

Janet England: Steward of St Philip's

Janet England began teaching Church School in September 1983 when Bill Stephens was rector (and John Stephens was a teen who used to mow the grass). Janet is completing her 35th year of teaching our littlest parishioners.

When I told parents that Janet is being honoured as a Steward of St Philip's, it was clear from their response how deserving Janet is of this recognition. These words come from Dorothy Chang, Harper Hadden, Deb Hamilton and Erin McDougall.

Janet England is a quiet addition to the parish, and she is hardly ever seen on a Sunday as she waits for her children to come to her classroom, yet Janet has provided the very foundation of the church school program at St Philip's for decades. She teaches not only stories of Christianity but also subtle lessons in the structure of a service and the church seasons that prepare children for the older classes, how to be in a church service, and how to behave in their day-to-day lives.

Even parents are drawn into the special and sacred space she creates each Sunday. It is like a church school from Heaven. There are songs, crafts, colouring and objects to play with. Janet shares the bible with special paper hearts and signs of God tucked into the pages of the bible story she reads to them, and the children are encouraged to touch, read, and handle the bible. She sets up a miniature altar and candles so children know what they are for. At the end of the lesson, the children pray with Janet. It is a special worship time just for them. Janet communicates the love of God, fellowship, reverence, and inclusion in the church family.

Of her many wonderful attributes that come to mind, the first is how much Janet respects children. She connects with them just the way they are, welcoming each new child to her class with a gentle but firm demeanour. She listens to everything they have to say, grasps their sense of wonder, and appreciates what they have to contribute - all at a level they can relate to. She cares deeply for the children, and for their spiritual and personal growth. She has an extraordinary ability to engage a class of lively young ones in her calm, patient and nurturing manner. This is no easy task, yet she makes it seem effortless, and does it all with grace and compassion.

Our children flourish in their time with her. We feel incredibly blessed to have such a dedicated, compassionate and gifted teacher as Janet England to lead the youngest members of our congregation. We honour Janet England as a Steward of St Philip's.