

Diocesan Synod, Saturday 21st March 2015

Stimulating Growth: Young People – In School and Out

This document will provide your group with some contextual information on work with young people in our Diocese, and will outline briefly some ideas and comments linked to this theme that have been put forward during initial consultation. This document should be considered a **stimulus for discussion**. You may wish to explore and develop aspects of the ideas presented, or you may come up with different ideas: all of this is helpful as we seek to discern how our resources can be used most effectively to stimulate Church growth.

Impetus

Engaging young people in the life of the Church is essential in ensuring long-term growth. We therefore need to explore different ways of involving young people in church, giving them positive experiences of Christian culture and values, which may lead them to faith or set down a positive marker to which they may, God willing, one day return. More broadly, it has been shown that the presence of young people within a church setting can have a positive impact across all growth measures.

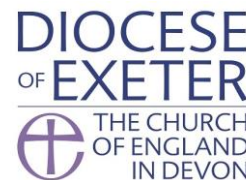
Context

There are around 150,000 children and young people aged under 18 living in Devon, yet the number of under-18s in our churches is only 3,200. Even if existing Fresh Expressions are included, there is very little likelihood that more than 5,000 children and young people are involved in our churches. It can be particularly difficult to keep young children engaged in church life when they go to secondary school and drift away from projects such as Messy Church; we therefore need to focus particularly on finding ways to continue to engage and involve teenagers in the life of the Church.

Over the last fifteen years we have seen an increasing gap between what we offer in church and the world in which young people live. This gap has pushed us in two different directions. Direction one has seen us trying to “make church cool”; however, in the rare case we succeed in doing so, we may sometimes also drive away the rest of our congregation in favour of a youth specific programme. Once young people graduate from this programme we often experience a drop-off owing to the lack of connection that occurs as the fun programme ends and ‘real church’ begins. This is church disillusionment. Direction two sees us treating young people as a separate culture. We may employ youth workers, programmes and initiatives to reach them, but we work with them away from our gathered congregations. This often sends the message ‘church isn’t really for you’. This is church disassociation.

The Diocesan Children and Youth Work Advisers already undertake a good deal of work aimed at developing youth ministry and growing the younger end of the Church; this includes the development of a three-year Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) programme focussing on how to develop youth work in churches (stage 1 complete), running high quality training programmes for those working with young people in church (current uptake only 3%), involvement in the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Project in Ilfracombe, partnering with the YMCA to release local (town council) funding for drop-in youth clubs, and the provision of ongoing support, mentoring and consultation for those who request it. In addition, the Big Listen project is to be launched in summer 2015 and presented in the Exeter Diocese in October; this is an initiative focussed on how to listen better to young people in the Church.

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Involvement with education offers a unique opportunity to share Christian culture and values with large numbers of children and young people. The Diocese of Exeter currently runs 131 church schools and academies, currently educating well over 22,000 children and young people and enabling them to engage in regular Christian worship, and explore their own sense of ministry. This number is growing as the Diocesan Board of Education engages with new housing communities across Devon. Clergy members and our congregations are involved in many of these schools, helping them in a variety of ways, although it is probably true that the level of involvement varies highly, with almost no engagement in some areas.

There is a total of well over 500 schools (primary, secondary, academy, independent, special and Free Schools) in the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Local Authority areas. ⁱⁱ These also fall within parochial boundaries and are part of the mission that we hold. There are congregations/clergy who do also engage with these non-Church schools and whose input is highly valued. However, there is room for further development and ministry within this area across all schools and academies. Furthermore, current government policy encourages all schools to be more involved in their local communities and so many would welcome resourceful links with their local churches as a means of achieving this.

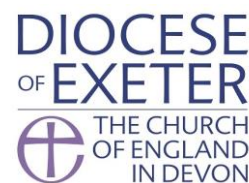
In order for contact with parishes and mission communities to be meaningful and worthwhile for schools, clergy and congregations need to be educated in the needs of schools, and to be prepared to change and be changed by the experience of working with them. The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) has organised a conference in March 2015, of which the objective will be to consider how mission communities might engage with schools in the local community; the keynote speaker is to be the Revd. Dr. Howard Worsley, Vice Principle of Trinity College, Bristol, and author of the Grove booklet, *Churches linking with Schools*.

Possible initiatives

In our approach to reaching young people, we must:

- Respect the fact that there are cultural gaps that need bridging;
 - Be prepared to learn and adapt to new ways of doing things;
 - Accurately identify what value there is in our traditions and invite young people to be a part of them.
1. To develop youth work and support for youth work on a mission community level. Resources might be used to fund the employment of part-time Youth Mission Advisers, who would work locally with mission communities, parishes and churches to support youth work, community links and networking across the Diocese.
 2. To invest in partnership projects with local youth mission organisations. We might set up partnership agreements that would produce practical support with training and youth work, 'on the ground' projects that dove-tail in with churches' MAPs, mission development, and youth programmes. Examples of such organisation are: South West Youth Ministries (SWYM), Exeter ICE Charitable Trust (a local Christian education charity), Devon Connect and The North Devon Youth Trust. We have already successfully piloted this approach in part with ICE and are seeing great results in North Devon.
 3. To provide and enable opportunities for young people to develop their discipleship and extend their experience in a context away from their local church. This might include opportunities for networking and developmental training (possibly including short residential opportunities that could make use of local facilities and expertise), and also for missional service to a wide range of communities at home

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and abroad. Consideration would need to be given concerning how to connect local churches to the opportunities available and, in turn, how to connect these opportunities with the young people in our local communities.

In our work with schools, we must ensure that schools truly benefit from their contact with the local church, and that each mission community has a resourced, high quality plan for engaging with local schools.

4. Building on the DBE's March 2015 conference, to run a series of conferences, training and network events which will help congregations to become more aware of what they can offer, share good practice (particularly in age appropriate ways to explain Christianity), learn about changes in the field of education, understand more fully recent research and advice, and find support and encouragement in their ministry.
5. To employ School Engagement Supporters who - armed with data already available within the Diocesan education team and from other public sources – will meet with ministry teams to assist in the development of a plan for engagement with local schools. Work might include speaking in churches, contact with schools, production of useful documentation, planning of services etc. Supporters would be tasked with enthusing the mission community as well as supporting it, and there would be strong liaison with the Education Team at the Old Deanery, as well as good coordination with other initiatives, such as youth work and Local Ministry Team Development.
6. Possible ways of engaging with schools might include:
 - Governors on all school governing bodies;
 - Supporting children's activities at schools;
 - Chaplaincy or similar spiritual support in secondary schools;
 - Reading with pupils;
 - Advisers for 'Young Enterprise' activities in secondary schools;
 - Teaching support;
 - Help with fund raising activities;
 - Supporting Religious Education;
 - Coaching pupils;
 - Assisting with minor maintenance;
 - Mentoring younger people;
 - Provision of pre and after school activities;
 - Using the school rather than the church for services and/or fresh expressions;
 - Helping with acts of Collective Worship;
 - Providing opportunities for work experience in local businesses run by congregation members.

Comments

- Residentials are great, but not enough by themselves. E.g., there is a long tradition of running residentials in Finland, and they are popular, but young people are involved in very little else. The gap to life-long discipleship expressed in being part of a worshipping community remains wide.
- Residentials and camps are mainly of benefit in the context of an inclusive youth ministry in the church. We need an approach that is based more on local participation over retreat experiences.

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- Young people gain much from being in large groups, but unless there is input and interest from their 'home' base, such events can be experienced simply as an alternative leisure activity. Prayer and support from local churches is key.
- What about green issues, which are especially relevant to younger people?
- Client input is essential: what do our young people want?
- Productive work to engage young people is only likely through schools. Continuing Ministerial Development is needed, and this is an area where Diocesan officers can help.
- It would be great if clergy can be more involved in work with schools – it can make such a difference.
- Discipleship must come first, together with a love of, and knowledge of, God; surely mission will then follow.
- Engagement with schools is vital.