



DISCOVERING JESUS

Evangelism within SUNZ

We believe that evangelism takes place when we reveal Jesus in ways that represent him as Saviour, Lord, and God and give children and young people opportunities to choose to discover and follow him as articulated in the good news of the Gospel.

It includes everything we say or do under the guidance of the Spirit of God which encourages children and young people towards a positive response to Jesus. This is in partnership with the Holy Spirit, and can involve encounters through Scripture, prayer, creation and other people.

This document lays out a holistic context within which the process of evangelism takes place. It needs to be read alongside the SUI ‘Serving Children and Young People’ Document, SUNZ Statement of Faith and the SUNZ Bible Engagement Document.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever flown over the Canterbury Plains and seen the beauty of the braided rivers stretching below?

Braided river systems are intricate and dynamic. Their channels repeatedly separate and reconnect, intertwining to create patterns of low islands and shallow bars. They provide habitats for many rare birds, fish and plants. Globally, braided rivers are unusual but here in New Zealand we are privileged to have more than 150 braided rivers. The entire Canterbury plain was formed by gravel carried from the Southern Alps by braided rivers. Southland and the West Coast and Otago regions also feature spectacular braided rivers, and there are some in the North Island too.

DISCOVERING JESUS – SUNZ STYLE

Like those braided rivers, the way we encourage children and young people to decide to follow Jesus has different channels running through it, each channel contributing to the way our children and young people discover Jesus and respond to him.

These channels do not work separately but weave in and out of each other, flowing together, meeting and informing each other. It is the synergy between the channels that enable faith to grow. Sometimes God will speak to a child or young person, and they will find faith for one reason and later discover the joy of the others. Whoever they are and however they are coming to faith, our role is to help and encourage them into a relationship with Jesus and find the fullness of life God has for them.

CHANNELS FOR DISCOVERING FAITH IN JESUS

Within Scripture Union NZ we believe children and young people discover Jesus through the following channels.

Discovering Jesus is an ENCOUNTER

Evangelism is articulating the gospel and can lead to an encounter with the living God our creator, with Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith and with the Holy Spirit who leads us to faith and empowers us for witness and service.

- The message of the gospel is initiated by God who gives his followers the responsibility to share the good news.
- We encourage faith encounters through Scripture, prayer, creation and other people.
- We listen carefully to what is being said and respond to what God is doing in the life of the child or young person.

Discovering Jesus is RELATIONAL

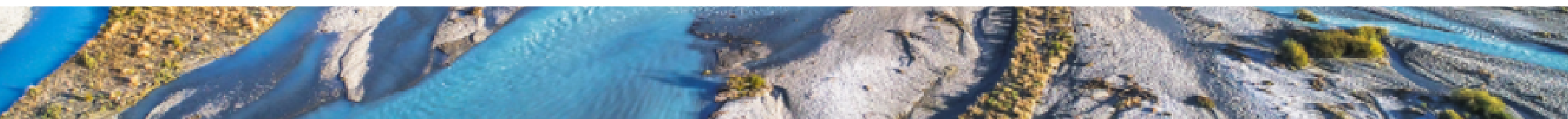
God is relational and we have been created to be in relationship too. Evangelism takes place within relationship

- We create communities where children and young people feel safe, valued and included.
- We explore the Bible and faith in community, where we learn and grow together.
- We encourage faith conversations in relationship through one on one or small group interactions.

Discovering Jesus is INVITATIONAL

It is God who initiates the invitation to children and young people to discover and follow Jesus. We walk alongside them to support them and provide the tools and encouragement they need.

- We create spaces and opportunities for invitations to follow Jesus to be given.
- We use creativity, imagination and wonder as part of the invitation.
- We seek to be thoughtful and careful in our approach.
- We use ways that are not coercive but allow freedom to respond honestly. This may include space for questions and expressing doubts.



Discovering Jesus is a JOURNEY

God is at work in the life of each child and young person in ways that are unique and ongoing. We acknowledge that our work with a child or young person is neither the beginning nor the end, but part of a lifelong journey between them and God. Evangelism and discipleship are interwoven.

- We understand that there will be a diverse range of responses to the invitation to follow Jesus.
- We know that children and young people may make a series of responses to the invitation to follow Jesus. These may look like small steps, or major milestones along the way and take place at the pace God chooses for them.
- We recognise that as leaders, we may play a small part in the whole journey of faith for a child or young person. We recognise our limitations as well as our opportunities.

Discovering Jesus is GUIDED BY DIGNITY

God has created every child and young person in the image of God, and they are deeply loved and so the process of evangelism respects the dignity and agency of every child and young person along with their family and whānau.

- We respect that the child is part of a family and community. We value the cultural backgrounds of children and young people and are sensitive to their context.
- We give space for children and young people to express themselves in ways that are authentic and genuine. We support children and young people to have agency over their choices as they work out what it means to follow Jesus.
- We seek to follow Jesus' example in providing hope for the vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- We provide safe programmes that respect the mental, spiritual and physical and social wellbeing of every child and young person.
- We do not view children and young people as lesser participants in the kingdom of God because of their age.

FOLLOWING JESUS TRANSFORMS THE WHOLE OF LIFE

A beautiful fact about braided rivers that has only been recently understood is that the water flowing into the plains around the river becomes a vital part of the ecosystem. Springs and wetlands are periodically renewed and recreated in these surrounding areas.

These eco-systems are a reminder that discovering and following Jesus brings transformation as the Holy Spirit flows in and around all we do and brings life and growth to children and young people.

Following Jesus transforms the whole of life - intellect, emotions, actions and thoughts. It also transforms families and communities, as well as the way we care for the world around us. This transformation is supported by Bible engagement and prayer, as we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit.

As we ponder the beauty of braided rivers, let's also remember what a gift the rivers are and what a responsibility we have to care for them, especially given how few of the world's rivers are braided and how endangered many of them are.

And let's also remember – as with our braided rivers – what a gift and a responsibility we have to care for and journey alongside our children and young people here in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

