

YOUNG FAMILIES IN A MODERN PARISH

Talk presented by Helen Day

I have been part of this parish for 7½ years. In some ways it is not that long, but after all of the milestones that have happened since, including meeting and marrying the man of my dreams, and the birth of our first child, it certainly seems like a lifetime.

Introducing Sam, my 16 month old son – some of you have seen him around, but perhaps not as often as we'd like. He has come to help out with the singing at the 6pm mass a couple of times, and he was certainly here for his baptism, but he finds a whole hour of being quiet and still a little challenging. Sam is a first class explorer and scientist, and wants to discover everything. He loves to play and run and shout. Fortunately, he also has a real love of books and music, and enjoys a good cuddle. He truly sees everything with awe and wonder, and he has taught my husband and me so much about finding joy in this world. Sam is certainly part of the St John's community. His godmother is another

presenter here today, and he meets up with the friends that Rob and I had made in the parish before he was born every month or so. We were also friends with a couple in the parish that had their first daughter 5 weeks after Sam, and we meet up for play dates and do a touch of babysitting for each other.

We are doing our best to raise Sam in the Christian tradition. He enjoys prayers before meal, and as soon as everyone is seated he tends to hold out both his hands and say 'Aaa' – his approximation of 'Amen' regardless of whether he has already started to eat or not. One of his favourite books was a gift from his Grandma 'Where does God live?' and I can recite it word for word without the pictures now.

Perhaps the most logical thing I have to compare raising our family in a modern parish to is my

own experience of being raised in a not-so-modern parish. And I mean that in both senses of the word. I was born in the middle of the 80s, but the parish I was raised in was Scalibrinian; very Italian, and very traditional. On certain feast days they still close off streets and process a statue of Mary down to the beach. Dad is an agnostic – although he knows the bible better than anyone I know, he believes in Gaia. Mum was raised Catholic, although she didn't and

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doesn't feel the need to practice beyond Christmas and Easter. I was baptised at the age of 4 and learned about Jesus through the Catechists that visited my public school. For some reason, Mum felt it was still important for me to go through the sacramental program, and from the

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aimed at young adults during Fr Michael's time and the very short-lived young couples group; aimed at newly-weds that Fr Paul started.

Funnily enough that

died quickly because at least 3 of the 5 or 6 couples had babies.

time I received my first holy communion, I dragged Mum out of bed every Sunday morning to go to church. They did run a children's liturgy program for school aged children, which essentially meant that the liturgy of the word was translated into child friendly language, and the homily was a more interactive 'question/answer' approach. At 13 I graduated straight out of the 'class' and became a 'teacher'. However, I was never really a part of the parish as a young child. So maybe the only thing left to compare family life in our Parish to is the life that we had here before the birth of our son. For most of that time Rob and I have helped out with the music on a Sunday night, Rob has also contributed to the liturgy committee and at different times we have both been on the pastoral council.

Now we take turns. I'm sure we're no different from most families in the parish while they have had children of Sam's age. If Sam is in a good mood for attending mass, we tag team to keep him entertained and calm, and when Sam is tired or cranky one of us will stay home with him instead of coming to mass. Rob and I each came for one session of the pastoral planning time, and this year Rob did the Vinnie's Door knock appeal on his own. At this stage Sam is only part of the St John's community and not part of the St John's parish, but I imagine that as Sam grows up things will change. Hopefully soon, Sam will be old enough to participate in parish life too, and we will be a united force in the church.

Together we participated in the Vinnie's Doorknock appeal and the Good Friday re-enactments. We were involved in the Footprints program;