Why . . . ???

This is the fourth 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 the first two years of life, and this month we will look at the time after the terrible two's, up to starting school.

It is said that in the first seven years of your life you learn almost 80% of everything you ever need to know. Whilst the first two years are certainly a huge learning curve in terms of new skills, the years between three and up to staring school are more intentional in learning about the world around us and how we fit into it. We learn about sharing, working with others, developing patterns of communication, mastering numbers and the alphabet, and start writing. The greatest question asked by children this age is "Why?". So, let's explore these years of big questions and great wonder!

Church Back Pack
At age three why not give every child a special "Church Backpack". In this backpack you could include things that are used at Church such as a prayer book, a children's bible, snacks to eat during the service and maybe a favourite story book. It could also be the bag in which material is taken home for the whole family to work on.

School
It is at this age that children begin pre-school and eventually enter Kindergarten. This is such an exciting time for children, and an emotional time for parents (whether that is relief or sadness). At the beginning of each school year, why not make an effort to call forward all children who are starting school and have a special blessing for them. You could make the theme of the entire service that of education – include teachers, especially scripture teachers in your worship.

Sharing
Learning to share is an important part of growing up, and so it is important that in our Church we create opportunities for children to share with us in all that makes us a community. If children are not already receiving communion prior to this age, this is a great time to welcome them to the Lord's table. Children learn from our sharing of this holy meal that they belong and are important members of the body. Other ways that we can encourage sharing is by including children in preparing the traditional cuppa after Church, or including them on some of the rosters – maybe with an accompanying parent to help them along. Children learn to share by seeing and practicing it, so think of ways to ensure that this is happening.

Asking big questions . . .
As I mentioned above, this is the age of asking the big questions in life. The answer to "why" is of course "because", but this often doesn't wash. Why not have a God box in your Parish? A God box is like a mail box where you can leave letters, questions and thoughts. They can be left by children, young people and even parents. They can be answered in a few ways – Q&A time in your worship service; in your Parish Pewsheet; or by a letter directly back to the person. They could be answered by a variety of people, and can include answers like "I don't know . . . but am willing to think some more about it with you".

There is so much that happens with this age group. These are only a few suggestions, but you get the idea. Identifying milestones and making sure that we meet these ever changing and important needs requires three things: 1. Someone who recognizes the need for each milestone to be celebrated; 2. Somone who cares enough to make a bit of an effort; 3. People who are willing to celebrate it.

Michael Armstrong
For CEY Ministries.