



## It's dad time

It's not part of most theological studies – the cost of a Batman play mobile or Postman Pat football.

It's not part of most men's weekly shopping list either, even those who confess to making one.

For the record, Neil Chapman also knows the cost of a season ticket at Man Utd and the full line up of the England rugby team.

However, every other month, Neil checks out the hot items on the latest Toys 'R' Us catalogue, albeit in a spiritual sort of way.

"When you're buying for 30 discerning toddlers, it pays to know whether Postman Pat is still ahead of Batman in the league of desirable toys," he smiles.

Neil is a member of Teddington Baptist Church and one of the forces behind the Dads and Toddlers group. No, that's not a misprint: well, it is actually.

kids who flock to the regular get-togethers is WLTDO, which stands for Who Let The Dads Out? While most churches opt for Mums and Toddlers groups, Teddington has opted to opt-in the dads.

"I was walking down the High Street one Saturday morning when I noticed the coffee shops and cafes were full of dads and their children," explains Neil, 47.

"I wondered if they were just trying to get out of mum's way for a few hours, or maybe it was the only time they had to spend with the kids. Some would be married, some single dads, maybe some estranged.

"I realised immediately this was a mission field waiting to be evangelised and we as a church were in a position to do something."

After stopping to smell the coffee, Neil consulted with his pastor, his wife and members of Teddington Baptist. How

the toddlers?

Soon, the ground rules for WLTDO were set. Firstly, it would be a woman-free zone (no offence, ladies). Secondly, it was aimed at mostly non-Christian dads, so no opening prayer beginning, 'Lord, please help with baby Josh's teething.'

Thirdly, the goal was a relaxed, pressure-free 90 minutes with no set agendas, although it was certain that rugby, Ronaldo and colic remedies would feature in most conversations.

Of course, behind the scenes, the church was praying round the clock that the whole, untried project would not be a learning curve so steep that the pram would not make it round the first bend.

"A lot of dads don't find it easy to play and interact with their kids," says Neil. "It's not considered cool to go into the office on a Monday morning asking other guys how to handle bed wetting or why isn't your child speaking yet?"

"The WLTDO sessions offer just such opportunities. Guys bring up issues themselves and offer tips and advice to each other. Barriers crumble when a 6ft3in, 30-year-old guy built like a prop forward says in a deep voice, 'I prefer Sudocrem myself!'"

twice monthly meetings winter. A number of others expressed an interest in schemes and have visited how it works at close hand.

Neil says one particular out for him: "A guy came and it was obvious he was being around her," he recalls.

"We played some music 'didn't do dancing' and so I got her up and after a few looked at him and said, 'I dance with me.'

"The guy walked over tiny hand and danced across lovely to watch."

It's moments like that in like a Mega Thunder Man of Hulk Power Blocks, that why the project was set

"A guy with no Christmas or maybe a negative one quietly asks if we can provide a job interview, or for his healing for his child," he

"Amidst the floor strewn nappies and giggling kids and touching people's lips

