

Barnabas

a story of encouragement

Barnabas

Barnabas is such an attractive character from the Acts of the Apostles that it is no wonder that many organisations have borrowed his encouraging name.

BRF (the Bible Reading Fellowship) did just that in the mid-nineties when they set up the Barnabas imprint for their children's publications. The choice of name was inspired. Now celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2005 and still steadily growing, BRF's Barnabas work, like its namesake, is travelling far and encouraging all leaders and teachers who work to bring the Bible to life for children in churches and schools.

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The publication of books from Barnabas for children's leaders in church is already well-known and well-respected. Alongside that has come a growing range of material written by Christian teachers to support the teaching of Christianity within RE in Primary Schools, as well as resources for collective worship, PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health & Citizenship Education) and Circle Time. In total Barnabas publications now account for about twenty new books every year.

This development has been exciting but the encouragement does not end there. Five years ago came the establishment of the *Barnabas Ministry*



Martyn Payne joined the Barnabas team in January 2003, having worked with the Church Mission Society (CMS) as National Children's Work Co-ordinator for 8 years. Prior to this he worked for 18 years as a teacher in east London, where he led a modern languages department as well as being involved in the planning, writing and delivery of RE lessons.

Along with his work for Barnabas in schools and churches across the UK, Martyn regularly contributes RE lesson plans, materials for school assemblies and acts of collective worship, and seasonal ideas to the www.barnabasinschools.org.uk website. His first book for Barnabas *A-cross the World* was published in November 2004.

Team to work alongside the publications. This team works with Primary Schools in a number of ways.

Excellence and enjoyment

First of all, it offers a *Barnabas Live* day – a day of workshops to support RE, in which Bible stories are brought alive through the creative arts. The team now numbers fifteen professionals – some full-time and some freelance – and each brings to the work a range of gifts including drama, music, dance and storytelling. These creative arts RE days are proving very popular and in 2004 the *Barnabas Live* team fulfilled almost 100 bookings.

Teachers have expressed great appreciation at the professional way in which *Barnabas Live* has explored themes such as compassion, creation or our uniqueness. A *Barnabas Live* day starts with an assembly, followed by workshops with each of the classes from Foundation to Year 6. By popular request seasonal themes, such as Christmas, Easter



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and Harvest, have now also been added to the choice of topics schools can choose from.

Government guidelines on the curriculum have at last begun to re-emphasise creativity within teaching and Barnabas has certainly come at the right time to work alongside teachers to help inspire this and deliver 'excellence and enjoyment' in RE, as children are encouraged to 'learn from' the Bible stories for themselves.

Godly Play

Out of these special days has grown another aspect of the work, that of in-service training with teachers. Training on using storytelling and drama to explore the Bible has been well received either as whole day or twilight sessions. In addition, schools are increasingly asking for help with cross-curricular RE, wishing to explore the use of Christian teaching to inform work done in PSHCE and Circle Time.

Many schools are also very interested in how the methodology and insights of Godly Play can be used effectively in the classroom. This approach to telling Bible stories is proving a great hit in many of our schools with its unique blend of faithfulness to scripture and respect for the children's own innate spirituality, as they are encouraged to

discover meaning in the stories through wondering questions. Demand for Barnabas in-service training is on the increase and is another example of how God has raised up this encouraging work at the right time.

Even with the advent of the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) non-statutory framework for RE (published in October 2004), many teachers still feel nervous about handling faith issues in the classroom and welcome professional, sensitive and informed support in this area. In response, Barnabas launched the www.barnabasinschools.org.uk website. This online resource links teachers to the QCA framework for RE, provides them with updates and reports about the work of the Barnabas team across the UK, and helps them find information about Barnabas books and training. It also includes lesson outlines and tried-and-tested ideas for leading collective worship.

Taking risks

At BRF we sense that in recent years the Church has rediscovered its commitment to the work of appropriate mission in schools – particularly, though not exclusively, in Church schools. Barnabas is eager to come alongside and support teachers in delivering RE in the ways outlined above. It also wants to encourage and equip churches to get more involved with schools in their locality.

In the Acts of the Apostles Barnabas was well known as a man who took some risks to help the Church step out into new areas. Not only was he the one to offer the right hand of fellowship to newly converted Saul and then to seek him out to pastor the flock at Antioch, he was also part of that first missionary partnership that took the good news of Jesus to new areas of the Roman Empire. As BRF celebrates ten years of this exciting work, our prayer is that this modern day Barnabas will in a similar way be able to help today's Christians step out beyond the church walls and work in partnership with schools to pass on our story to the next generation.

■ Martyn Payne, Barnabas Ministry Team

More information

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