



spread the big idea

ways to grow your church's understanding of FTD

At this stage in your journey towards being an increasingly FTD-friendly church, you are looking to grow your congregation's awareness and sense of ownership around this stage of life. You are wanting to collectively grow congregant's interest and excitement around the opportunity and the sense that everyone can play a part in growing greatness in the young lives in their midst – both in the congregation and in spheres of life outside your church.

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

Jesus, Matthew 18:5

consider what you already have

God has empowered every church with strengths and gifts to accomplish his purposes. As you have discerned and planned how you, in your context, can best direct these strengths and gifts towards connecting with families so that they are caring and their children are thriving, we encourage you to grow the congregation's awareness around this topic. Rather than only a small team holding the ideas, passion and opportunities, see your congregants as resources to serve families within your congregation as well as across the society you are in.

In Matthew 18:1-5, we read of Jesus bringing a child in the midst of the disciples. In pointing out what we can learn from children about the Kingdom of God, he physically demonstrated that children are to be in the community, not on the outside. This isn't about growing a child-centred congregation, but rather bringing the child into the midst of the community. Jesus had to grow the disciples' awareness of his heart for young children, even rebuking them when they prevented parents from bringing their children to Jesus (Mark 10:13-16). Many times, pastors are to grow the awareness and passion of congregants so that they do not hinder parents bringing their children to Jesus.

You will find that you have existing meetings, existing resources, existing platforms that can be used to spread the big idea. This isn't about running new events or adding more meetings. You are already meeting, you are already preaching, you are already communicating with key

leaders. With some intentionality and focus, you can use what you are already doing to spread the big idea to your congregants and beyond. What follows are practical ideas that you can explore and discern how to use within your context.

consider what you are preaching

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 FTD concepts and examples in other messages. It could be drawing implications and applications from other texts and topics to the season of FTD. 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 FTD, the more they know how passionate you are about it.

This isn't about making FTD 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.

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). How does this look and feel? What message does it send? What are culturally relevant ways of communicating these concepts?

consider what you can do in your meetings

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 FTD. 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.

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.

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 FTD.

consider the long term

As you see a growing understanding and conviction within your congregants, be aware of who else can be drawn into specific teams that are serving families in FTD. Refer them to the Sikunye website for resources and inspiration and, where relevant, send them to Sikunye training. Build for the long-term picture and engage the whole congregation to be part of

fostering greatness in families and young lives.

In leading your community towards being FTD-friendly, you are helping everyone live out Jesus' encouragement, "*And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me*" (Matthew 18:5