

Faith and Society Files: Church and School - Celebrating Christmas and Easter

Many churches around the country put on presentations at Christmas and Easter for local schools. This File explores a programme devised by Slough Baptist Church for children in year 6 with their teachers.



Many churches around the country put on presentations at Christmas and Easter for local schools. The idea is that they come to the church and spend time finding out about the real meaning of Christmas and Easter in a fun, enjoyable and informative way. The events aim to unite schools and churches across a community to help children to think for themselves about Christmas and Easter.

This File explores a programme devised by Slough Baptist Church in which children in year 6 come with their teachers as a class for 90 minute sessions. They come as a whole year group from one school, which can range from one to three classes; the whole year group can range from 25 to 90 pupils (ideal numbers for the team at Slough are around 50-60). The pupils are given a chance to answer questions as the presentation unfolds. This works really well.

The Story from Slough

Slough Baptist Church first did an Easter presentation for schools in 1995. It followed the church's centenary in 1994 when they put on a special presentation for local schools. Building on the success of this event, the church's senior minister Jem Sewell and Scripture Union Schools' Worker Wayne Dixon developed the Easter presentation as a follow-up in 1995. Some local schools came in for a 90 minute presentation which had the twin aim of giving a positive experience of being in a local church, and teaching them something about Easter. That went well, and schools have been coming back at Christmas and Easter every year since then.

The church sets aside a week, and usually hosts 500 pupils from 10 schools. It is encouraging that two other local churches are now offering a presentation which has probably doubled the number of schools in the area being catered for, so that 1000-1100 pupils have the opportunity to take part each year.



The idea has also spread more widely across the country so that in 2009, Wayne estimated that there were around 30 locations serving approximately 200 schools. This corresponds to roughly 10-11,000 pupils going into a church for one of these seasonal presentations. Whether it's called 'Why Easter?', 'Christmas Cracked' or 'Easter Unwrapped' – different areas call it different things – at the heart of the presentation is the same message: the Christmas story or the Easter story being communicated in a fun and relevant way for thousands of children.

Jem and Wayne put the initial programme package together in 1995 and since then it has been developed and changed, with other people getting involved. In 2009 the team of presenters was made up of four people including associate minister Andy Perryman and church member and former youthworker, Sarah Smart. The initiative has the backing and support of the church and there are many others involved in a background role.

"We have been blown away by how well it has gone and the positive feedback from staff and children. As a secondary schools worker I still have chats with teenagers who can remember their visit to the church, and the positive impression it made on them."

*Wayne Dixon,
Scripture Union Schools Worker*

Wayne is keen to point out that it's not just one person or one minister who makes it happen but a team effort and part of the church's ministry – the whole church prays for it and is involved and encourages it. The team of four is just one part of the bigger picture.

It has been encouraging to Wayne that youngsters in secondary schools still come up to him today several years later making reference to the rap, the baptism, the wordsearch or the mince pie making. He would love to see this ministry develop and grow in other locations. To date he is aware of 30 locations, from Altrincham to Woodley, from Gravesend to Glasgow that are doing something similar.

The idea is very flexible so that churches can, like Slough Baptist Church, set aside a week for

the presentations, or they can be spread over two weeks, or just for one day or one morning for one local school. It's do-able, it's accessible, it's not 're-inventing the wheel' and all the information, resources, ideas are available on the Slough Baptist Church website or the Scripture Union seasonal website. If anyone is interested and would like to come along see the presentations in action, please contact Slough Baptist Church to arrange a time to visit at Christmas or Easter if you are local, or they can suggest another area that does something similar.

Part of the value of these presentations is making connections with the local schools. The schools are open, they're happy to come, it ticks the right boxes as far as RE curriculum is concerned. Schools come back with positive comments and feedback.

Christmas and Easter Presentations

Each session is a fast moving multi-media presentation lasting an hour and a half, and includes:

- Individual work packs designed for year 6
- A graphic telling of the Christmas/Easter story
- An explanation of many of the modern Christmas/Easter traditions
- Fun activities based around Christmas/Easter themes

The presentation is aimed at children of all faiths, giving an explanation of why Christmas is an important festival for Christians.

The presentations can be downloaded or sent on CD. There is a small cost of £5 (payable via paypal), but that will give you access to all the material to download in open format, so you can make your own changes. You can download the material as many times as you like, and can get newer versions as they are made available.

To find out more about how to download the material, see: <http://sbc.sloughbaptistchurch.org.uk/schoolsweek/>

Resources available for download:

Christmas Files

- ◇ Christmas Presentation
- ◇ Christmas Invite
- ◇ Christmas Poster
- ◇ Christmas Flyer
- ◇ Letter to attending schools
- ◇ Christmas Full Script
- ◇ Christmas Storyboards
- ◇ Christmas Survey
- ◇ Christmas Book
- ◇ Christmas Evaluation

Easter Files

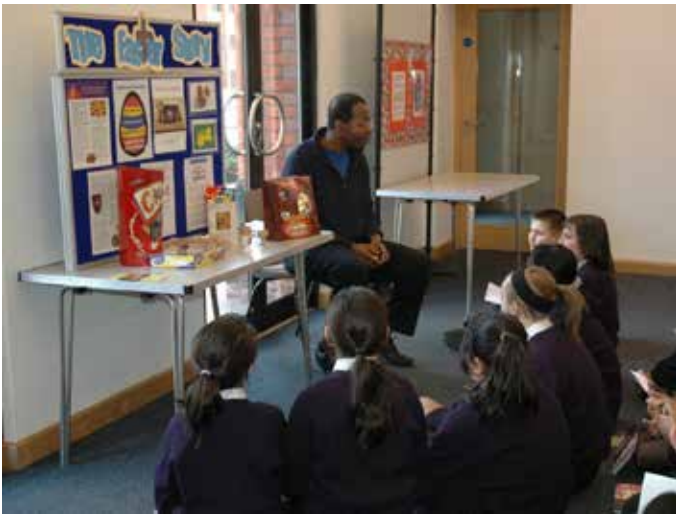
- ◇ Easter Presentation
- ◇ Easter Invite
- ◇ Easter Flyer
- ◇ Letter to attending schools
- ◇ Easter Schedule
- ◇ Easter Full Script
- ◇ Easter Storyboards
- ◇ Easter Storybook
- ◇ Easter Evaluation
- ◇ MP3 Easter Song (with words)

Contact

Slough Baptist Church, Windsor Rd, Slough, SL1 2EJ

Tel: 01753 523058

Email: office@sloughbaptistchurch.org.uk



Wayne tells us about a 17-year old boy from one of the schools who came up to him in his school and, totally out of the blue, said that the thing he remembered most was the story from the Bible about Easter. "That was brilliant! He'd come in six years previously and he could remember in a positive light his experience of his visit to the church, and there are many more stories like that."

Wayne Dixon is a Scripture Union Schools' Worker. Scripture Union has played a crucial part in the development of these presentations. See www.scriptureunion.org.uk for details.

BUGB Faith and Society Team, Baptist House PO Box 44 129 Broadway Didcot Oxon OX11 8RT
telephone 01235 517700 email faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk website www.baptist.org.uk

BUGB operates as a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) with registered Charity Number: 1181392

June 2013