



# Church of Ireland Children's Ministry

## HARVEST NEWSLETTER

Harvest is a very busy time for a lot of people but it also gives us a chance to reflect on what God has provided for us and to take time to appreciate creation. Victoria Beech from God Venture has found a unique way of using an autumn favourite for reflection:

### CONKER REFLECTION

I don't know about you, but I've got a lot of conkers in my house this Autumn. It seems to have been a bumper year, and although I pretend I'm collecting them just because my daughters love playing with them, if I'm honest, they're partly for me as I love the wonder of those beautiful silky-smooth chestnuts with their super-spikey shells.

Last year, I posted an idea on praying with conkers, focusing on spikey situations and asking God to transform them. This year, I've found the more I collect, the more they cause me to reflect. The other day I was thinking of how sometimes I am like a spikey, difficult conker shell. When I let tiredness lead to impatience, irritation and general moaning, I find my children often reflect my state back to me either in their own spikey behaviour, or an astute comment ("Mummy, stop shouting!"). I'm glad, because it brings me up short, and gives me a chance to say sorry to them and to God, and to ask Jesus to make me more like Him, often out loud so they get to hear. When I'm tempted to wallow in how spikey I am, I remember how God is making me new: just like a smooth conker is revealed from inside the spikey shell, God is slowly making me less spikey and more smooth.

When I was collecting today's conker harvest, I was mulling

over the words in the song Cornerstone "dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless stand before the throne" and it occurred to me that God already views me as a smooth, silky conker, not as a spikey shell. When He looks at me, He sees Jesus, perfect in every way. Somehow this knowledge spurs me on, not only to love Him more, but also to be more like the person He sees me to be.

Why not try sitting around your conker collection and asking everyone what it makes them think of. Does it remind them of anything in the Bible? (crown of thorns? the parable of the sower? stories about trees? Does it make them want to pray about something?

We all have times that we feel 'spikey' but God helps us to become shiny and new - what other ways could we use conkers to reflect?

Victoria also gives us this idea for praying with conkers:

Use the contrast between the spikey shell and the smooth conker to reflect on God's transforming work.

Collect conkers still in their spikey shells. Invite everyone to carefully pick one shell up and hold it while thinking of something 'spikey' or not nice they would like God to sort



out. This could be anything, for example, unforgiveness or sickness or a difficult situation among friends. This can be done silently so that everyone has privacy to be honest with God about things they might not want to share with everyone else.

Read the following verse from Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time."

Carefully break open the shells and hold the conkers for a minute, reflecting on how something so lovely comes from something spikey, a picture of how God can transform people and situations.

Leave at least one conker unopened somewhere everyone will see it. Pray the same prayer each time you see the spikey shell until the shell opens to release the conker.







# Diddy Disciples

We are huge fans of Diddy Disciples and the opportunity it gives the youngest members of our church community to learn and worship together. The sessions are fab and packed full of ideas so you can make the session as relevant to those coming along as possible. The Harvest Session in the September

to December book is no exception. 'Thank you, God the maker!' allows children to think about bread and what has to happen before we get to eat our toast! The story is a beautiful song called This is the way we sow the seed, sung to the tune of Here we go round the Mullberry Bush. In response to the story children can

make a thank you card for God the maker, or decorate a paper plate with their favourite meal and add thank you to God on it. All this is finished off with the unique way of praying and again saying Thank You to God the Maker! For more information see <https://www.diddydisciples.org/godthemaker>

## HARVEST SONGS

Harvest Samba (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTdIrITLXks>)

This lively song by Out of the Ark Music, Zane Colquhoun and New Hope will have everyone bopping along and thinking about all the things we need to say thank you to God for at Harvest time. It is colourful, lively and perfect to sing along to.

Conkers - (<https://www.outoftheark.co.uk/songs/conkers.html>)

Another Conker theme, this time a song, again by Out of the Ark Music. This catchy song is all about searching for conkers and finding what else we can discover during autumn.

### RAINDROPS FALLING

Raindrops falling in the night  
Feeding seedlings out of sight  
Beneath the ground they sit so small  
Hardly even there at all  
Thirsty seedlings lift their heads  
Thanking God for being fed

This simple song is sang to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and is perfect for the younger members of our churches to sing. (<https://www.christianitycove.com/children-sunday-school-lesson-harvest-time/101/>)

## BIBLE REFLECTIONS

Harvest services take place over several weeks - why not use this time to reflect on different Bible verses about Harvest:

'We cried on the way to plant our seeds but we will celebrate and shout as we bring in the crops.' *Psalm 126:6*

'If you worry about the weather and don't plant seeds you won't harvest a crop.' *Ecclesiasters 11:4*

'Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not more valuable that they.' *Matthew 6:26*

'I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, but God made them sprout and grow.' *1 Corinthians 3:6*

'When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice.' *James 3:18*







## TALK IDEA

BRF have a huge selection of Harvest services available on their website and include everything you need for an all age service such as introductory ideas, readings, prayer ideas and an interactive talk. The example below is called God the Faithful Gardener and looks at how 3 special gardens played a part in the Bible and how they can help us produce the fruit and the harvest that God is looking for.

God the faithful gardener - Luke 13:6-9 (<https://ideas.brf.org.uk/god-faithful-gardener>)

You will need a bag of apples, a bowl of olives and a bunch of grapes.

Let me tell you about three special gardens, which between them hold the clue to how our lives can produce the fruit and the harvest that God is looking for.

There were once three gardens with three very different sorts of crops.

The fruit of the first garden I've got here. Show the bag of apples

I wonder what's your favorite variety of apple? There are so many to choose from nowadays - many from around the world. Some look tasty. Some look rather waxy! Some look as if they may be sweet but turn out rather sharp. Here are some apples to choose from the fruit garden. Invite some children and adults to taste a few of the apples and give their opinions

The second garden is very different. This garden produces olives. Show the bowl of olives Who likes olives? Invite some children and adults to come and taste them and give their opinions. You may get a mixed response to this!

Well, these olives grow in gardens too and can be eaten. But they can also be crushed to make olive oil, which

has many uses. So here are some olives to crush from this fruit garden.

The third garden is very different again. This garden produces grapes. It is a grape garden or vineyard, as it is more usually known. I wonder who likes grapes? Most people do and they are good for our health. They look good. They can be very sweet and tasty. Which is why we sometimes take grapes to people in hospital. Grapes help us get better. Here are grapes to cure. Invite some children and adults to taste the grapes.

So here are the three gardens and their three fruits.

With: apples to choose; olives to crush; grapes to cure.

Now in fact these three gardens all have one rather special gardener to look after them. All these three gardens are in the Bible and God is the faithful gardener.

The three gardens have a message for us for harvest about how God is faithful and how God wants to help us produce a harvest of good things in our lives.

1. The Apple Garden is there right at the beginning of the Bible story. It is the garden of choice... the Garden of Eden. God in love allowed us to choose whether to love him and know him or not, and we chose not to. God never wanted to force love on us and so it meant we chose what was bad for us and for our world. Christians take the mess of the world with its failed harvests and unfair trade seriously and we own up to the truth that it is us who have caused it, not God.

2. But God is faithful and does not leave us in the mess. Here is the olive garden next. It is a real garden in place and time and one where once God, in the form of Jesus, knelt to pray. It's called the Garden of Gethsemane - an olive garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Here Jesus chose to be crushed like the olives in that garden; crushed on the cross in our place for all the mess we caused. Jesus took on himself all the bad that we had brought into the world so we can have the opportunity of a new start, a clean sheet, a fresh beginning.

3. Which leads us on to the last garden, the grape garden. This is the garden Jesus used to describe how we can be different. In this garden Jesus says he is the main trunk of the tree and if we choose to belong to him, we can start producing the good fruit of the Spirit which we can see in Jesus: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control and faithfulness. Jesus described this garden to his disciples on the night before he died (see John 15). As we get linked up to Jesus and this grape garden - this vineyard - this is the way we can be different and produce a harvest of good things that can make us and the world the sort of place God intended it to be all along.

### Prayer:

Father God thank-you for these three gardens, which show us how you have been faithful and long to be faithful to each one of us. As we face up to our wrong choices and as we accept that Jesus was crushed in our place, help us to be linked up to you so that our lives will produce a bumper harvest.





## CRAFT IDEAS

Conker Crafts - a variety of crafts to make using conkers - you can try painting, make a conker spider or worm or a necklace - get creative!

Be sure to have something sharp to pierce the conkers and only let an adult do that part.

(<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/blogs/nature-detectives-blog/2017/09/conker-crafts/>)



### Pom Pom Apples

Pom Poms are simple and fun to make and because these are only small they won't take long to create. Using either a pom pom maker or two pieces of cardboard cut into circles, with the centre removed, wrap the wool around until the centre of the

circle is full. Carefully cut along the outer edge of the circle. Put another piece of wool between the cardboard layers and tie tightly. Take the cardboard out and trim the Pom Pom to shape.

(<https://www.redtedart.com/apple-crafts-apple-pom-poms/>)



Apple Scarecrow (<http://www.busybeekidscrafts.com/Johnny-Appleseed.html>) - Crafts using food are always a winner. Use an apple and decorate with sweets to make the face of a scarecrow. Jelly laces will make great and tasty hair!