The first two years

This is the third part of a series exploring milestones. Milestones are important points that you reach throughout life. These articles are exploring how we as a Church community can share in these important celebrations. Last time we looked at birth and baptism, and this month we will be exploring that the first two years of life.

Of course, in your first two years of life you are met by many "firsts" such as Christmas, Easter, Birthdays, Crawling, Walking, Speaking, Teeth, Hair etc. The list could go on quite a bit! It is such an exciting time for families. Conversations often begin with "Jamie took three steps last week", or "She seems to be cutting another tooth". The child themselves often becomes the focus of not just conversation, but entertainment and joy.

So, how as a Church community can we help to celebrate some of these great milestones? The following are a few ideas of how to celebrate this wonderful of so many "firsts":

Growth Chart
Parents love to share what's happening with their children. In a large congregation this is not always easy, so we have stolen the idea of "Grandma's brag book", but it has a twist. On a large sheet of paper, trace around the child. Now cut this outline out and stick it up on a wall in your Church or in the Hall. To this outline stick photo's, short stories, news from parents etc. The idea is to create a place where the whole community is able to share in the wonder of watching a child grow. Most importantly, add some stories or photo's that relate to the Child growth in faith and Church life – at Sunday School, first words about God, or stories (eg. My nephew learn't really quickly to say "amen" at meals – there is some debate as to whether this was for theological reasons, or he knew it was the point at which he could start eating). Of course, this chart will need to be taken down and renewed every few months as the child grows.

Resources
Have you got a library in your Parish? Why not establish a parenting section. It could include books on parenting, story books or even toys. I speak to many parents who talk about how expensive these items are, and that having a place to share these resources would be ideal. They often talk about how bored they get as parents doing the same thing, or reading the same book over and over – so you could provide them some variety, and contribute to some of the great milestones in life like motor skills and speech development.

Mum's/Dad's Groups
Parenting is not a skill that just happens overnight, and genes only play a small part in the role. So, one of the best ways to support parents in this new role is to visit and find out what they need. Some may be interested in a short course on "positive parenting", others may like to meet with other parents in a less formal setting like a mums and toddlers group. Recently at the Parish of Stroud I witnessed a Mum's and Toddler's group held inside this historic old Church. It meets regularly together to share, sing, discuss and simply encourage each other. One mother said "in some ways, this is like

my Church . . . I find Sunday Church too hard with two little children, here they can be themselves and I can participate fully as well".

1st Birthday

Your first birthday is a milestone where many great traditions can begin. In my family we always had a cake, lots of singing and made sure that a story or two was told about the person who was celebrating – usually something funny. We always made sure that grace was said, and this always included a prayer for the life that we were celebrating. In some Parishes that I have visited this happens during morning tea after Church, and during the service the person is called up for a special prayer and blessing.

The first two years are such an exciting stage in life with so many "firsts" taking place. Families are often bursting to talk about and celebrate the high's and low's of these times. The trick for a congregation is to find creative ways to celebrate these events, and most importantly, celebrate them in light of the creator in who's image we are made. Have fun!

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