



# SRE Update

## Key Negotiations undertaken by ICCOREIS to strengthen SRE

### *Response by ICCOREIS to The Hon Rev Fred Nile's introduction of a Bill to repeal Special Ethics classes:*

On 27 July, ICCOREIS representatives met with Rev Nile and presented a concise assessment of the impact of Ethics classes on the delivery of SRE in schools. This included outlining the reason for the Commission's decision late last year to move ahead in a cooperative manner with Ethics providers in the interest of the continued smooth operation of SRE in government schools.

The meeting concluded with a clear understanding that Rev Nile would look to implement strategies that were presented to him to *strengthen the place of SRE*. A letter outlining this was delivered to his advisors the next day, and representatives of ICCOREIS were invited to meet with him regularly to advise him on the issue.

Within two days, the position of Rev Nile and the Christian Democrats had reverted to one that would move ahead with the Bill to remove Ethics classes. This was partly due to the fact that members of the NSW Council of Churches had provided different advice. The Chairperson of ICCOREIS wrote to Rev Nile advising that its members, who constitute the majority of Christian providers of SRE, opposed his move to introduce a Bill to remove Ethics classes. This was delivered to The Hon Paul Green and Rev Nile's advisors on August 2. Nevertheless, The Bill to remove Ethics classes was read in Parliament.

A follow up meeting was held in late September. ICCOREIS representatives affirmed Rev Nile in his desire to ensure the place of SRE is protected and enhanced. ICCOREIS' position regarding Ethics classes was reiterated.

### *ICCOREIS Representatives meet the Education Minister:*

The Chairperson of ICCOREIS presented a letter to the Education Minister, the Hon Adrian Piccoli, at a meeting in August. The letter affirmed the Minister in his support of SRE and listed a number of specific strategies the Department of Education and Communities might use to ensure that SRE was supported and strengthened. There was an opportunity to discuss these strategies with the Minister and his advisors at this meeting. As a result representatives of ICCOREIS will meet regularly with the Minister's senior advisor to discuss ongoing issues related to the Christian provision of SRE.

*ICCOREIS notes with sadness the recent death of Rev Nile's wife, Elaine, and offers sincere sympathy.*

## SRE (Scripture) Display at Lambton Public School - Newcastle

On Friday 9 September, Lambton Public School celebrated the opening of its new school hall. Inspired by something I heard at an 'Encouragement Day' earlier in the

year, I approached the Principal about having an SRE display and I was given permission to create one in the library along with children's art works. I aimed to make it positive and

informative as it seemed to me that there is a lot of misinformation and mystique surrounding SRE, especially over the past year. In the end the children did some beautiful hand prints and wrote about things they liked or enjoyed about scripture (or in some cases just things they liked!), and I included some factual text at the bottom and key words. I was quite happy with how it came out and so was the Principal!

*Kate Baker, SRE Co-ordinator Lambton and Jesmond Public Schools.*



### In This Issue

State Snippets	2
Shirley's Story	3
Resources	4

## Central Coast Expo

In early August, the Central Coast SRE Committee hosted an Expo in West Gosford. The function was attended by 60 SRE teachers from local churches. There were exhibitors from the Bible Society, Scripture Union, Connect, GodSpace, Koorong Books, Christian Education Publications, Walking with Jesus and the "Luke 14 Project". The day commenced with a delicious morning tea followed by a short presentation by each of the exhibitors about the resources they had on display.

Later in the month an Appreciation Lunch was held at Holy Family Anglican Church, Wyoming attended by 30 SRE coordinators. Alison Newell, Chairperson of the committee,

offered encouragement to the SRE coordinators in carrying out their responsibilities and reminded them of the importance of being sensitive to the schools' needs when discussing matters concerning SRE with Principals or school staff. This was followed by words of encouragement from Mark Erbsleben who serves as an SRE teacher at Brisbane Water Secondary College, Umina Campus. Lunch was provided by the ladies of the church.

In October, the group is planning an Encouragement Day for SRE teachers in both the Gosford and Wyong areas.

*Ron Taylor*



## Just how many SRE teachers are there in NSW?

To prepare for a strategic planning meeting the current statistics for SRE in our state were collected. This was a difficult exercise because there is no "go to place" for these kinds of numbers. There are only a few denominations who even employ someone to make these figures available. Some churches keep centralised records, but some are independent and do not feed into an umbrella group. At best, these are approximations, but they are the best approximations we could come up with. They are also conservative, ie we have only used figures we could justify.

The total number of Christian SRE teachers in NSW is around 10,000 and about 850 non-Christian SRE teachers, such as Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist etc. Of the Christian SRE teachers there are about 5,000 Catholics and about 2,500 Anglicans.

Another way of putting this is that 97% of primary schools and 53% of high schools have SRE in one form or another.

### What are the current trends?

**Age:** Volunteer SRE teachers are generally older than employed SRE teachers. This is because they often began when they were younger and have just kept teaching. It is not uncommon for them to be teaching for decades.

**Gender:** In general there are more women teaching than men – this is the same for all SRE teachers, whether Christian or not.

**Location:** There are SRE teachers wherever there is a church and in some places where there aren't churches anymore.

**Experience:** SRE teachers' experience varies greatly. Volunteers can be from other professions, or trained in basic teaching skills, although some have been teachers or professional educators. Employed teachers are usually trained teachers, but may have qualifications in other fields.

### How does this compare with Ethics teachers?

Only 3% of primary schools have ethics classes. We have little information about ethics teachers, but we do know that before they are able to teach they must complete child protection training and attend a two day training course. In addition, all ethics teachers must complete a police check and sign a declaration similar to the one for SRE teachers.

## Shirley's Story

Let me tell you about a truly inspirational 80 year old who only began teaching SRE eight years ago. She asked me if I could suggest any good websites that her students could use if they want to know more about God. Shirley doesn't have a computer herself.

Shirley really feels that teaching SRE was a calling from God: she was invited into it by a chance meeting with a Catholic SRE teacher while posting a letter one day. Shirley had recently moved to the area after her husband had passed away.

One of the challenges she has faced with the curriculum is the amount of bible content. "What I really needed was someone who could teach that" she said. She found that someone at the door of a new church which she began attending. He made a comment about teaching children and she thought he must be a teacher. "What I really would love to do is to teach the Bible", he said. He now also teaches SRE.

She confided that she'd had to work hard to prepare a recent lesson and it just didn't sit right with her. It required quite a lot of different activities all going on at the same time and she just knew she wasn't good at that. Undaunted Shirley found an extra lesson in the back of the book on self esteem. This struck a note with her, and after ten days of trying to prepare the set lesson she abandoned it for the alternative and had a good night's sleep.

Shirley is about to go overseas for a holiday but doesn't need to worry about leaving her class as she's also found another person in her new church who also wants to teach children about God. "I am so conscious that I am depending on God. My SRE lesson is the highlight of my week."

*The answer to Shirley's question about child friendly websites is on page 4.*

## Knitting for Christmas

I know you are thinking that this doesn't make sense because it is hot in Australia at Christmas – no-one needs winter woolies. This story is not about clothing – it's about making a nativity scene. I've been knitting mine since I was given a book of patterns last Christmas. And as I've knitted I've wondered why I am knitting dolls and dolls' clothes – I am not a very good knitter at all and have never been interested in making dolls of any sort.

However, this is different. What appealed to me most was that besides being very cute they are also child friendly: they are unbreakable and can even be undressed and dressed again. Being made of pure wool they are also very tactile. The book has patterns for every member of the scene and page by page tells the story beginning with the angel's appearance to Mary. So of course I began with Mary: the most obvious first character.

It wasn't that easy though. My first attempt looked decidedly jaundiced as I had chosen a rather mustardy yellow colour for Mary's body. This doll will become a wise man from the east. My second attempt was a better colour but Mary was enormous: the wrong choice of yarn. Another visit to the local wool shop and another bad choice of colour later, I had another potential wise man! Finally my eye alighted on the perfect skin colour for Mary and she was knitted and sewn together with dark brown hair rather than the blond colour in the book. I felt I had finally achieved something.

About this time, I began SRE classes for the year and as the curriculum was on creation I was to show the children something I had made and how it made me feel, to preface what God had made and how it made him feel as he looked at his creation: "very good". Of course it felt good to be able to take along my Mary **and** Joseph (who proved to be much easier to produce). I showed the class the first failures asking

the children if they knew what they were – they had no idea! When I finally produced Mary and Joseph the children oohed and aahed and even worked out who they were meant to be!



When I started baby Jesus I bought special yarn: the best I could find and told the woman at the shop that it was for Jesus so it had to be special. This has been a delightful project as I have had fun choosing knobbly wool for a lamb and sequined wool for the angel's wings. I've had comments from other family members and discovered that even grown up sons think they're OK.

One of the best suggestions in the book is that other members of the family can assist: one of my sisters has provided some grey homespun for the donkey and the other sister knitted it. By Christmas we may have the whole set, but it doesn't matter if we don't. We are experiencing the Christmas story and many of its blessings: giving and receiving of gifts. One of the special gifts will be taking the set to school and allowing the children to talk about each character and why they are in the story.

*Sue Sneddon*

## Resources

### Kinder Orientation Pack - Free Resource

About this time of year, schools are planning for the next intake of kindergarten children, and most schools will have parent information evenings and one or more "orientation" days for the new kindergarten children to have a taste of "big school". These may already have taken place, but many will be held in fourth term.

This is a most opportune time for SRE coordinators to speak to school principals or staff SRE coordinators about informing the new parents about SRE. Many new parents still refer to it as "Scripture" or do not know it even exists.

ICCOREIS has produced a **Kinder Orientation Pack** which could be used in a number of different ways:

- There is a brochure which can be customised with information about your school to be given out to parents.
- There is a PowerPoint which could be used at a parent information session.
- There is a letter of introduction to be given to the parents of children in your SRE class, and another letter asking the classroom teacher for information about the classroom is managed.

Go to <http://www.iccoreis.asn.au/resources.htm> and "Promoting SRE" There is an overview of the pack which explains how to use it, PowerPoint and sample letter. If you would like a copy emailed or mailed to you contact Sue Sneddon, Executive Officer.

Some great YouTube videos promoting SRE:

See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7XkYftHLxI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PT0c0PV7htg&feature=related>

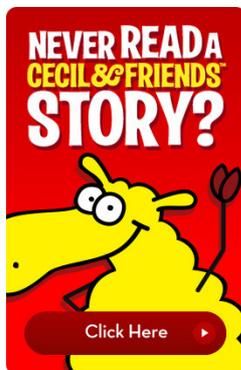


### Child Friendly Websites

These websites are suitable for children who want to find out more about Christianity. They include stories, games and activities.

<http://www.cecilandfriends.com/?c=kids/overview>

This is a website for readers of the "Lost Sheep" books. There are wallpapers to download, character profiles of the story book characters, and colouring in pages.



<http://www.allojunior.org/english/principalroll.htm>  
(Hi Kidz website)

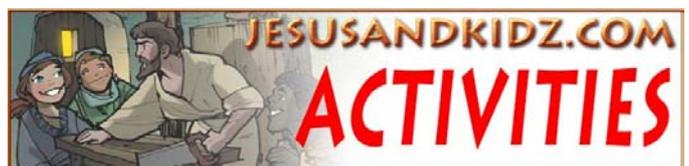
Lots of stuff about finding out more about Jesus and the bible. Interactive and colourful. Games, facts about nature and other countries. Stories to listen to in multiple languages.

<http://www.biblekids.info/>

The Bible Society website for kids with stories (check out the cartoons), Bible verse puzzles and games.

<http://answers.encyclopedia.com/question/Can-Find-Bible-Study-Maps-1115002.html>

Lots of Bible maps



[http://www.jesusandkidz.com/html/smalljk\\_activities.htm](http://www.jesusandkidz.com/html/smalljk_activities.htm)

Kids colouring pages



<http://www.biblesocietyyouth.org/>

Has a good range of computer games for kids.

<http://www.yoplace.org/>

A list of stories from the bible with kids' devotions.

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