



Youth and Children's Ministry

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YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT CYCLE



6

SHARING THE HARVEST

You are looking to share your experiences, and what you have learned, with others. How can we help other churches to benefit from our journey as a community?



5

BEARING FRUIT

You are working on ensuring children and young people are equal partners and decision-makers in church life. How can they become ministers and leaders, with roles in the broader work of the church?



1

PREPARING THE GROUND

You are planning, dreaming or envisioning what ministry with children, families, and young people might look like in your context.

4

GROWING TOGETHER

You are challenging the expectation that children and young people are separate from the rest of the church. How can you build intergenerational community and sharing of faith journeys?

2

PLANTING SEEDS

You are actively working to build connections with children, families, and young people. How can you deepen and increase engagement?

3

NURTURING THE ROOTS

You are exploring questions of faith with children, families, and young people. How can you move from relationship to discipleship?

A VISION FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY WITH ALL AGES

I've never met a church that says they don't want to attract children, families, and young people. However, being a church for all ages usually involves change and change is scary. Even if you have lots of children and young people, there's usually things you can do to continue the journey of fully welcoming them, encouraging them to grow as disciples, and including their voices in the church's work.

Being a church of all ages involves all four of our Diocesan values:



GENEROSITY: in giving our time, our talents, and our treasure to support new ministries with children and young people, or in helping the children and young people among us to grow deeper as disciples or learn how to live out their faith in their lives.



JOY: it is a joy to see our churches fill with new life, new ideas, new insights into God. It can be a joy to be challenged in thinking about new ways of doing things, or to share our beloved traditions with new generations. Encouraging our congregations to see the presence of children and young people – even sometimes their noise and their new ideas – as a joy and a blessing can be a journey in and of itself.



IMAGINATION: becoming a church for all ages may require enormous amounts of creative thinking and imagination. You may decide to start something new, or to make changes to your existing services. You may need to imaginatively engage with new technologies or new ways of communicating, or new ways of using your building. But children and young people will pay this back with their own brilliant imaginations and their own creativity.



COURAGE: it takes courage to try something new, and to reach out to new people – especially if you think of yourself as “not good with kids.” It takes courage to consider changing the way you do things. It takes courage to change your culture so that the children and young people go from being passive recipients of programmes to active participants and leaders.



The Development Cycle reflects our experiences with churches, from few or no children to children and young people as full and active members of the church.

Consider which roots your church might strengthen for the further flourishing of youth and children in your community, remembering that it's in the light of a clear vision and the nourishment of sustained prayer that this happens.

This process will look different in each church but having a clear step-by-step path may help you feel less lost as you try to discern what's next for your children and youth ministry. The process may not be simple and straightforward – you may spend ages in one stage and then race through another. Or something unexpected may happen and mean you go back a step. But it's there to help you look at where your church is now, and from there, help give you some guidance on what you can do next.

Here are some thoughts to help aid your church as you pray and plan.

CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

Biblical scholar Marcia J. Bunge points out that there are at least six main images of children in the Bible. Children are:

- Gifts of God and sources of joy
- Sinful creatures and moral agents
- Developing beings who need instruction and guidance
- Fully human and made in the image of God
- Models of faith and sources or vehicles of revelation
- Orphans, neighbours and strangers in need of justice and compassion

Bunge, Marcia. "Biblical Understandings of Children," pages 21-28

Which of these is most prominent in how your church sees children? Has your church thought about the role children play in Scripture, how we view children in our communities, and how our own stories and experiences with children and childhood may affect us?

Exploring Biblical imagery around children and childhood may help your church think about your ministry with children and young people. These reflections and readings could be used for a home group, a PCC meeting or for a sermon. They are a resource for parishes to reflect on the promise of children in Biblical times and in our contemporary church.

- God's desire for children. The line of God's people was assured through the birth of children even when things went wrong. The first children Cain and Abel fought against each other. Noah's children were part of the great promise of God. Sarah gave birth to Isaac after many years of childlessness – the struggle of infertility made her cruel and cynical and yet God blessed her with a son because of his promise to Abraham of faithful descendants. (Genesis 9.1, 7-19) (Genesis 18.1-15)
- The desire of men and women to share in God's work of creation. From the beginning God created humanity to be fruitful and to share in his work of creation. Hannah prayed desperately for a son that she would offer to the Lord, Isaac prayed for his wife Rebecca that her infertility would end and that children would be born to them - and Esau and Jacob were born. (Genesis 25.19-21) (1 Samuel 1)

- The image of children as a blessing continues in the Psalms - the image of the fruitful vine, of children at the table. (Psalm 128)
- Birth as an image for resurrection and new creation: "You will weep and mourn but the world will rejoice. When a woman is in labour she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. (John 16.20, 21). Paul speaks of the present difficulties and persecutions of the early church as labour pains, as the church struggles to come to birth. Our own developing spiritual lives are groaning as we continue to be transformed. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies". (Romans 8.22-23)

Read some of the above passages. Maybe smaller groups or pairs could look at each section. Ask:

- a) Is our church in this story? Why or how?
- b) Which story seems to be most about your church?
- c) Which of these images attracts you? Blessing, Longing, Pain, Creation, Fruitfulness, Resurrection, Adoption, Transformation. You might like to arrange them in the order of importance for your group. Which of these words describe what you want most for your church?
- d) Which other words from the story are important in the life of your church?
- e) Draw the outline of a child on a large piece of paper. Take two different coloured felt tip pens. As a group write in one colour the gifts that children might bring. Write in the other colour the fears you have of children coming to your church.
- f) What is your next priority?



YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE, IN CHURCH AND IN COMMUNITY

The Bible is full of stories of young people working with God to change the world. Rather than the bearded old men that is sometimes assumed, the Bible is filled with courageous men and women of all ages, including young people. Here are four examples of young people with major roles in the story of God's unfolding grace.

MARY – In Mary we see the humility and faith of a young woman to say yes to God, despite the dangers and at great cost. (Luke 1)

DAVID – As a youngest son, he is overlooked by his family but not by God. His relationship with God is still an example for us today and his confident faith rescues a people from invasion. (1 Samuel 17)

JOSEPH – A profound calling that shapes history, God speaks to Joseph at age 17. He is rejected and cast out by his brothers but comes to their rescue. (Genesis 37)

THE BOY WHO GAVE HIS LUNCH – Jesus' miracle of provision to feed 5000. God uses what this young person offers, for the blessing of many. (John 6)

We can hope, pray and plan not just to plant seeds in the lives of young people but see growth and fruit that sustains and renews the whole community. Young

people (11 to 18 year olds) add vibrancy to our churches, they challenge us, they are attuned to the wider cultural moment we all live in and share their faith naturally and relevantly. The Bible confirms to us that young people need the nurture and support of a loving community to help maximise their calling. I wonder if you have heard any of these reasons for not investing in or welcoming young people?

"Young people just are too busy"

"Young people aren't interested"

"Church isn't for young people"

"They will find a way back as adults"

What do you think about these statements? How might you respond?

For a great many of us, it was in our teenage years that our faith went deep within us, that we 'owned' it for ourselves. We face significant challenges in building 11-18s into the life of the church but with prayer and some creative thought in putting foundational 'roots' in place, we can walk with an emerging generation, as they discover Jesus and change the world for good.

Discussion questions to begin a review of young people's place in church:

- a) What other examples of young people in the Bible stand out to you?
- b) What was your teenage experience of faith and church?
- c) Who impacted your faith as a teenager?
- d) How confident are you that the Gospel is relevant for young people today? What might help grow your confidence?

- e) How confident are you that your church is a welcoming place where young people can flourish? What might help grow your confidence in this?

Getting connected

How is your church connected to young people? Map out your connections, listing all the ways the church connects to young people and teenagers. Think about family connections, schools, uniform groups, choirs etc. How do these connections support young people to grow in faith and where might connections be deepened?

REVIEWING WHERE YOU ARE AND PLANNING AHEAD

Now consider these points together:

- **Disappointment and hurt of infertility/pregnancy loss.**

Many still suffer from infertility. Hopes are raised through IVF and other treatments and yet there are still women and men who have longed for a child and not conceived. Some become pregnant and lose children during pregnancy, during labour, or shortly after birth. After these traumatic experiences, some turn their attention to other ways of nurturing children, supporting friends and family as aunties and uncles and godparents. Does your church feel as though it is infertile or has lost children? What solution would you hope for in your church? What would be the equivalent of IVF or adoption for your church?

- **Which character do you identify with as an individual or as a church?**

Adam and Eve watching children harm each other; Noah bringing children on board for safety but willing to trust God's promise; Sarah cynical in the face of statistics and declining numbers at church; Hannah praying desperately for a son, wanting to offer him to the Lord if only she can conceive; Hannah's husband Elkanah, who loved her and gave her double portions; Isaac who prayed for his wife that she might conceive. What can your church learn from these?

- **Jesus put a child in the middle of those who asked him about status and power.**

What can young people teach our church and how are we embracing the call to become like children?



Development Cycle Discussion Questions:

1. At what stage would we place ourselves (as a church) in the Development Cycle?
2. What is stopping us from moving on to the next step?
3. What are our biggest challenges in strengthening our 'roots'?
4. What positive connections do we currently have to children and young people?
5. What are our honest feelings around the place of children, families, and young people in church?
6. What opportunities are there for building multi-generational community in our church? How can people of different ages get to know each other and build relationships?
7. How can children and young people be included in decisions that affect them? How can we make sure their voices are heard and respected?

Having looked carefully both at your church and your community, where could you begin to make contact most easily with new children, young people and families and what could you put in place to help them find a place at the heart of your church community?

It is a great joy to walk with children, young people and families as they discover and live out a relationship with God. Get in touch with the Youth and Children's Team for support, ideas and encouragement, whatever stage you are at. We will be praying for you every step of the way.

www.stalbans.anglican.org/yac

Here is a checklist to aid your thinking and help you discern your next steps and priorities:

	Yes	No	Notes
Are there children and/or young people in church most Sundays?			
Do you have contact with children and/or young people during the week?			
Do you provide something for children each Sunday? What form does it take?			
Do congregation members have grandchildren/great-grandchildren?			
Are children, young people, and their concerns regularly prayed for in your worship?			
In each of your MAP priorities, have you considered what each means for children, families, and young people?			
Are issues around children and young people regularly on the PCC agenda?			
Are your Safeguarding training and protocols up to date?			
Has anyone from your congregation attended training on children's or youth ministry recently?			
Is there a school in your community? Do you know how students and staff could be supported by the church?			
Do you have a safe place for under 5s to move around and still be able to see and be involved in worship?			
Do young people have opportunities to explore faith with their peers?			
Is there provision for children and young people attending baptisms, weddings, and funerals?			
Do you have a system for getting contact details of families attending occasional events (e.g. Crib Service) so you can invite them to other things?			
Is there a safe, clean place to change nappies?			

	Yes	No	Notes
Are children and young people encouraged to participate at all levels in the church's ministry and mission?			
Do you plan opportunities for enhancing inter-generational community?			
Is your church's website up to date, and is the key information – service times, christenings, etc – easily accessible from the main page?			
Would a young person feel welcome to join a service after researching you online?			
Do you have a strategy for welcoming and including new children, young people and families?			
Does your church support parents and grandparents to share their faith with their families?			
Are there opportunities for outings, pilgrimages, etc?			
Have you explored admitting children to Communion before Confirmation?			
Do you have connections to charities in your area who work with children, families, and young people?			
Is there a nursery school or playgroup? Do you have contact with them?			
Are there opportunities for children and young people to share their ideas and concerns with PCC, working groups, etc?			
What other leisure activities and services are there for children and young people in your parish?			
Do you have contact with health visitors, midwives, NCT groups, etc?			
Do you know the current issues affecting children and young people in your parish?			
If there are children's or young people's groups who use your hall, do you have contact with them?			