptised at St Leonard's if you live in the parish, or if you are a regular member of St Leonard's congregation.
- ◆ Children are baptised in the Church of England on the understanding that their parents will bring them up to be Christians and encourage them to come to church.
- ◆ We hold Baptism services at least six times a year on alternate first Sundays of the month. Baptism is also available on several Sundays in August.
- ◆ We only administer baptism during our main Sunday services.

Arranging a baptism

If you would like your child baptised please come to the office hour on Saturday mornings between 10.00 and 11.00 am to make your booking. Your child will need to have at least three godparents, all of whom should have been baptised themselves.

Baptism preparation

Baptism preparation involves a home visit from the priest who is baptising your child if they are under 18 months, or a rehearsal in church in the week before the service if they are older. If you have any questions or concerns about baptism please speak to the clergy.

Admission of Children to Communion and Confirmation

St Leonard's admits baptised children to communion before they have been confirmed. Children are admitted, following a course of preparation, on Easter Day each year.

The Admission of Children to communion is relatively new in the church of England. If you would like to know more about why this change has happened and the theology behind it please get in touch with the Rector or The Revd Mary Hawes.

Children under 7 years

Children under 7 years of age are admitted after a short session of preparation. They usually only receive bread at communion until they reach the age of 7 years. Once these children are seven they are expected to join the First Communion classes.

Children aged 7 years or over

Children aged 7 years or over on Easter Day are admitted to communion following a series of 10 classes. The classes give an outline of our faith and what it means to share communion together. Children not already baptised can be baptised on Easter Day at the same time as they receive communion for the first time.

Confirmation

Confirmation is generally a rite for older teenagers or adults. Through confirmation candidates take on for themselves, in maturity, the commitments made for them at their baptism. We run confirmation preparation sessions for teenagers and adults separately. Usually the classes start after Easter and the confirmation takes place in mid-July. If you would like to discuss this further please speak to the Rector.

School Admissions

Each year a large number of parents ask for a church reference for school admissions. Outlined below is what you need to do if you would like the Rector to give you a reference. You might find it helpful to know that references only cover church attendance and involvement in church activities.

References for primary school admissions

- ◆ If you are planning to ask for a reference please let the Rector know the September before it is required.
- ◆ Make sure you introduce yourself and your child to the Rector.
- ◆ Make sure that you greet the Rector after each service you attend, as the size of the congregation can mean that people are missed.
- ◆ Attendance at Toddler Church counts equally with attendance on a Sunday for references for primary schools.

References for secondary school admissions

- ◆ If you are asking for a reference for a secondary school and will require a letter please give the Rector written details of the name and address of the school, and the person to whom the reference should be addressed.
- ◆ Please let her know in your written request what sort of details the school are going to be asking for in the reference. You should also give your and your partner's names and your child's name, date of birth and address.
- ◆ Make sure that you greet the Rector after each service you attend as the size of the congregation can mean that people are missed.

Would you like to get involved?

We are always looking for more helpers and volunteers. If you would like to know how you could get involved please speak to the Chair of the Younger Church Committee or any member of the PCC whose details are on the board in the Narthex.

All our helpers who work with children are subjected to checks with the Criminal Records Bureau as well as a self disclosure form and an interview. We will also take up references. Details of our Safe-Guarding Policy are available through the church or on our website.

And finally....

This is the first edition of our Parents Handbook. If you have any suggestions about how to improve it or any other comments, please pass them onto the chair of the Younger Church Committee.

Contact details can be found on the parish web-site.

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