



The role of men:

Men in children's ministry

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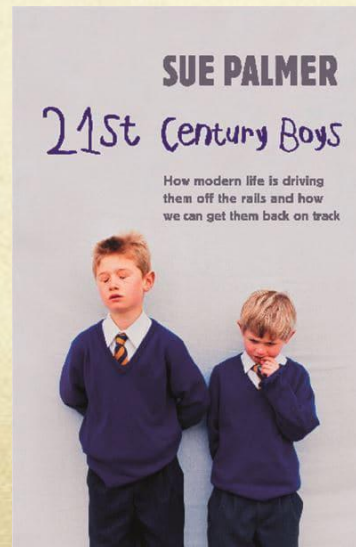
# Aims of this session

- To introduce the subject of men, focussed in relation to work among children within a church setting
- To describe a small piece of historic research; A Few Good Men
- To invite personal thinking, writing and table discussion
- To challenge our thinking about ways ahead for our work
- To share in some prayer ministry



# Resources

- Edwards, C. (2011) *Slugs & Snails & Puppy Dogs' Tails*, IVP
- Palmer, S. (2010) *21<sup>st</sup> Century Boys; How modern life is driving them off the rails and how we can get them back on track*, Orion



# Resources

- Childrenswork Vol 1 issue 7; *A Few Good Men* Aug/Sept 2013
- Martin; *Male involvement in young children's lives* (Australia) 2013
- Nordic Council of Ministers; *State of Nordic Fathers* 2019
- Research in Practice; *Working effectively with men in families* (UK) 2017
- ResearchGate; *Men in childcare* (UK) 2019
- Wiley - Children & Society; *How many men work in the English childcare sector?* (England) 2021
- United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs; *Men in Families* 2011



# Some opening observations...1

- Father/male teacher involvement & participation with children can have a positive impact. Increased single parenting noted. (Martin)
- Shared Parenting roles benefit children. Research into parental leave. Mothers often still seen as the 'expert parent'. (Nordic Council of Ministers)
- Services should engage better with fathers as research shows that fathers/men can play an important and positive role in children's development. (Research in Practice)

# Some opening observations...2

- How do children perceive men involved in their lives (other than fathers)? 5% men involved in paid childcare – (UK 2017) yet in 1996 the European Commission Network on Childcare set one of 40 targets as *“20 per cent of staff employed in collective services should be men.”* (ResearchGate)
- Latest figures suggest that only 3% of the early years workforce in England & Wales, and 4% in Scotland, are men. This proportion has remained virtually static for 20 years. GenderEYE research aims to identify the obstacles that stand in the way of greater gender diversity; to learn about possible solutions (including those developed overseas); and to use this knowledge to produce practical resources that can help the UK diversify this vital part of the education sector. (GenderEYE research in Wiley Children & Society)
- Despite an increasing worldwide focus on the role of men in families and burgeoning research documenting men’s contribution to gender equality, the importance of their engagement for work-family balance, and the numerous positive paternal contributions to children’s development, policy-makers have been slow to recognize the need for effective public policy that is supportive of men’s involvement in their families. (UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs)



# A few good men

Shared concerns about children's ministry

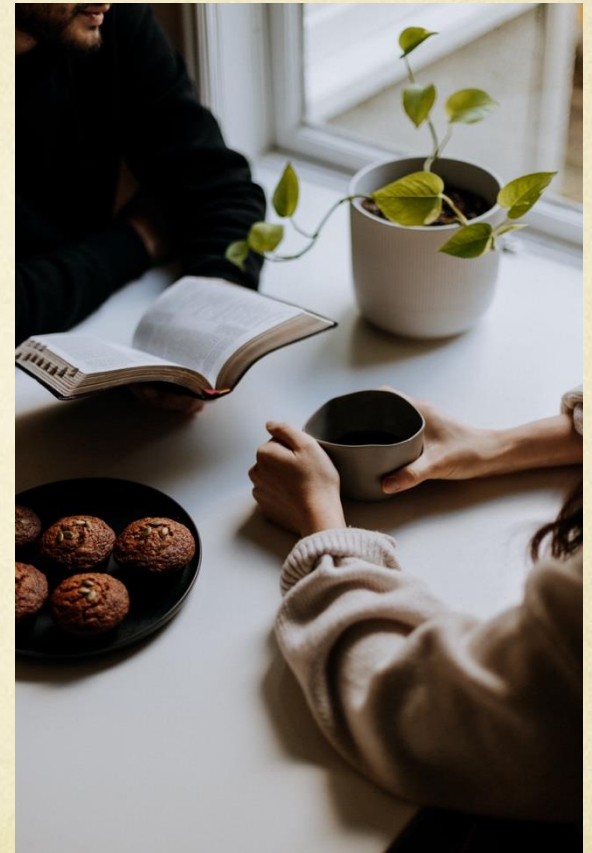
- Lack of men
- Place of men
- Issues men face
- Ways forward to attract men



# Table starter

Men: What is your experience?

Women: What are your observations?





# A few good men: Carolyn Edwards

Concerned about lack of male role models – children need both

Assumption that women are better than men at nurturing the young – this is merely cultural

The Savile case and other stories compounds the problem of suspicion around men

Children's work as the 'Cinderella ministry' beneath adult ministry and under youth ministry

## A few good men: Ian White

Concerned about the idea that children's ministry is 'best suited' to women – as if God's calling is age limited

The 'feminisation of the curriculum', depending on certain types of children's ministry often switches men off – not interested in the activities

Men can feel isolated – 'why would you want to do that as a man?' – so leading them to back off from risk and suspicion.



# A few good men: Twitter responses to the question why so few men are involved in children's ministry.

The red tape is daunting and litigation society makes it frightening, in light of terrible allegations.

Does our children's work attract men? Many men love football – is that part of our ministries?

Stereotypically it's 'women's work' and (hence?) comes with low-pay. Remember that committed men are a minority in the church anyway.

Because we don't ask them to get involved enough in the first place?  
Also because of the lack of mature male role models who are experienced children's workers. And craft activities don't necessarily appeal to men.

It's the reason why so many boys drop out of church. They see it as too feminine.

# Pause for thinking and writing





# A few good men: Research

## June - August 2013

10 questions (1-9 fixed response, 10 open for anecdotal comment);

1. Gender, 2. Age, 3. Age group of children, 4. Focus of work, 5. Percentage of men in team, 6. Why important to have men working with children (role model for boys / healthy relationships for girls / wider variety of activities / different perspective on Christian faith, less risk averse culture), 7. Curriculum feminine? 8. Your children's ministry? 9. Why men aren't in children's ministry (Worried about motives, women's work, role not seen as having status, discouraged by men, men feel they have nothing to offer), 10. Anecdotal evidence



# A few good men: Research June - August 2013

155 respondents

Gender: 55% men / 45% women

Age group: 35% under 35 yr / 40% 36-50 yr / 25% 50+ yr

Age group of children: 58% worked with children aged 8-11 yrs. 5-7 yrs – 27%. 0-4 15%

Percentage of children's workers in your team? Under 10% - 40%; under 25% – 36% (76%)





# A few observations.....1

Reason for having men in children's ministry:

1. Role model for boys
2. Healthy male/female relationships with girls
3. Wider variety of activities
4. Less risk averse culture
5. Different perspectives of Christian faith



# A few observations.....2

Curriculum too feminine? 64% Yes

36% No

Why not as many men as women in children's ministry?

1. Scared of people questioning their motives
2. See it as women's work
3. Role does not have enough status
4. Discouraged by women
5. Don't feel they have enough to offer





# A few quotes:

Are we actively pursuing men to do children's ministry or are we just giving a notice at the front of church?

I think a lot of men feel that they "aren't good with children".

There is a cultural shift that needs to happen which requires children's work to become a) important in church and b) a high calling for those who serve in this area. Also need emphasis on having fun.

*Testimony from J: 'During my first week in post one of the ladies that helps at our kid's club said she was happy to have me here but would have to check whether they would need higher ratios of adults to supervise me working with the kids. Unbelievable what some people think.'*

# A few good men: Some ways forward?

**Ian:** There are things that the church can do, but actually things that women especially can do. One of these is encouragement. Men need to be encouraged that it is OK. They need to hear: 'we are happy that you are around our kids', 'we feel safe' and also 'we will protect you'. Scrutiny and safe-guarding is important, but men need to be protected and valued.

**Carolyn:** Women also need to avoid being over-protective about something they are involved in. I have seen situations where – because it is perhaps the key part of the life of the Church that women have been allowed to be part of – they actually want to keep men out. They see men as threatening and perhaps 'taking over'. We need to take very seriously the remit that God has given many men to work with children – and respect, support and salute that rather than suggest because you are male you don't have the ability to change a nappy, or lead a game, or even a craft activity for that matter.



# A few good men: Some ways forward?

## **Who let the dad's out?**

**Join a movement that inspires and resources churches to support fathers, father-figures and their children.**

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/support-for-you/faith-in-the-family/support-for-churches/wltdo/>

# Table conversation

How could you better encourage men into your children's ministry?

What do men uniquely bring to children's ministry?

To what extent has your curriculum been feminised? Are there fresh ways that you could deliver your programmes, events or work with children and families that could better engage men?

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# Prayer

- Encourage the men
- Adapt the programme towards the gifts that men bring
- Defend the men
- Pray for the men

