

As 'Church', we run two toddler groups - one in each parish. One on a Wednesday at the Mission Church, Sandhurst; the other on a Friday at St George's Church, Benenden. It is great to be involved with them; and it's a real privilege to watch small human beings develop. Some are little babies, literally just a few days old, completely vulnerable, totally reliant upon another human being for absolutely everything they need in life. Over the months and years they grow and develop. We see them taking very tentative steps. We hear them trying to make themselves understood. We watch them learning the skill of sharing; and of knowing when to say 'please' and 'thank you'. We watch them develop into independent little people, who certainly have their own minds and opinions on things; who are then not shy to move around the whole church with pushchairs, scuttle-bugs, cars and scooters.

We also know, from our own experience, that these little people can be incredibly testing at times. They somehow learn to be able to push the limits; they test the boundaries that we try to set. Somehow they are extremely good at it. It can be frustrating, annoying, maddening, infuriating, challenging, irritating, upsetting and tiring. But remember, at the end of the day, they are your beautiful little creation. And they do tend to grow out of these things - it may take time, but generally they stop doing most of things that test us. So whilst they might push you to the limit, remember they are actually a wonderful gift. Enjoy them; love them; treasure them. Life is precious and life is to be enjoyed. And these all-important first five years will pass very quickly even if it might not feel it right now whilst you're in the middle of it. Remember that they are living this stage of their life for the very first time; and they need help doing it.

For some, it can also be the same with loved ones as they move towards the end of this life. Dementia seems to be an ever growing problem for our society. It is a horrible disease that can rob a person of their quality of life long before they pass away. For family it can also be an incredibly testing time; it also can be frustrating, annoying, upsetting, tiring etc. Our loved ones, whatever their age, whatever their physical or mental capabilities, are going through this stage of their life for the first time themselves. They too might need a little bit of support and love to help them get through it. So whilst it might be testing right now, please try and enjoy their life, and love them, and treasure them too. They are not deliberately pushing the limits like a toddler does! Let's try and learn to love and value all stages of life.

Remember also that we test God all the time, and he is always patient with us.

Revd David Commander, Rector