Immediate release

EatPlayPray St Thomas à Becket, Ramsey
The power of Christ complimented by Lego and bacon rolls.

The smell of fresh coffee rests in the air and welcomes the patter of mud coated wellies as they burst through the church door. The rustle of a newspaper as the reader reclines in his chair enjoying a bacon roll and the back pages. The chatter of parents as they share anecdotes of the week, enlivened by the giggles of their children playing together. Baptism enquirers and prospective wedding couples share their stories to eager ears, happy to quench fears and encourage deeper thinking. Toddlers munch on toast and bananas, their highchair trays and hands evidence of the enjoyment. Gentle music serenades; the resting, the happy, the hurting, the joyful, the burdened, all are welcomed here. A candle flame flickers in the calm of a corner spreading light and an invitation to pray. The ancient pews offers a place for quiet contemplation as two heads bow in prayer, supporting each other. Short, easy to read grace cards scattered on tables, ease in those seeking something more than just a butty and a cuppa. The every weekers, once in a ‘whilers’ or the never ‘beforers’, talk with growing ease and new relationships form amongst the tea mugs, fruit bowls, lego covered rugs and baby play mat.

Establishing relationship is at the heart of EatPlayPray, relationship with others but ultimately with Christ. A year ago a small team at St. Thomas à Becket, Ramsey started a Fresh Expression called EatPlayPray, we started on a journey, following consultation and discernment with the community, not sure where God would steer us. We applied and received a small grant from Ely Diocese Local Mission Plan Funding (LMPF) to assist with the set up costs and set forth on an adventure. A year on we continue to proactively listen to God and remain agile in our delivery, preparation and planning. We move as the spirit leads us and are intentional and committed to creating a space for individuals and families to receive generous hospitality, a warm welcome and an opportunity to explore, strengthen and widen their faith.

The basic format involves, clusters of round tablecloth covered tables with chairs set at the back of church, collection of teas and fresh coffee resting on tables and an array of cereal boxes and spreads to cater for varied tastes. Held on Saturday Mornings between 9-11am, directly after morning prayer. It is an informal space where all are welcome to Eat - Play - Pray. We serve fresh coffee, a range of teas, warm rolls,
cereals, fresh fruit, toast, juices, play spaces, craft, newspapers, prayer (all with no charge). The core aim of the initiative is to address the needs of the community by offering practical assistance (providing free food, Foodbank referrals, Credit Union check in, signposting to different agencies and community activities) and creating an informal, safe space that allows the flourishing of all who use it. We also seek to open the church to a wider audience, and use the church building to its full potential. We advertise on notice boards, facebook, church toddler group, school gates and networks, the church website and our twice weekly Foodbank and Drop-In sessions.

A year on we have a growing number of people attending. We have some busy weeks and some with just a handful of people. We have great testimony to the transformative power of Jesus at EatPlayPray. The small dedicated team of volunteers have witnessed people new to the Church nervously enter the doors and grow in confidence to ask big questions and to seek Christ through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. We have celebrated, mourned, rejoiced and at points been left speechless as God has surprised and wowed us. The space has enabled respite to carers, especially those caring for people with dementia. It has revived how clergy meet with wedding couples and those enquiring about baptism and offered a gentle continuation for the uncertain, seeking something bigger than themselves but unsure about the formality of church. It has given the lonely companionship and conversation and given a path for an elderly man to return to church after decades, the burden lifted from his shoulders visible.

We hold at the centre of what we do, a call to love people just as they are (John 13:34-35), we seek to ‘find out what God is doing and go and join in.’

For more information please visit www.ramseysandupwood.org/eat-play-pray or feel free to drop me an email becky@ramseysandupwood.org

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