



How to ...

Set up and launch a church puppet team

Introduction

Puppets have long been used as a way of communicating the Christian Gospel and Bible stories. Popular in Medieval times, discontinued post the reformation, they have now come back to be seen as a valid and powerful way of doing drama.

At All Saints, Lydiard Millicent, our puppet team, All Saints People's Puppets, stage name: "Puppets Alive" has been going about 8 years. We mainly use Muppet style large and medium sized glove puppets which use rods to manipulate the arms.

Main elements

Here are the main components of our Puppet Team and equipment: People! We have two adults and 5 children and teenagers and we practice most Saturday mornings for an hour.

We have a One Way UK Puppet stage which is composed of two aluminium frames with black curtains that the puppeteers either kneel, sit, or stand behind. We use special puppeteer's blocks to adjust children's heights, and we also use two aluminium painter's benches.

We do a lot of puppet sketches which go with songs on CD so we have our independent sound system with two mikes that go with it.

Puppets; we have built up a large collection of both animal and people puppets. Having them in different sizes is particularly helpful for us as we have children aged 8 and adults aged 57! We now use 5 very strong bags to carry our puppets and staging which is aluminium is in its own separate bags, as are the rods.

Getting started

So, how do you get started? It's been a joy for us to see a local Church grow and they now have a bigger team than us. They started by borrowing our puppets and then gradually started up. We are now planning a major venture in the summer with both teams working together.

The best way to get started is to go on a local One Way UK puppet training day (see link below), or google Church Puppet teams and find a local one and go and see how they do it. There are good ones in Swindon, Bristol and Gloucester.

We have found that it very hard to run a puppet team with children under 8, although some do so and very well, as they are not so able to manipulate the puppets well at height, and can see them as "toys" rather than a tool for drama. We are now very grateful that we have some very strong puppeteers, as holding your arm up can be tiring.

Funding can be an issue as good puppets are not cheap. Some churches get people to sponsor a puppet. We went down the route of seeking funding and found some grant making bodies were more than willing to fund us.



We have a committee with a treasurer and publish what we do so that we are accountable, and it goes without saying that it's good to prepare and train people in all the safeguarding procedure that are needed when working with young people.

As you get going, seek out ways of using puppets in Old People's homes, in Church services, in prisons, in schools, in youth groups, and with toddler groups We find that what we do works well in Church and out of Church.

As you gain confidence it builds up the team and then you can go on to do bigger things. We read a short Bible passage and pray at every meeting and are clear that our vision is to use the Puppet Team for God's glory but we have a lot of fun and laughter along the way.

Useful links and further information

<http://www.onewayuk.com/>

<http://allsaints-online.org.uk/children-youth/puppets-alive/>

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