Back from Hermanus Holiday Club 2010 **[1]**

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Today I got back from spending a week in the coastal town of Hermanus, were I helped out with the annual Holiday Club, which the church I attend organises every year. This was my first experience of being on a "mission" and came back with a lot to think about.

The first and most pressing is that of children's ministry. I have never had any formal training in working with children before (apart from being one, of course, but who ever learns from their own experiences and memories, right?). This was a big concern for me leading up to the mission: I wanted a day, an hour, anything in which some of the critical bases could be covered. But as departure day drew close, no such training appeared: we only received the material we would be using for the week. Everyone I spoke to beforehand assure me, however, that there was nothing to worry about. Most people had been on a holiday club before as a leader and assured me that there was nothing to stress about. But driving back today, the people whom I was in the car with all agreed that we could have done more (even if just individually) to prepare.

Every day we would start by playing some games with the children while the rest arrived. After everyone arrived, we got the children fired up (as if it was necessary) with some aerobics, singing and recapping of the previous days' lessons. We then played a game with them, usually with some underlying illustration for the day's lesson. After some juice and oranges, we sang some more, taught the kids a verse to memorise, and did a little play on a Bible passage. Afterwards we broke up into small groups in a Sunday school-esque style. Finally, we gathered everyone together again and played some games until all the children had been fetched by the parents.

My small group consisted of grade 2 and 3 boys. Each age group has its own characteristics and it takes time to figure out what they are. After today, the last of five days, I think I may have it pinned down for the group I had. Too late, of course, but at least I have an experience to drawn on now in the future. On the first day we were two taking on the grade 2 and 3 boys. The other leader has had quite some experience in working with youth, so I was hoping to learn a lot from him, but after that first day, we split the group and I was flying solo. This threw me a bit, especially when it came to maintaining discipline. There isn't much you can do (although, as I learned today on the last day, the threat of being sent to the girls' group works wonders), but by this age children are experts in boundary-pushing and you need to make sure you assert your authority, otherwise you won't have any control over them. By some miracle I survived, and hopefully some of the lessons were imparted on some of the children.

The splitting of the groups arose from an unforeseen problem which we discovered on the first day. A large chunk of the children who attended the holiday club this year came from a community of farm workers. These children grow up very poor and due to their environment, I postulate, have very little to aspire for. While they enjoyed the activities very much, in small group time they were very quiet and unresponsive. It also turned out that, while most were competent in English, they were actually Afrikaans kids. Having identified this cultural and language barrier, we thought it best to split the groups to give better individual attention to the kids. Unfortunately my co-leader of the first day reported that even after the split, the children were still reluctant to speak. It breaks my heart, really: one group of children has luxuries like game consoles, quad bikes, good school education, and so much more. They talk and brag and boast about the latest book they read or the last movie they've seen. But the other group is quiet and withdrawn. You can see they are poorer and that there is nothing to brag about except the same day-by-day monotony which is only broken by holiday club. When you ask them what they want to be when they grow up, you are answered with silence, and one has to wonder whether they are merely shy, or whether they dare not, or cannot, dream of the grand.

Our theme for the week was "Champions" and how we can be part of God's team. We of course drew a lot from the current "sporty" energy going around with the 2010 soccer World Cup. The lessons for

each day were:

1. Follow Jesus
2. Listen to Jesus
3. Tell others about Jesus
4. Live like Jesus who put others first

On the last day we just recapped everything we did on each day, and then we had a good old children's party with everyone. Ah, to be a child again...

The team was just fantastic. Of everyone, I had the least experience. Luckily the others didn't just have experience working with youth, but we also had three qualified teachers and one person studying to become a teacher on our team. Everyone pulled together through all situations and everyone took their responsibilities seriously. But the sheer talent for working with the children which some leaders have just amazes me. I thank God for them, and for what I can learn from them. But all things considered, I honestly don't see myself being involved too much in children's ministry. Perhaps one day if I have my own children I'll be better equipped, but at the moment I can best serve elsewhere.

Getting to know the other leaders better was definitely a highlight for me. Through prepping, playing, goofing around and just chatting, we all got much better acquainted with each other.

It was a cold and wet week, as well as a week of early mornings. All of this did take its toll on everyone in one way or the other. There were no incidents (at least that I am aware of), but tiredness hit me like a wet fish yesterday, and that strained my attitude and manner. I won't say cabin fever was a problem, but most of us certainly could have done with more rest.

Throughout the whole week, we feasted like kings. Some meals were made by our leader, others provided by the church were we hosted the holiday club and others by generous benefactors. Honestly I don't know if I've every consumed so much food in one week, let alone seen it. I suppose it was needed to keep your energy levels up, especially between the kids and the cold[1]. But it was not only that we had a lot of food, we had a lot of *good* quality food. Really, it was a blessing. Thanks goes out again to everyone who provided for us!

In conclusion I just want to say that, in terms of running the actual holiday club, the highlight for me was watching the children having a good time. Not only did it provide a fun break in routine in a long school holiday, but for others it was a healthy and constructive escape from what probably isn't always a very healthy environment. Getting to know some of the kids a little was also great, discovering their personalities and prominent love of God which some has.

It is an academic exercise to worry about the efficacy of our work of the past week. Yes, it was necessary to work hard and to do it to the best of our abilities, but our audience was young and most (if not all) still has a long way to go before really realising the full implication of the gospel. But I shall not worry about the efficacy of our work. This was not our mission: it was God's mission, and He will use our labour to work in the hearts of those children. If not now, then at some point down the road. To God and Yeshua our Saviour be all the glory. Amen.

- 1. Apparently the week's cold has been record breaking in South Africa and you can see snow all along the mountains.

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