



HOW TO...

Speak up about the first 1000 days

becoming an FTD-Friendly Church

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of workshops hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly.

Watch the video recording [here](#)

Proverbs 31:8-9

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Speaking up is one of the ways we as Christ followers can influence how families are seen, cared for and supported. Churches have trusted voices in communities and can use existing moments of preaching and teaching to share the opportunity of the First Thousand Days (FTD). Whether in public, in private, on social media (WhatsApp groups, church Facebook page etc), or in networking moments (fraternals), we can use everyday opportunities to speak about First Thousand Days and the impact it has on the lives of children.

Churches have a respected voice and people listen when the pastor or leaders speak. Each week churches are teaching in various ways like the Sunday gatherings/services (even if via Zoom or Youtube) and through courses or mid-week meetings or home groups. These moments can be used to inspire people, challenge them and get them serving families in your church and around your church.

There are many opportunities as leaders, as individuals and as a collective of churches in an area. Find ways to use your influence to speak into your context including your workplace and friendship circles. At the same time, understanding your context and what the needs are that should be addressed or spoken about. Speaking up as a church includes adding examples into sermons, correcting myths around First Thousand

Days topics (like breastfeeding, fathers' role and much more), and bringing truth and light to ensure that all families are seen, supported, and encouraged.

the strengths of local churches

Every local church has a set of strengths, or assets, that can be utilised to Speak Up and support and strengthen caregivers in this stage. Gary Gunderson, in his book, 'Deeply Woven Roots', outlines how the church is a social actor, with the following assets:

- **Do life together:** to show up in each other's lives, personally and physically; to visit, care, be present, attend, and listen, one human with another.
- **Gather:** to bring people together around coffee tables and stadiums to engage opportunities and challenges of finding God's intentions for people and communities.
- **Connect:** to create webs of relationship among the complex lives of members and communities so that resources can be engaged, accessed, and aligned. This is a critical strength for children who cannot be expected to cope with the highly complex institutional systems that create, manage, and control critical resources needed for development.
- **Frame or tell stories:** to place in context experience and data so that people can recognise and play their role amid their complex relationships with other humans and God. Congregations have the strength to answer "Who am I?" without dumbing the question down to a set of statistics, labels, and legal obligations.
- **Give safe spaces:** for important programs and services that can be critical for individuals and for important dialogues necessary to align the social and political systems that determine health at community scale.
- **Bless:** people, especially children, grow in the direction of that which blesses them and looks like life. Congregations have enormous practical power to bless.
- **Pray:** to help people live at the boundary of human and holy with a rich menu of vocabulary, symbol, ritual, and religious practice.
- **Consistency:** congregations are built for slow change, long-term mundane discipline, growth and development throughout the cycle of life. This gives them quite different accountability than almost any other social structure; it might even give them patience for the countless unremarkable things a child, or a hundred thousand children, might need in order to grow as God intends.

use these strengths to Speak Up well.

some practical tips for speaking up well

- **Grow your awareness** of what is happening in your community and what challenges families are facing. Keep growing in your understanding of First Thousand Days – read, watch, listen, notice to understand better what is happening.
- Aim to **win the person**, not the argument – speak up in a “winsome” way that helps move people towards action.
- **Find common ground** with people to try win them over. Find ways to be to allies and not adversaries. Don’t get stuck in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ framework. Rather, find ways to work together that both sides want the best for the family and child.
- **Be clear on the purpose** – what do you want people to know, think or feel and put into action. Then you can communicate well to help move people.
- **Don’t use guilt, obligation or fear** to motivate people.
- **Take people on a learning journey of awareness** – help them take their next step. People don’t go from unaware to passionate in one conversation.
- **Be vulnerable and authentic** instead of trying to be the most factual person.
- **Credibility** around the topic speaks loudly. Invite those with credibility to help you speak up.
- **Choose the best communicator** for the context, not necessarily the most passionate person. Find the right person to talk or share.

pause and reflect on what you already have happening in your church to speak up

- What are the strengths that you already have?
Do the [self-assessment](#)
- Have you [Listened to what parents and families in FTD are saying?](#)
- Do you have a WhatsApp group to send information on?
- Do you have a space, room or church groups where you can share Sikunye and other resources such as [Support a mother DGMT](#) or [The Sikunye brochure \(English\)](#) or [\(Afrikaans\)](#), our [Why Young Children Matter: a 20 Day Devotional](#) or the [Sikunye Posters](#)
- For Social media posts follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)



step 1: grow your understanding and awareness of the first thousand days

- Read [what are the first thousand days](#) and [the incredible opportunity](#)
- Look at the resources listed on [Tools to Speak Up](#)
Look at Sikunye's website (also in Afrikaans, isiXhosa, Zulu), and the [resource page](#)

step 2: what platforms can you use?

- Visual spaces – posters, notice boards/ bulletins, handouts, powerpoint slides in your meeting room or parents' room
- Announcements in a Sunday meeting
- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Do you have a WhatsApp group for your church community that you can send messages on? Or a WhatsApp channel that you can repost Sikunye's broadcast messages and social media
- Emails
- Life groups, small groups, prayer meetings, mid-week bible studies, or other meetings
- In your workspace
- In fraternals or gatherings of church leaders
- In your family, community and friends

Discern how you can use the various resources and platforms within your church. Perhaps connect with another First Thousand Days (FTD)-friendly church that is similar to you to discover how they have integrated these ideas into the life of their church.

step 3: “front of church” preaching, announcements and communication

You can spread the big idea in your regular meetings. You can use existing moments, whether it is a baby dedication / celebration / Christening to grow awareness and conviction. There are culturally significant moments in the calendar that can be easily connected to First Thousand Days. Consider Mother's Day and Father's Day as opportunities to raise awareness. You can also use announcements / notices to keep informing and inspiring congregants. Consider the next time you announce a pregnancy or birth: how can you use that moment to speak to the need for loving connections and how the community can be the modern-day village around the family.

Depending on your church culture and context, making announcements in a Sunday meeting may require permission several days in advance. Whether it is an announcement of a pregnancy, birth, a call for volunteers in a First Thousand Days ministry, a new opportunity that exists etc. explore the best way of bringing an announcement on a Sunday, so that it is in line with how things normally operate. How much does the pastor or key leader need to know about what you are announcing? They should not be surprised by what you are saying. We encourage that you write what will be said and send it to your leaders so that they are fully aware of what will be said.

The same principles apply to using other media to communicate – Whatsapp groups, social media, noticeboards and newsletters. Seek permission from your church leadership first. Similarly, be sure you have the permission of the family, should you want to be sharing any details of pregnancy, birth or miscarriage.

here are two resources to help you speak up

- Use a sample sermon script – still to come
- [Use a sample baby dedication script](#)

Every Sunday there are opportunities to spread the big idea through preaching. You may want to give full attention to this topic and preach an entire message (or more) on it. As you have grown your conviction around this, use preaching as a way of sharing this passion and helping congregants see God's heart for little children.

You can also use First Thousand Days concepts and examples in other messages. It could be drawing implications and applications from other texts and topics to the season of First Thousand Days. An example could be preaching on community and, when talking about what that looks like, share how important community is to families in this season. The more frequently a congregant hears about First Thousand Days, the more they know how passionate you are about it.

This isn't about making First Thousand Days the centre of the church, but rather raising awareness and inviting people in to be part of the big idea. It is about understanding your context and what the cultural barriers and opportunities are that need to be spoken into. As you have listened to families in your space, discern what truths need to be brought to light through God's word.

step 4: consider what congregants are seeing

What people see in your church space sends a message. Wherever your Sunday gathering meets, there are opportunities to spread the big idea through posters, signs and pictures. Sikunye offers posters that can be used in your churches. Consider, too, other pictures, banners or photos that are in your church building / room. How many of these include young children? Do they send a message that families in this stage are welcome? Similarly, if you use a projector, what pictures are being used for announcements, for sermons and so on? Do the pictures include young children?

You may have a specific space for young families (like a breastfeeding space or parents' room). How does this look and feel? What message does it send? What are culturally relevant ways of communicating these concepts?

step 5: consider how you can inspire your leaders

Many churches have different leadership structures, with a range of people fulfilling different functions of leadership. Consider deacons, ministry leaders, small group leaders, children's programme leaders and so on. These are people who can continue to spread the big idea in their spaces of leadership. Be sure to take them on the journey of awareness, conviction and action so that they can be part of spreading the big idea. Send them Sikunye materials, invite them to events, share your heart with them. Use your existing channels / platforms / meetings to engage them around this topic and opportunity.

what can a congregant do?

If your pastor is not yet on board – you can also increase your awareness and understanding of FTD and [have a look at our resource](#) to help you encourage your church leadership to see the importance that they play in seeing SA's children thrive.

step 6: consider the implication and application of the big idea

Beyond awareness of the opportunity that the First Thousand Days presents, be sure to draw attention to what it means for congregants. You may want to speak into fatherhood, positive parenting, refer women to breastfeeding resources, marriage

enrichment and so on. It is also important to point people to what they can do in their spheres outside of church. Your context may have specific barriers and risks to families that you will want to address. You can also be leading congregants around how to be warm and welcoming to single parents and teenage parents, to help be a community of support around them. Be sure to explore the Sikunye website for more details of the application and implications of First Thousand Days.

ideas from other churches speaking up

“When I get the information, I post it on my Facebook, on my WhatsApp so that everybody must know. Because this is something that everybody must know this information” “So now when the knowledge is there for us, it is not just there for us to keep for ourselves but it’s for us to share it with the world.” “with the information that we have there is a lot that we can do” – Prophetess Shirley Mkize

“In our sermons we have included First Thousand Day teachings so that our members and congregants understand the type of love, care and need mothers require.”

- Reverend Masilo Marumo

*“I have been supporting a family of four, who have a little girl of 7 months born with Down Syndrome. I have accompanied the family to attend therapy for their daughter – and I have been encouraging the mother as she is struggling. It is hard for her to accept the situation of her daughter. I have been praying for this family, and we agreed to do two weeks of prayer. I have also encouraged them to read Psalm 139 every night.” **Pastor Likeleli Molate** - used one Sunday to speak about Down Syndrome, inviting families from within her community to attend, to raise awareness, as well as use the opportunity to speak into the importance of First Thousand Days. Likeleli calls this “Compassionate Sundays” using a topic to speak into whilst highlighting the need to surround families in First Thousand Days.*

Omdraai Community Church – De Doorns – Launched their FTD ministry on a Sunday where they called families up and prayed for them

Common Ground Church Durbanville did two Sundays to get people to sign up as volunteers and they have put posters up on their walls to declare that they are an FTD-Friendly church. Look at these [posters](#) that you can print and put up on your walls

The Bay City Church – Vryground / Capricorn – also used a Sunday service to launch what was on their heart as a leadership and invite parents in the First Thousand Days to connect

what if you don't have any young families in your church?

Your church can be missional about this and create a space that families do feel welcome and cared for by speaking up about how your church cares for, loves and supports families in the First Thousand Days.

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