

Disciples Together

Putting children, young people and families
at the centre of a more Christ-like Church



DIOCESE of OXFORD

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

Preface

The Diocese of Oxford seeks to be a more Christ-like Church: more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous. Focused work, over many months, has helped us to understand the cultural shifts that have happened in the world around us and the changes we need to put in place to connect and inspire young people today. Of particular importance, now, is communicating these cultural changes and supporting parishes, benefices and deaneries to engage afresh with children, young people and families.

Jesus' words about little children are well known but need to be heard afresh:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Luke 18:16-17 (NRSV)

Adult members of the church are called to welcome children, young people and families into our communities as fellow disciples. This has implications for every family and every part of our common life. But Jesus says something else that is vital: children and young people are to be our models and example, in the way of faith and in the kingdom of God.

God loves young people and, in the Gospels, God entrusts his mission to the young: Mary is a teenager when she is visited by Gabriel and receives the gift of the Christ child; the disciples and many others who follow Christ are also young – called and entrusted with great responsibility.

The more we have listened to what is happening across the Diocese and in the wider culture, the more we have focused our work and begun to pray for a deep transformation in the life of the Church in relation to children, young people and families over the next decade.

We have not come to the end of our listening but we have reached clear conclusions as to the shifts in thinking that are needed and how we should begin to invest to see this transformation. I commend this report to the Bishop's Council, our Synod and the whole Diocese of Oxford as the next step of our common vision to become a more Christ-like Church.



Bishop Steven, Oxford
June 2020

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Photo: Steven Buckley

1 Where we are now

BECOMING A MORE CHRIST-LIKE CHURCH

Imagine a church that reconnects with the importance of children, young people and families.¹ A church whose confidence in being and living Good News allows it to listen and to play, to learn and to grow, to invite and encounter; and to work both inside and outside of church buildings. Imagine a church that believes in Christianity as a way of living more deeply, with children and young people as co-journeymen in faith, connecting more easily with God.

Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence of disconnection between children, young people, families and the Church. In the world at large, huge changes have taken place not only in people's perception of Church and religion but also in the experiences of children and young people. Past efforts by the Church to address this gap, through technical fixes – new resources and techniques – have failed to address the need for a more significant change. If the Church is serious about engaging with, learning from, and making a difference to children, young people and families, a significant culture shift is required.

While there is much to celebrate and we are thankful for the ways that churches and faithful ministers are already being Good News for children, young people and families, if we wish for our imagined church to come into being, we need to make shifts in our current practice and policy; we need to consider afresh how children and young people are seen, valued and involved, and in how we share faith and discipleship.

Our approach to deepening contemplation, compassion and courage

A focus on children, young people and families is one of five focus areas we have set out in order to progress our common vision to become a more Christ-like church.

Making a bigger difference
Catechesis and discipleship
Growing new congregations
Schools, children, young people and families
Celebrate and bless Milton Keynes

Inevitably, there is much interdependence between these areas, and work around children, young people, families and schools is, in many ways, at the heart of them all.

For example, **'Making a bigger difference'** in the world is an area of work that connects deeply with young people's concerns about environmental stewardship and global justice. There is huge potential for intergenerational learning, co-creating and co-working in this arena and this clearly overlaps with work in schools.

'Catechesis' and **'discipleship'** both feed into and flow from the ministry we have with children and young people. Work on **'growing new congregations'** and the growth of adult disciples is critical if we are to engage our children and young people. And finally, we recognise the value of implementing and learning about youth engagement from all these strands as we put them into practice within **'Milton Keynes'**.

CHILD AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TODAY

Nationally, and at a diocesan level, engagement with children and young people has been decreasing year-on-year. The parishes of the Diocese are still in contact with a large number of young people but there are many churches where links with children and young people are extremely limited or not existent. Of particular concern is that many young people do not stay connected to the faith community beyond primary school age, and by the age of 15 their connection is significantly reduced.

Children and young people in the Diocese of Oxford's worshipping community

According to *Statistics for Mission*, of the Diocese of Oxford's worshipping community in 2018, 21% were aged 0 – 17. And Church House Westminster has approximated that, of these, just 30% (about 6% of the total) were of secondary school age. (See Figure i.)

i: The worshipping community in the Diocese of Oxford in 2017/2018 (based on *Statistics for Mission 2018*)

	2017	2018
Total community	66,600	65,000
All youth	14,500	13,650
Children (0-10)		9,500
Young people (11-17)		4,000

Average Sunday attendance figures are shown in Figure ii. Sunday attendance among 0-16 year olds, for 2018, was 5,600 – which equates to less than half the number of the full 'worshipping community' of that age group, cited above. In addition, child attendance in the Diocese from 2015 to 2018 showed some steep declines. (Figure iii.)

ii. Average Sunday church attendance in the Diocese of Oxford



iii. Child attendance at church in the Diocese of Oxford

	% change from the previous year		
	2016	2017	2018
Usual Sunday, Child	-2.7%	-6.6%	-7.5%
Usual Sunday, All Age	-1.0%	-1.9%	-3.3%
Weekly Average, Adult	-2.7%	-2.4%	-2.1%
Weekly Average, Child	-7.1%	-5.3%	-6.6%
Weekly Average, All Age	-3.4%	-2.8%	-2.8%
Sunday Average, Adult	-4.2%	-2.3%	-2.7%
Sunday Average, Child	-6.7%	-7.1%	-8.5%

For the tables above, read 'child' as 0-16 years old.

How we are engaging with children and young people

Alongside parish and community-based children, youth and family work and ministry, a close working relationship between churches, schools and households is vital.

In schools

The Diocese of Oxford serves about 60,000 children and young people through its 283 church schools. As well as being places where spirituality, worship and faith are explored, schools are centres where the Church can connect with children and young people to make a practical difference in the world.

iv. The Church of England's 'Growing Faith' vision

1. Every parish creating expressions of Church in which children, young people and households are actively involved, growing spiritually and having their voices heard.
2. 100% of Anglican parents recognising the importance of sharing faith with their children and actively engaging in this responsibility.
3. Clergy and lay ministers confident in supporting households to share faith at home.
4. Congregations that nurture and support the faith of children and young people.
5. Churches that serve and are served by their local school communities, actively building strong relationships between church, schools and households.
6. Children and young people who are confident to share their faith with their peers and families.

The departments of Mission and Education work closely together to enhance church and school relationships, and in the area of mental health and well-being. In line with the Church of England's 'Growing Faith' commitment and priorities (outlined in the paper *Growing faith: Children, Schools and Households?*), we are keen to build on this relationship.

The appointments of a Chaplaincy Adviser and a Church-School Relationship Adviser have been made to strategically support the relationship between Mission, Ministry and Schools. And this work and its priorities are key in the thinking of our 'Growing Faith' work.

Through parish clubs and groups

The primary focus of our current work with children, young people and families is through parish engagement in our 615 parishes in the Diocese. These range from toddler and youth groups to holiday clubs and Messy Church. (See figure v.)

v. Parish engagement with children and young people

Churches known to be offering toddler groups	198	32%
Churches known to be offering midweek kids' clubs	55	9%
Churches known to be offering youth groups (age range varies)	142	23%
Churches in contact with children/young people through choir	40	6.5%
Churches known to be offering holiday clubs	56	9%
Churches known to be offering 'Messy Church'	80-100	13%-16%

What all the data tells us

There are clearly some positives here, not least the 13,650 young people who are a part of our worshipping communities (albeit that this is a very small percentage of the total population of young people). What has to be faced, however, is the reality of the year-on-year fall in youth participation and the imperative that we embrace shifts in culture, approach and practice.

What has also become apparent is that accurate, consistent and comparable data is lacking. A more accurate audit is clearly needed.

THE CHALLENGES AND THE OPPORTUNITIES

There are several pieces of work from beyond our own Diocese that have informed our understanding.

The need to support families in their practice of faith

Research shows that parents have the largest influence on their children in matters of faith. A 2017 Varkey Foundation survey, for example, confirmed the importance of parents (the primary influencers) and the primacy of family.³

Foundations for faith are most often laid in childhood, but Christian families do not always find it easy to model living and sharing faith together. Research by Care for the Family⁴ shows that although 90% of Anglican parents thought it important to teach their children about faith, only 29% thought it was their responsibility.

Barriers to living faith together include family time being devoted to other things, not knowing what to do, and a lack of confidence in discussing matters of faith or establishing patterns of prayer.

Conclusion: The need for development of further intergenerational thinking and practice.

Inclusion of children and young people with additional needs

According to the UK Government's *Family Resources Survey, 2017-2018*, around 8% of children in the UK live with a disability, the most significant of which are learning and/or social, behavioural difficulties.⁵

Conclusion: Inclusion must be at the heart of thinking, planning and practice in approaches to children, young people and families.

The importance of focusing on young people of secondary-school age

Generation Z (those born in the mid to late 90s up to around 2010)⁷ are described as 'the least religious generation ever' with, according to a US and UK study,⁸ only 20% of them attending any religious space. The mechanics of this decline are highlighted in the *British Social Attitudes Survey* for 2019, which said: "This decline is generational – each successive cohort is less likely to identify as religious than the one before. Analysis by Voas and Crockett (2004) illustrates the mechanics of this decline: while two non-religious parents will successfully transmit their lack of religion, two religious parents have just a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith."⁹ This means that for every generation, the numbers of faith bearers decreases dramatically.

Conclusion: This not only underlines the importance of working with families but also, given that the vast majority of young people are disconnected from Christian communities, to the need for our focus to be outward and missional.

Research in 2017 by ComRes, mapping churchgoing and religious practice,¹⁰ included exploration of the age at which people came to faith or left faith. When practising Christians were asked at what age they came to faith, the results showed 40% before the age of 5, 16% between the ages of 5 and 10, 20% between the ages of 11 and 18. Another question asked respondents who had previously been a member of a religious group (not just Christian): 'At what age did you stop considering yourself to be a member of this religious group?' The results showed 4% between 5 and 10, 34% between 11 and 18 and 21% between 19 and 24.

The fact that 76% of Christians in the ComRes research said that they came to faith before the age of 18, indicates the importance of focusing on how children and young people are helped to grow their faith firmly.

The fact that, of those surveyed, 55% left a religious group between the ages of 11 and 24, points to the need for a more relevant, real and practical experience and engagement with faith (and the faith community) beyond primary school.

Conclusion: The rooting of young people's faith needs greater attention, especially when they reach secondary-school age.

"Churches, especially smaller ones, do more children's work than youth work, and are less confident when it comes to youth work."

Youthscape's Losing Heart survey, 2015⁶

Contexts to consider

Connecting with a tolerant generation

The *Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey* states 89% of respondents believe men and women should be treated equally and 74% believe in equal rights for transgender people. (Note, this is worldwide data, and some strict religious beliefs influence this figure.) Looking at support for same-sex marriage, among Americans of all ages who are without religious affiliation, the figure is 79%¹¹ (and acknowledged to be higher among young people). Looking at the changing attitudes and law, the last *British Social Attitudes* study's key findings concluded: "These changes mean that both public attitudes to, and the law on, sex and sexuality are now profoundly out of step with the doctrinal position of many established faiths in Britain, including that of most Christian denominations."¹²

Conclusion: Young People are less binary about gender, more open to difference, and more accepting of other people's experience, definitions and views.

Our digital society

Young people today are growing up with, and in, a very different world view to the one broadly occupied by the Church and, more particularly, to those whose power and influence, both consciously and unconsciously, creates the culture of learning, thinking and interpreting in the late-modernity culture of much Western Christianity.

This generation of young people are 'digital natives'. They have grown up not knowing a time without the internet, mobile phones and rapid digital evolution. (A recent article in *The Times*, reporting a study by Childwise, revealed that more than three-quarters of British children under five have access to the internet.)¹³ Alongside the challenges that technology has brought, this tech-savviness is crucial to an understanding of children and young people today. Their attitude to knowledge, relationships, creativity, possibilities, the world, and so much more, are radically different from the generations that preceded them.

Conclusion: We have to ask ourselves, how do a very visual generation of creatives, who usually participate in their own learning, fit with a Church that is broadly built around words and largely passive attendance?

Mental health

Across Western Culture, there is currently an explosion in mental health challenges and experiences. It would be impossible to look at this generation without noting the impacts of what have been called 'the four epidemics of our age': stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness.¹⁴ Very worryingly, 18% of young people in the UK have said that they felt that "life was not worth living",¹⁵ one-in-eight 5- to 19-year-olds have at least one mental disorder, and almost a quarter of 14-year-old girls are depressed.¹⁶

Adolescent mental health services are struggling to meet the need. At the Oxfordshire Children's Trust Board Meeting on 2 October 2019, it was reported that only 36% of children have their first Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) appointment within 12 weeks, against a target of 75%. This is mainly due to the increase in demand for CAMHS services.

The Varkey research concludes that “young people have a negative outlook on the future of the world. And believe it is becoming a worse place to live in”, even though the majority surveyed did say that they felt happy with their life overall.¹⁷

Conclusion: Our gospel vision promises us life in all its fullness, and there are deep resources within our Christian tradition to enable us to make a positive and healing contribution to the well-being of children and young people.

The cross-cultural challenge

Mired as the Church is in a kind of late-modernity theology, where ‘correct belief’ is highly prized, and in which views are held that can seem exclusive, sexist and homophobic, there is a significant challenge in engaging with an open, generously inclusive, sexually diverse cohort of young people.

Young People care about authenticity in life and authenticity of action. They argue that an authentic human cannot judge and exclude another. They value people like Greta Thunberg, for example, whose energy and activity is invested in worthwhile endeavour. This lens of authenticity and aligned action does not see an ally in a Church whose energy seems all too often focused on defining and defending faith and doctrines more than in action and inclusion.

“We have lived for so long with a propositional approach to Christianity, we have nearly lost its true meaning... Our rationalistic approach to life, which has dominated Western Culture for hundreds of years has [left us with] a faith that is barely more than fact-telling.”¹⁸



Yellow Braces diocesan youth camp.

2 Where we need to be

The Church should, of course, celebrate all that is good in its work with children, young people and families, but it needs to look hard at its processes, policies and practices and be realistic about the changes required for the future good of the Church – and of the world.

The following five shifts are the result of work undertaken from a starting point of deepened contemplation, compassion and courage. Here we outline how we can begin to put them into practice, and how we can experiment and build on them. (For each of the identified shifts, Bishop Steven has articulated the Diocese of Oxford's direction of travel in consultation with Children, Youth and Family ministers.)

FIVE CULTURAL SHIFTS

1. Viewing children and young people as active participants and pilgrims

A shift from viewing children and young people as a problem/deficit/challenge to children and young people as active participants and pilgrims.

2. Engaging with children, young people and families intergenerationally

A shift from running separate programmes to living intergenerationally.

3. Being intentional disciple makers

A shift from 'vague influencers' to intentional disciple makers.

4. Enabling those engaging with children and young people to be 'called', 'formed' and 'equipped' ministers

A shift from pressed volunteers and workers to called and formed ministers.

5. Being the change we want to see

A shift from an 'adults-only' Church to an 'all-age community of grace'.

Shift 1: Viewing children and young people as active participants and pilgrims

“At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.’”

Luke 10:21 (NIV)

“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the members of the body, every one of them, according to His design.”

1 Corinthians 12:17-18 (NIV)

Imagine a church where every person is welcomed and valued. A church where children and young people are encouraged and enabled to be active participants in, and contributors to, the worshipping and missional community life. A church that views the young as disciples of Jesus and recognises that their offerings, gifts and skills are critical to the growth of all disciples.

All people are created in God’s image and are His ‘children’. We recognise children and young people are capable of being agents and disciples of God’s Kingdom whatever their age and stage of life. We believe they are best helped on this journey accompanied by adults who, likewise, seek to learn from their travelling companions. Children and young people are not empty vessels to be filled.

What does this look like in practice?

- We demonstrate how we value and welcome children and young people in the attitudes, language, resources, budgets, activities, and building set-up of churches.
- Ministry by children and young people is recognised, nurtured and encouraged.
- Congregations, including children and young people, are journeying together in spiritual practices, theological reflection and making a difference in the world.
- The language of ‘ministry’ and ‘ministers’ replaces ‘work’ and ‘workers’.
- The invitation to be involved in children, youth or family ministry is framed around call, vocation and invitation, and never around desperation (‘anyone will do’) or threat (‘we’ll close the group if someone doesn’t’).
- The Church routinely celebrates and encourages ‘missionaries’ – recognising that people minister with children, young people and families outside of church settings (for example teaching, coaching, Scouting/Guiding).

“We can tell if you think you are better than us”

Teenager (17)

How do we shift the way we view children and young people?

1.1 Church culture demonstrates in word and action that children and young people are highly valued and welcomed.

1.2 Church culture seeks to induct children and young people into the life-giving gift of Christian faith, which includes spiritual nurture and practices – offering “How do we live this?” not just “What do we need to know?”.

1.3 Children and young people are active participants in, and contributors to, the whole life and mission of the Church.

1.4 Families whose members have additional needs are given extra care and support so that their faith and spiritual life can thrive.

Shift 2: Engaging with children, young people and families, including intergenerationally

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

Mark 10:14 [ESV]

Imagine a church that actively embraces the messiness of togetherness with people of every age and stage of life. A church that acknowledges the full range of experience, needs and personal contexts, and that resources social connection, worship and mission ‘together’ more than separately.

How do we ‘do’ a life of discipleship, worship and mission alongside and with children, young people and families? We know from ‘Sticky Faith’¹⁹ and other research²⁰ that retaining a sense of belonging to a community of faith is very significant in determining whether someone will stick with church.

We are clear that intergenerational relationships at all stages are key in faith formation. Relationships with non-parent adults also have a strong influence through adolescence into adulthood. Fostering and nurturing intergenerational relationships and practices offers life-enhancing benefits right across the generations in church communities.

What does this look like in practice?

- Increased engagement with children, young people and families that reflects local context and needs.
- Recognition that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ and that individual churches are the ones best placed to work out God’s call for their ministry and mission with children, young people and families.
- Greater openness and confidence in welcoming, supporting and ministering alongside people with additional needs, and their families.
- Churches recognise the connections, opportunities and presence of young people they already have, and they strengthen these relationships.
- There is confidence in assessing where God is already at work, and there is a culture of joining in with God’s activity alongside children, young people and their families, however small, fragile and immaterial it seems. The culture will be one of experimentation and learning.
- Opportunities for intergenerational gathering, play, ministry and mission will be a routine part of the life of the congregation.
- There will be increased engagement with the Diocese of Oxford Child and Youth Friendly Award.

“Sometimes we don’t pay attention, not because we are rude but because it is not our style of learning”

Teenager (15)

How do we shift the way we engage with children and young people?

2.1 The principles and practices of ‘intergenerational’ approaches are created and strengthened to enable bold experiments within worshipping communities.

2.2 A culture of learning and experimenting enables the church to be confident, flexible and missional in its ministries with children, young people and families.

2.3 Churches invest in missional approaches to direct their ministry with children and young people, actively seeking and working with partners in mission wherever possible and appropriate.

2.4 Nurturing a culture of predominantly working with and alongside young people in mission, justice and social enterprise.

2.5 A recognition that Church is more than ‘the Sunday service’, reflected in experimental worship and activities at times and in places accessed by children, young people and families.

Shift 3: Being intentional disciple makers

“Go and make disciples”

Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

Imagine a church that is confidently prioritising and supporting the transmission of faith and spiritual nurture in its worship and activities with children and young people, and supporting parents, carers and households to be faith-nurturing environments.

Approaches we take to faith-transmission and adult discipleship are of key significance not only for the adults themselves but also in the way that they are confident, vulnerable and open in how they explore and journey in faith alongside children and young people. These changes will have an impact in mission, in worship and community.

Part of this is recognising that it is parents that matter most in the faith formation and spiritual nurture of children and young people. What is modelled in the home continues to influence into adulthood, yet we know that many Christian parents lack confidence in ‘sharing faith at home’. We believe that greater investment is needed to resource and support parents and households to be more open and confident in ‘living faith together’, rather than putting on an extra activity to fit in the day or week.

These changes to the way that we share faith, and the ways we journey in discipleship, are key to engaging with children, young people and faith. Enhancing the rich breadth of spiritual, faith and missional activity to be inclusive of all ages and stages brings great benefits to all. We believe that churches need to seek new ways of mutual learning; experiencing and exploring how to live Christianity and how we uncover the way of Jesus together.

What does this look like in practice?

- Young people have the tools for, and are more confident with the ‘how’ of, life-enhancing Christian faith.
- There will be more-confident adult disciples.
- We will see more intergenerational experiments at every level of church life.

“Young people need to feel they belong”

Teenager (16)

“[Don’t have] an oversimplified approach like you would with children”

Teenager (17)

How do we shift our approaches to faith transmission and discipleship?

3.1 Methodologies of ‘adult discipleship’ are developed so that different experiences will influence and change the approaches and practices of those who work with children and young people.

3.2 Approaches to the discipleship of children and young people in the places they find themselves – at home and in school, church and community environments – are examined and developed.

3.3 We ensure that the principles and practices of our diocesan common vision to be more contemplative, compassionate and courageous, are intentionally diffused into ministry with children, young people and families.

3.4 Parents and carers are supported and resourced to understand the role of ‘ordinary home, everyday life’ in the faith formation of children and young people.

3.5 Churches are better resourced to understand and support times of transition and rites of passage for children and young people, in order to challenge the deep-rooted view that ‘it’s inevitable and ok that they will leave’.

Shift 4: Enabling those engaging with children and young people to be 'called', 'formed' and 'equipped ministers'

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms"

1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

Imagine a church that recognises the calling some have to specifically minister with children, young people and families. A church that invests in and actively pursues excellence for children, youth and family ministry team members in how they are formed, recruited, trained and supported.

We believe there is a need for better-structured training and learning opportunities that embody formational journeying approaches. This recognises the calling, forming, equipping, sustaining and authorising of all ministers with children, youth and families (voluntary and employed). We believe that these new opportunities will enable ministers to confidently and effectively operate in a rapidly changing culture. These new learning pathways also provide a framework to communicate and embed the culture changes we hope to see.

What does this look like in practice?

- Children, Youth and Family Ministers will be thriving. And they will benefit from improved Terms and Conditions of employment.
- Communities that are learning.
- We will see confident, formed, co-journeying disciples. people who feel valued and equipped.
- There will be more activities with children, young people and families, resulting from partnerships with other churches, denominations and community groups (including sports, arts and other children and youth organisations).
- There will be more confidence in working in missional partnerships beyond the Church.

"[Train people] who are willing to listen"

Teenager (17)

How do we shift the way we form, equip and support people working with children, young people and families?

4.1 A culture of learning and structure of training, including formation, spiritual nurture, theology skills and safe practice, being offered at a variety of levels and embracing both physical and online learning.

4.2 Offering formational pathways for young people serving as leaders at Kids' Clubs, Holiday Clubs, Messy Churches and other ministries.

4.3 Voluntary and employed ministers are invited and strongly encouraged to join and commit to being in local learning communities to foster a) spiritual practice, b) theological reflection, c) the forging of experiments, d) regular checking in with the learning community, to embed learning and best practice.

4.4 The Diocese develops a process of enabling parishes to be 'excellent employers' of Children, Youth and Family Ministers; pre-recruitment, during the recruitment process and post-recruitment. The framework offered by the Diocese becomes the 'default' for parishes seeking to employ, and is intrinsically linked with formational pathways (see shift 5).

Shift 5: Being the change we want to see

“He said, ‘Bring them to me.’ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed them. Then he broke the loaves in pieces and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”

Matthew 14:18-19 (ISV)

Imagine a church that facilitates children and young people to participate (appropriately) at every level of church life. A church whose life is underpinned with policy enabling excellent, safe creative practice.

Our desire is that we model, at diocesan level, what we are asking churches to implement at deanery and parish level. This is not easy, but we believe there are creative ways we can enable children and young people to have a voice at every level, so that we continue to challenge and influence each other as co-journeymen on the adventure of faith.

What does this look like in practice?

- Children and young people will be (appropriately) consulted and listened to on a wide variety of church-life issues.
- Children and young people will be involved in church-life issues; engaging with church decision-making, prayer and discussion.
- There will be an increase in intergenerational interaction that is life-giving, stimulating and valued.
- The culture will be one of increased participation, modelled and embedded at every level.

“Get people of different generations to talk”

Teenager (15)

How do we shift the priorities, policies and practices of the Church?

5.1 Develop a culture that expects and seeks consultation, participation and partnership with children and young people at every level.

5.2 The voices, passions, ideas and insights of children and young people are routinely sought, expressed and heard at Diocesan Synods, gatherings, events and training (in person or through appropriate channels).

5.3 Exploration of the question: “What might it mean to see every aspect of mission and ministry in your Diocese or the national church through the lens of what it means for our ministry with children, young people and families? How might your diocesan vision be viewed through this lens?”²¹

Conclusion

This report has outlined the current cultural context for the deepening disconnect between the Church and children, young people and families. Data about church attendance of under 16s, reported in the *Statistics for Mission 2018*, revealed no surprises. A realistic analysis of the Diocese of Oxford is discussed in Section 1 of this report.

The requirement for cultural shifts in five key areas has been articulated within a theological and practical framework. We wholeheartedly believe the recommendations and proposals offer parishes, benefices and deaneries a way to newly connect, reconnect and better connect with children, young people and families, whatever their local context. We pray that these five shifts will help all generations in a journeying faith life that allows them to live more deeply and to connect more easily with God.

Clearly this level of change across the entire Diocese is hugely ambitious. We have outlined clear pathways for phased informing, engaging, resourcing and reviewing, at local and diocesan level. Our expectation is to see our ministering disciples growing in courage and confidence, leading to a bubbling up of innovations. Within the framework of the five shifts, we hope to see the growth of new intergenerational congregations, new engagement with digital media and a wide range of experiments in faith formation and community engagement.

The thinking in this report is offered as part of a relational, invitational and partnership process. It outlines a series of supported and resourced shifts that will be shaped by and for the specific contexts in which they are explored.

Finally, we would like to add a heartfelt note of thanks to all those who invest time, effort and energy to bless, support and nurture children, young people and families all across the Diocese.

Ian Macdonald, Diocesan Youth Adviser

Yvonne Morris, Diocesan Children's and Family Ministry Adviser

Appendices

APPENDIX I: THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES WORKING GROUP OVERVIEW

The common vision for a more Christ-like Church Working Group, focused on ministry and mission with children, young people and families, first met in September 2018. Its creation came from the realisation that although children, young people and families were implicit in the thinking of the common vision, insufficient attention was being given to the considerable challenges faced by young people, and with the challenge for churches of engaging with emerging generations.

The group gathered around the following initial framing of its scope and purpose:

1. Exploring how we become 'a Christ-like Church for the good of the world'²² that both involves (at all levels), and makes a difference to, children and young people.
2. To identify the cultural and theological assumptions that the Church works from in its current approach(es) to children and young people.
3. To unearth or to imagine ways in which contemplation, compassion and courage form and inform our work and ministry with and among children and young people.
4. To explore cultural gaps between emerging generations and the culture(s) of Church.
5. To find ways to engender and normalise children and young people being co-disciples, co-travellers, and co-teachers with adults in uncovering the way of Jesus.
6. To articulate how the work of the group intersects with the work of the other working groups.
7. To explore new understandings and approaches with intergenerational work.
8. To more accurately map and understand the level of contact and engagement that exists.
9. To work closely with experiments in catechetical process.

The Children, Young People and Families working group:

Bishop Steven	Bishop of Oxford
Yvonne Morris	Diocesan Children's and Family Ministry Adviser
Ian Macdonald	Diocesan Youth Adviser
Olly Shaw	Parish-based Youth Minister
Ruth Harley	Former Youth and Children's Minister and now Ordinand
Linda Galpin	Children's and Family Minister
Naomi Graham	Oversees Accessible Church Ministry for New Wine, and CEO of 'Growing Hope'
Charlie Kerr	Diocesan Chaplaincy Adviser
Chris Russell	Vicar of St Laurence Reading
David Ritchie	Associate Minister, Warfield Church
Anika Parker	'Shift Youth and Community'

During the process, those involved consulted and listened in the contexts in which they were ministering. Two specific consultations were also run with parish-based children, young people and family workers. Themes were also explored through two residential events with young people in 2018 and 2019.

APPENDIX II: SAFEGUARDING AND BEST PRACTICE

The Diocese of Oxford have dramatically increased support for, and training in, Safeguarding and Best Practice in recent years and we recognise, with thanks, how deeply embedded this now is throughout churches' ministry with children, young people, families and vulnerable adults. We continue to be totally committed to working within our policies and guidance for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. It is our expectation that the highest standards of safeguarding will be implemented as we seek to further increase engagement and to develop mission and ministry with children, young people and families.

Endnotes

- 1** Contemporary definitions of ‘children’ and ‘young people’ are more about stage than age. Reflecting current culture, media and the views of children and young people, when we refer to ‘children’ in this report, we mean from birth to about nine-year-olds. By ‘young people’ or ‘youth’, we mean people from the age of about 10 up to 18-years-old. Families, it goes without saying, refers to and includes all family units, whatever their shape, size, or make-up.
- 2** See the Church of England’s General Synod paper *Growing faith: Children, Schools and Households*, GS 2121, February 2019. www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/GS%202121.pdf ‘Growing Faith’ is the vision set by the House of Bishops and endorsed by General Synod to ensure a national commitment to achieve a significant culture change within the church, so that every aspect of mission and ministry is seen through the lens of what it means for ministry with children, young people and families.
- 3** Highlighted in the Varkey Foundation study, *Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey, 2017*. www.varkeyfoundation.org/what-we-do/research/generation-z-global-citizenship-survey For a further example, see work from the Associated Press and MTV, where “spending time with family” came out as the top answer for “What makes you happy?”
- 4** *Faith in our Families: A snapshot of Anglican churches*, Care for the Family, 2017. www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Research-supplement-Anglican-churches-3.pdf
- 5** The Government’s *Family Resources Survey 2017-2018*, pp.1, 7 and 8. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791271/family-resources-survey-2017-18.pdf
- 6** Youthscape Centre for Research, *Losing Heart* survey, December 2016. www.youthscape.co.uk/research/losing-heart
- 7** There is more consensus on when the Gen Z generation starts than when it ends.
- 8** www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/want-to-win-over-millennials-and-gen-z-vices-new-study-says-brands-should-get-spiritual/
- 9** *British Social Attitudes 36*, Religion, 2019 edition, p.5. www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-36/religion.aspx
- 10** www.comresglobal.com/polls/church-of-england-mapping-survey/
- 11** Pew Research Centre. www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/
- 12** www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39287/0_bsa36_keyfindings.pdf
- 13** www.thetimes.co.uk/article/three-quarters-of-children-under-five-have-internet-access-rvspp7rn6
- 14** According to the office for national statistics, 9.8% of 11-16 year olds were ‘often’ lonely. This figure nearly doubles among those with long-term illness or disability. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018
- 15** YouGov report cited in the Guardian. www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/05/youth-unhappiness-uk-doubles-in-past-10-years
- 16** *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017*, Summary of Key Findings, NHS Digital. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>
- 17** Varkey Foundation, *Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey, 2017*. www.varkeyfoundation.org/what-we-do/research/generation-z-global-citizenship-survey
- 18** Brent Curtis and John Eldridge quoted in: *Mapping Post Modernism: A Survey of Christian Options* Greer, Robert C., InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 2003, p.163.
- 19** *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in your Kids*, Dr Kara E. Powell and Dr Chap Clark, Zondervan, 2011.
- 20** *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013*, Church Commissioners for England, 2014. And: *Rooted in the Church: Summary Report*, Church of England Education Office, 2016.
- 21** Bishop Steven, Oxford Area Day 2018
- 22** *Growing Faith* CB (18)16, paragraph 9)

“Churches know that they are struggling with their youth and children’s work but don’t know how to fix it.”

Youthscape Centre for Research, *Losing Heart* survey, 2019

It is time for the Church to re-engage with children, young people and families. There has been a growing gulf between our work and the reality of life for young people and in the culture at large.

This report, based the research of our Children, Young People and Families working group, explores how we can embrace change for the benefit of God’s work in the world and outlines steps for our future ministry.



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A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world