



# Growth & Fruitfulness

A strategy for  
ministry amongst  
children and  
young people

# The Context

As far as children and young people are concerned the vision of Newcastle diocese is:

- to ensure numerical growth;
- to have more young people involved in the life of the Church;
- a deepening of spirituality and prayer.

According to the 'Statistics for Mission 2014' (Research and Statistics Department Archbishops' Council), although Newcastle diocese fares better than others, Sunday and mid-week attendance at Church by children and young people ranges from being static to being in decline. Between 2004-2014 the number of children and young people attending Church on Sundays 'has decreased' and is 'remaining the same' during the week.

These statistics are of no surprise to existing congregations, particularly older people with whom we have spoken who have witnessed significant decline during their lifetimes. Many are concerned that over the past one or two generations fewer and fewer parents and children have regarded regular church attendance on Sunday mornings as the norm, and many children are growing up with no experience of regular Church worship at all.

Yet many people, it seems, have other types of contact with the Church. During a consultation that took place between 2015 and 2016 the diocesan Children's and Youth team has discovered that if we include the increasing number of churches being involved with schools and uniformed organisations, thousands of children, young people and their families are being reached through 'drop-ins', detached youth work, holiday clubs, Messy Church, youth cafes, Teatime Church, Toddler Groups, Prayer Spaces, Godly Play, and more..... and lots of those with whom we spoke are excited about what is happening in their parishes.....



# The Consultation

In 2015 the Children's and Youth team was asked to develop a diocesan strategy for children's and youth work. We therefore embarked upon 9 months of consultation.

- We read some current reports: the Newcastle diocesan Children's and Youth Work proposal paper (2014), 'Going for Growth' (CofE Archbishops' Council Education Division 2010), 'From Anecdote to Evidence' (CofE Archbishops' Council 2014), 'Reform and Renewal' (CofE Archbishops' Council 2015).
- We held 3 formal consultations with children and young people in different parts of the diocese.



- We held 6 formal consultations with volunteer leaders and clergy in different parts of the diocese.
- We met lots of children, young people, clergy and leaders in informal situations.
- During the process we paused twice to hold 'sounding boards' with 14 interested volunteers and clergy to share our findings and to reflect upon the process.

At the consultations and in our informal conversations we asked 5 questions:

- (i) What's been your best experience of Church?
- (ii) What do you hope for?
- (iii) Where do you see signs of growth in the Church?
- (iv) What resources do we need to fulfil our hopes?
- (v) What should we be doing?

We heard so many stories about inclusive worship, baptism ministry, involvement with uniformed organisations and local schools; ecumenical working, strategic planning, thoughtfulness about faith sharing, admission to Holy Communion, healthy Sunday Junior Churches and monthly all-age services; children contributing to worship and the parish magazine, Messy Churches, holiday clubs, festival workshop days; the use of the North East Religious Learning Resources Centre and the resources of agencies like Scripture Union and Urban Saints; Mothers' Union Baptism parties, Mum and Toddler groups that developed into weekly services; a confirmation class that became a youth group by building friendships, sharing food, fun, prayer and learning; encouraging playfulness with a 'wonder' board where people of all ages can place their 'I wonder...' questions.....

We heard about Hot Chocolate 'drop-ins', Fun Football, Choirs, 'Take This' (a comic produced by children), Tots' Praise, meditation, deanery youth groups; the desire of young people to study the Bible, to look at parables - and their confidence that exploring belief builds their faith.

We heard from young people how they appreciate debate, music, fun, residentials, getting together with friends, time to pray, time to talk, bible study, sports, cinema, issues, getting together with other churches, retreats, doing new things. Relationships featured a lot!

We heard how volunteers and other leaders want to share faith, model discipleship, give young people a voice; we heard about the importance of relationships, the need for training, the need to take the faith of children and young people seriously, the need to plan. We heard anxieties about the provision of a good experience and effective learning, capacity, sustainability and volunteers. We heard about the need for accompaniment, confidence, training, and planning; about the need to feel part of something bigger.

**The responses we heard revealed 2 underlying questions:**

- 1 As people of faith what do we want for our children and young people?**
- 2 Why are children and young people so important to us?**

**The key messages we were receiving were that:**

- We have so much to learn from children and young people about the nature of God and faith.**
- We can only grow as a Church if we grow with and alongside our children and young people.**
- The way we value children and young people today will shape the future of the Church.**



Within this context the team articulated its purpose, in the form of a mission statement.

# Mission Statement

‘To resource creative opportunities for children and young people to encounter the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ, through the life of the Church’.

(inspired by ‘Going for Growth’ 2010 p3 2:2.)

## Our Vision

If we fulfil our mission statement, we will see the children and young people of the diocese playing their part in the whole Church by

### **Growing Deeper**

Children, young people and adults developing authentic, real, transforming, lifelong faith journeys.

### **Growing Larger**

Every church reaching more children, young people and adults with the love of God.

### **Growing Together**

Children, young people and adults becoming more integrated as they grow in relationship with each other.

# Our Values:

Doing everything through God's grace and by the power of the Spirit with

## Generosity, Openness, Engagement ...and working with others.

The **Children's and Youth** team will model good practice by working collaboratively with churches to enable children and young people to grow deeper, larger and together in the context of the whole worshipping community - worshipping communities that are called to:

- provide a welcome, creative, safe, dynamic space for growth;
- provide a solid foundation of stories, tradition and ritual that nurtures everyone;
- live out a loving, authentic and resilient faith;
- reach out to help people find meaning in the Christian faith.

In all our ministry we will aspire to:

- regularly **pray for parishes'** ministry amongst children & young people;
- promote a **culture of 'worth'** of ourselves, others and all children & young people;
- learn to recognise **God's activity** already taking place - and to enjoy joining in;
- pro-actively **listen to and learn from young people and children** and always be open to discover and engage with issues that are important to them;
- **keep up to date** with resources and current thinking;
- **collaborate** with each other, parishes, supporting ministers, other task groups, dioceses, denominations and agencies, to ensure strategic, consistent practice;
- maintain effective channels of **communication** with all in the Diocese and be clear about the language we use (eg 'discipleship');
- **celebrate** ministry amongst children and young people;
- **reflect upon** practice, constantly monitoring and reviewing.

We will keep asking – 'As people of faith what do we want for our children and young people?' and 'Why are children and young people important to us?'

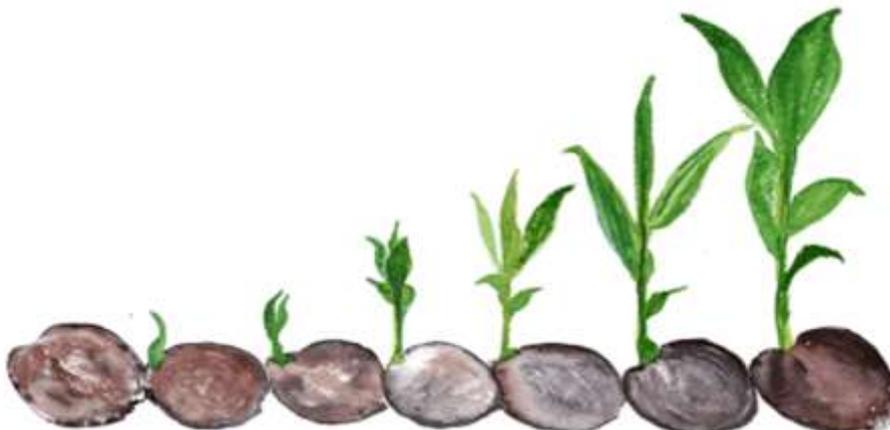
We believe that we can fulfil our vision by

# Nurturing Disciples

- 1 To foster identity as Children of God.**
  - Signpost/provide training and resources.
  - Build confidence in volunteers to recognise their value and vocation.
  - Encourage aspirational choices amongst young people.
  
- 2 To nourish faith development, particularly from initial encounters to deeper discipleship.**
  - Research and develop programmes of accompaniment, particularly in relation to Messy Church and 'Drop-Ins'.
  - Facilitate the sharing of experience, including how churches relate to schools.
  
- 3 To encourage faith sharing.**
  - Hold an annual diocesan residential/event for older children and young people.
  - Hold an annual diocesan event for younger children.
  
- 4 To develop understanding of initiation rites, sacraments, liturgy, language.**
  - Collaborate with other Supporting Ministers/Task Groups to provide training.
  - Initiate training programme on Admission to Communion and Confirmation.

# Enabling Parishes

- 1 To listen, accompany and build confidence amongst volunteers and clergy.**
  - Provide training and networking events
  
- 2 To provide strategic support to deaneries and parishes.**



# In 5 years we hope for these outcomes:

## **Nurturing Disciples**    **1 Fostering identity as Children of God:**

Greater integration of people of all ages in the life and worship of the Church.

- *Ways found to measure 'greater integration' of 'all ages'.*
- *Events designed/promoted that model good practice.*
- *Means of sharing that good practice in place across the diocese.*

Greater confidence in a sense of identity as Christians in the Church of England.

- *Regular training available for volunteers and clergy about Baptism, Admission to Communion and Confirmation.*
- *Regular 'Transition' events to encourage churches to welcome students and students to seek out churches.*
- *Evidence of higher self-esteem and aspirational choices amongst young people associated with churches which run drop-ins and youth cafes.*
- *A dynamic relationship between Synod and children and young people, giving voice to children and young people.*

## **2 Nourishing faith development, particularly from initial encounters to deeper discipleship**

More people from Messy Church and Youth Cafes deepening their faith – alongside existing Church members.

- *Ways found to measure the 'deepening' of faith.*
- *Events initiated that bring together those engaged in the traditional model of 'Sunday' Church and those engaged in the 'Not Sunday' Church activities and worship (eg Messy Church).*
- *Evidence of a greater understanding amongst clergy and volunteers of how we help young people, particularly those 'on the edge', to those 'spaces' where they can explore, express and develop their faith, which might be very different from traditional 'spaces'.*
- *Good practice being shared across the diocese about how parishes engage with schools and how that practice supports faith development amongst students, staff and families.*

## **3 Encouraging faith sharing**

- *Annual diocesan celebration of the contribution made by children and young people to the life of the Church.*
- *Annual diocesan Youth residential.*

## **4 To develop understanding of initiation rites, sacraments, liturgy, language**

- *Ways found to measure the impact of training for volunteers and clergy about Baptism, Admission to Communion and Confirmation on Church growth.*

## **Enabling parishes**    **1 Listening, accompanying and building confidence amongst volunteers and clergy**

- *Regular opportunities for 'returning' to the children, young people, volunteers and clergy involved in the original consultations, to feed back what was heard, report on the outcomes, share good practice and explore further.*
- *A variety of consultations and training/development programmes for volunteers and clergy.*
- *Volunteers and clergy who have taken part in the training being recruited to deliver training/development.*

## **2 Providing strategic support to deaneries and parishes**

- *Children and young people enjoying playing their part in the life of the Church.*
- *People in parishes enjoying children and young people playing their part in the life of the Church.*
- *More capacity – voluntary and paid.*

# Support and Accountability

- A Children and Youth Task Group (that meets 5/6 times a year).
- Working groups set up for specific events and projects.
- Regular invitations from Diocesan Synod to the Task Group.
- Pro-active engagement with other Task Groups and Supporting Ministers.
- Regular consultations with children; young people; volunteers.

## Purpose of the Children's and Youth Task Group:

To be an advocate of the place of children and young people in the Church; to be a champion of 'Growth and Fruitfulness' (the diocesan strategy for ministry amongst children and young people in the diocese of Newcastle); to support the diocesan Children's and Youth team in implementing the strategy.

The Task Group will do this by:

- owning and intentionally advocating and championing the strategy;
- supporting the team in shaping and developing their plan for implementing the strategy;
- resourcing the plan eg helping to develop capacity through the establishment of working groups and volunteer recruitment;
- resolving issues;
- collaborating with other task groups where appropriate;
- finding ways of measuring the outcomes and monitoring progress;
- reflecting upon and reviewing the strategy.