

Paper 1: What Makes Children's and Youth Ministry a Success?

By Catherine Ellerby, freelance writer, in conversation with Sam Donoghue, Head of Children's and Youth Ministry (London diocese)

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By Catherine Ellerby, freelance writer, in conversation with the Revd Mike Pilavachi and the Revd Andy Croft, Senior Pastors, Soul Survivor Watford (St Albans diocese)

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What makes Children's and Youth Ministry a Success?

By Catherine Ellerby, freelance writer, in conversation with Sam Donoghue, Head of Children's and Youth Ministry Support, London diocese

Summary

A recent review of children's and youth ministry projects in London diocese has helped pinpoint the factors that help give these projects the greatest chance of success, not just in London but in the wider Church. Here we summarise the findings and Sam Donoghue, Head of Children's and Youth Ministry Support at London Diocese, offers some explanation and reaction.

Introduction

In London diocese, employing a children's or youth worker is on the increase, in recognition of the inherent potential in these roles for growing the Church. The Bishop of London's Mission Fund (BLMF) plays a key role in promoting and funding children's and youth work across the diocese. Over 40 projects have been funded in the last 10 years.

The BLMF is focused on maximizing the impact of its grants. An external review was commissioned in 2014-2015 to look at the effectiveness of previous grants. The aims were to understand what typically drives success in a project and assess what can be put in place to ensure future projects are set up with the right foundations and support.

Sam Donoghue offers support and advice to those involved with children's and youth work in London's 400 churches. He explains more about the evaluation project:

"Every children's and youth worker wants their work to be meaningful. We don't head into this children's ministry thing expecting or looking for failure – we want our work to be significant for the children and young people, and to thrive. Equally, every church or funder wants the projects or activities they support to work, and to engage the children and young people taking part. But what is it that makes a project, and the role of the children's worker, 'work'? And how can we ensure that the groups, activities and projects we are working on are moving in the right direction?"

The review process

The research was based on reviews of projects which had received funding from the BLMF and detailed interviews with church leaders involved with these. The aim was to find out which of the projects and roles had seen the most success.

The research looked into a wide variety of projects, deliberately focusing on not only those which were successful but those which struggled too. Each project was evaluated and ranked according to its success. Sam says:

"The research was externally commissioned which meant the consultant was able to bring a fresh perspective. He read every single review form ever submitted and then went to visit a selection of 21 projects - both those that were successful and those that failed. Speaking to project workers,

line managers, vicars and even those who attended the projects gave a good picture of the key factors in making projects a success and indeed what will cause a project to struggle.

“Some of the factors we already knew, it was intuitively obvious from our experience, but also some of it was more surprising and pushes against some more established norms. Many of the points centred on employment but others are more relevant generally when launching any new project in a church.”

Key success factors in children’s and youth ministry projects

The research found that several key factors make longer term success in children’s and youth ministry projects more likely.

Making the right appointment was found to be one of the most important success factors. Sam says:

“Making the right appointment might be the most obvious statement imaginable but this is often the most important thing you do for a children’s or youth work project. If you make a bad appointment there is no amount of mentoring and support that can save the project, but getting the right person means the project is likely to fly. We heard again and again that it is crucial in the recruitment phase to hold your nerve and not appoint unless you’re really sure. If that means going through the recruitment process multiple times and not appointing anyone you interview, then so be it. Parishes that panic and appoint the person who is the best on offer in the interviews rather than the right person for the job always regret it. In London right now it’s become normal to have two goes at appointing.”

The character of the worker was shown to be far more important than their skills, which, says Sam, flies in the face of much established logic: *“We have attempted to professionalise our workforce and we often include a youth or children’s work degree on the personal specification but our research showed us that this doesn’t matter as much as we hope.*

“What we’ve seen is that qualifications – for example, degrees in children’s and youth work - are great in terms of depth of thinking etc. but they are not necessarily leading to better output in practice. What we need to be looking for are people with staying power, the ability to enthuse and inspire others and who can shift the culture of a church. You can teach those people about children’s and youth work. Parishes have tried the opposite and thought they could motivate someone with some skills and a degree but it doesn’t work.

“If you can get that person with the entrepreneurial spirit required then you will still have issues to deal with: you may have to reign them in at times and getting them to consent to being trained can be a battle but fundamentally you’ll be having good problems around harnessing their energy as opposed to getting someone going.”

Good line management was also shown to be essential, increasing the likelihood of success.

Sam says: *“Good line management is crucial but only in forming and steering an entrepreneur. The research showed that meetings should focus on ensuring objectives are being met and that the worker is reflecting well on their work and not just charging ahead without thinking about what they’re doing.”*

Knowing the area was another essential factor helping a project to succeed. Sam says:

“It’s not enough to have a good idea or even a vision - good research into your local area is

crucial. Just because someone else has had huge success with a project, that doesn't mean it's going to work in your locality. It's vital to take time to engage with the local community and find what's already out there but oversubscribed and where there are needs that aren't being met."

Engaging and enthusing the whole church (PCC and congregation) in the vision for children's and youth work was shown to lead to successful ministry projects: *"Making children's and youth work an integrated part of church life is crucial for building momentum, driving internal funding and growing the volunteer base,"* says Sam. *"Too many of us are content to live in a silo aside from the church and accept the fact that no one gets what we do. This attitude however will slowly kill your project. Many parent and toddler groups get founded by churches with great missionary objectives but some then slowly get detached from the church until the only input from the church community is to complain about the way the hall is left afterwards: this is probably not something Jesus is very chuffed about."*

Prioritising relationships, and taking a "whole life" approach above an over-emphasis on programmes and activities also leads to greater chance of success. Sam comments that: *"It's easy to obsess with getting our programmes slicker and more exciting but where projects prioritised deep relationships over better programmes we saw success. Actually setting up programs is the easy bit; we are learning not to be impressed with them when we review but to dig deeper to see what relationships the programmes are facilitating. Caring about people and building trust builds a powerful witness."*

Building a strong volunteer base is important, rather than leaving the children's/youth worker to do everything. Sam says: *"Volunteers are crucial. Projects that are too dependent on a key worker can only survive as long as the key worker is around and are therefore incredibly fragile. Recruiting and empowering volunteers is a constant mission that pays off over time with a broader leadership than just one person, leading to greater creativity in planning and space for the key worker to think and reflect."*

Powering through plateau. The findings point to the need to avoid plateauing in children's and youth work ministry projects. Sam says it is possible to keep going even if it's hard work and may mean asking for help from others:

"Although much of what's been said above will mitigate against this, there is a clear trend of projects hitting a plateau in year two, often caused by the fact that the early years are spent setting things up and launching programs and there is then a transition in focus to developing and growing the groups and people find this difficult. Getting through this stage requires a big effort from more than just the worker but it can be done. Often a response to it is to try and launch a new program but that won't solve the problem.

"Expert advice is really important. We saw a direct link between success and engagement with the training and resourcing we provide as a diocese for all youth and children's workers. Those that sat on their own tended to struggle more. This need for expert advice also spreads into fundraising and any number of other things specific to the projects, but it's amazing how many projects struggle on without taking the help that is on offer.

Planning for long-term sustainability is also a key factor in a successful project: *"Long-term sustainability is not an accident; you have to plan this from the start. There can be an assumption that sustainability happens because successful projects generate momentum that*

keeps then going and going. We assume that it's easier for other churches as they have a huge pool of willing volunteers that you can only dream of. This simply isn't true, the projects that make it work for the long haul do so because they have been thinking that way from the start and working with that in mind."

So what are the sort of steps that long term successes have been taking to achieve long-term sustainability? Sam explains that many have established a **clear long-term vision** and have built with that in mind from the start, systematically putting in place the foundations needed. This includes things like **integrating children's and youth work into the wider vision of the church, fundraising and succession planning**. He also suggests that for some projects the prize was in getting the project up and running and they failed to think beyond that. By the time they do it is too late and they rarely last longer than a couple of years.

"Long-term projects are realistic in their expectations," says Sam. "One of the temptations when planning a project is to be too ambitious: we've learnt that our funding model can encourage this and we need to be more willing to fund less ambitious projects. We have seen that doing less really well by putting more resources into fewer projects is far more effective. Therefore, a project plan should have logical and realistic objectives. If you want to start two things put all your efforts into getting one right before you try and move on the other one."

Conclusion

One thing which stands out for Sam – especially where projects were less successful - is a need to highlight the support available and encourage those in children's and youth ministry to tap into this, through the dioceses in particular: *"We saw projects which were huge successes, some which were somewhere in the middle and others which had really struggled for a number of reasons or fizzled out after a strong start. It really struck me that in a number of projects where the children's/youth ministry was not thriving or a project hadn't succeeded, there was a worker who wasn't plugged into any networks and therefore struggling alone. In some cases, they had fallen to pieces and left. My message to anyone in this situation and to the wider church is that people like me and many others across the church in specialist and advisory positions are here to help – that's why we're in post so there's no need to struggle/give up!*

"The other important thing is that this research was carried out not based solely on anecdotal evidence. Of course we want to hear stories about what's happening out there, to highlight good practice and point to models which can be used in similar situations; but this review used a more methodical approach and had a focused remit, taking the 43 projects and systematically looking at what had worked and hadn't.

"That's a clear strength for me, and what we now have is some clear messages which can help the BLMF but may also benefit churches in other dioceses and indeed the wider church as it continues its mission to grow with a focus on children and young people."

This article draws on material previously used in an article by Sam Donoghue published in Premier Childrenswork magazine in Autumn 2015

Focus on Soul Survivor Watford

By Catherine Ellerby, freelance writer, in conversation with the Revd Mike Pilavachi and the Revd Andy Croft, Senior Pastors

Summary

A passion to reach out to young people in Watford, to care for and befriend them unconditionally led to a radical church emerging which is still growing 23 years later. In conversation with Revd Mike Pilavachi and Revd Andy Croft, Soul Survivor's senior pastors, this case study tells the story of the church, its beginnings, its journey so far and how it ministers to all ages while still focusing on the younger age groups.

Introduction

Soul Survivor is no "ordinary" church either in size or style. Meeting in two warehouses in Watford, there are now over a thousand members and the church is still growing.

What began as a church plant 23 years ago for young people has grown into a large and active multigenerational church. With a team of 21 and a programme which includes three weekly Sunday services, numerous activities and community outreach, Soul Survivor now looks very different from its early days, while still with a heart to reach young people.

Looking back to those early days when the church met in a front room, Andy and Mike can see how Soul Survivor Watford has been supported with wisdom - both at the outset, and subsequently - by the Church of England at a time when it was very hard to plant a church outside parish boundaries. As a consequence of that support, Soul Survivor Watford has grown up within the Church of England's structures. 18 months ago, it became a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO) under the joint leadership of Andy and Mike.

Early beginnings

The impetus to plant a church came from Mike's experience of working as a youth minister at St Andrew's church, Chorleywood, about 25 miles from Watford. Mike says:

"As the youth worker I was very aware that in a lively charismatic evangelical church, only a trickle of young people were becoming Christians – it seemed as if whatever we did, we never saw the flood of young people we hoped and prayed for.

"I watched these young people and started to realise that what we considered to be a modern service was just as alien to young people as any high or more traditional church service. I talked to them and found out that despite our efforts, church was not working for them. In fact, rather than feeling welcome, they were thinking "why is that person talking at me and why can't I smoke here? It will help me concentrate..."

A group of eleven people from St Andrew's, including Mike, felt prompted to start a different sort of church, one which would fit within the youth culture of the time. Mike

says “Our church gave permission for a team of us to go to Watford and plant a church. One of the team was Matt Redman who was 18 at the time and had just started university; when I told him I was going to start a church he told me he believed that God was telling him to join us – I told him not to do it and to reconsider but I lost the argument – and as a result he came with us leading the band which turned out to be a central part of what we were trying to do to connect with the young people.”

Connecting with young people

Mike wrote to local schools offering to do assemblies and some accepted. Alongside this, they provided a place where they could invite the young people to come, starting up “Dreggs” café with music, games and food. Everything was aimed at offering young people a place to be and to relax in a comfortable and non-threatening setting.

Mike says: “We took some of our musicians from the group, with Matt heading up the band which did covers of well-known songs – Wonderwall by Oasis was a favourite – along with karaoke..... The band and other leaders had space and time to chat to the kids, play card games with them, start to get to know them a bit”.

The café started attracting young people immediately - first a few came and before long a hundred of them.

Aware that there was a big gap between assemblies and coming to the café for the young people, Mike was anxious not to put them off by offering anything overtly Christian:

“The assemblies involved telling a moral story and letting people know that we were Christians – but inviting them to the café was different. I promised them that if they came we wouldn’t try to convert them... I then went back to the team and made things very clear indeed, that they must not talk about Jesus! We couldn’t break our promise to the kids... The team were open about being Christians; they just didn’t preach to them, instead they cared for and befriended them.”

As a result, some of the young people started talking to the leaders about what was going on in their lives, opening up about the issues which were important to them and the things they were facing. Then some started asking them about their faith and a “rumour” that they met on a Sunday night. Mike says:

“When I told them that the “rumour” was true, they asked if they could come along. It was so natural – they were our friends so they wanted to join us. So the next thing was to find somewhere to meet.

“We hired a school hall and decked it out just like the café but on a Sunday. The band was the same as at the café. It all felt very familiar to them – they knew them already and it felt like their place with their people there playing music. One went up to Matt and asked if he was going to play Wonderwall and Matt told him he was going to play a song which he’d written himself.”

Mike says that he thinks of what they did then as building a bridge between the team and the young people and walking over the bridge to where they were; then walking back bringing the young people too. The same principle stands today in reaching young people, he says: “What we sometimes don’t realise, even now, is that church is a frightening thing and teenagers are asking “am I allowed to go?” or “what if I do something wrong?” We focused just on making relationships which allowed us to be in their world.”

From then the church continued to grow – young people became Christians and then told others: *“they were some of the best evangelists because they just talked to their friends – it all happened so naturally.”*

Looking back, Andy Croft who co-leads Soul Survivor, Watford with Mike, says the approach taken by the team was excellent practice for what was to come: *“In those early days, the focus was on cultural relevance, relationships with young people and then bringing young people into a space where they were exposed to worship and the Lord.”*

There were clear signs that God was moving, for example, on one occasion the church’s sound system, worth £3,500, was stolen from a congregation member’s car. Within an hour of a phone call informing him of the theft, a business man phoned Mike saying that God had told him to ring and say that there was a cheque for £3,500 in the post with a message saying: *“God says never let money keep you from your ministry with young people.”*

Andy continues; *“Another time a girl brought her sister in because she had fallen over in the road. But the girl had been met by the Holy Spirit and became a Christian. Her mother also came to faith through her daughter.”*

Although he says that Soul Survivor, Watford has never seen a time of miracles since those early days, it has continued to see God move in different ways and has grown to its present size – a large worshipping community of 1,100.

How has the church evolved?

The church has evolved from being a church just for young people. It has members ranging in age from 20–65 but much of the congregation is made up of people in their 40s with children. There are 100 children in the children’s club.

Mike explains this evolution: *“The reason we’ve become like this is that everyone grew up! I had assumed that young people would move on, but whenever I ask people about what they planned to do they always say “Why would I want to leave?” Some have got married and now some have children so we now have a challenge to keep investing in the next generations.”*

The pattern and style of services on Sundays reflects what they are trying to achieve to reach the different groups and different ages.

There is a 9am service of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month – all the other Sunday services are weekly. The 10.30am service has an all age focus with families and children’s work. A 4.30pm service caters for people in their 20s and 30s.

The 7pm Sunday service was aimed at young people but is increasingly moving away from being exclusive to youth and becoming more all age. Some changes are being made to this service, recognising that what young people want in church is changing, but the focus is on evolution rather than revolution. Mike says:

“We’re still trying to stay at the cutting edge of youth culture. When we started, young people wanted to be different and radical and to do things apart from their parents. Now increasingly young people like to be in a family environment, worshipping among people of all ages - we’ve become a multigenerational church.”

The 4.30pm service was started as an experiment with a different teaching style in response to a need to engage better with people in their 20s and 30s. It has now been going for eight years and numbers have grown from 60 to over 150.

Mike says: *“Many in this age group say that they have struggled to find a church where they feel at home. So we’re trying to provide something for them. We’ve listened to what they are saying, things like: “When I was in my teens I wanted to change the world; now the world is changing me...” and asking: “How do I know what is the right career path? When should I settle down? How can I find a partner? How can I stay faithful to my partner? Life is harder than I thought...”*

I’ve realized that everything is done within a culture – even Jesus ministered within a culture - and we as the church have to respond to that. I’ve learned to listen to what people are saying and we do our best to offer services and activities which are helpful to different groups and ages.”

Discipleship

Alongside the Sunday worshipping communities, helping people to grow in their faith is another area where Soul Survivor is changing and adapting all the time. Andy says that they are currently looking again at how to disciple people. *“We’re trying to reflect the context we’re in now – in modern culture which is actively hostile to the Christian faith, people need to know more than ever why they believe what they believe. Thirty years ago, people had a foundation of knowing the Bible but young people today don’t have that foundation. They don’t know the scriptures and don’t look to the Bible as a source of authority.”*

To help address this, the church is challenging the congregation on why they hold their beliefs through a unique teaching series for the 7pm service on the Apostles Creed.

Everyone who comes is also encouraged to join a connect group which come in many shapes, sizes and forms: there is one for new people on the basics of faith; some are more traditional Bible study and prayer groups; and others are very different. This includes one group which goes to the gym together, a crochet and knitting group and even a wine tasting and Bible study group.

There are clear signs of spiritual growth. Not only are young people coming to faith and growing in discipleship, they are also going on to become church leaders. In the last five years, over 25 people have been ordained or are training for ordained ministry.

Growth and the future of Soul Survivor Watford

Growth in the church has been slow and steady over recent years. While the church has “grown up” in terms of average age, and is involved in a broader range of activities than in the early days it still has the same vision to embrace people where they are and to be a place of welcome. Mike says:

“In everything we are doing we as a team of pastors try to foster a sense of unity and family – we love each other and want that to be evident and shared with everyone who comes or who we’re in contact with.

“Some of our recent growth has been through us being involved with Christians Against Poverty in Watford, and we also have a huge mothers and toddlers group now. There are lots of events and we eat a lot together!”

One of the two warehouses has been developed into a café which is used a lot for events, for inviting people in, e.g. after the 4.30pm meeting, everyone invites their friends to have a meal together.

Mike continues: *“We try to have a range of different events so that there is something for everyone – alongside our services and meetings, we have purely social events, and some with a bit more input. For example, we held a series of talks in January on the new year’s resolution theme, another evening on CAP and one with a health theme when we invited a doctor, a nutritionist and a fitness expert (all of them Christians) to come to tell us about how to keep fit and eat well. People really liked it and they said there was a nice ambience.”*

The church is involved in a Watford Trust for homeless people and in outreach to other groups in the town for people in crisis. *“These are lonely days,”* says Mike, *“and people are longing to belong.”*

Being a welcoming church is a strength and ensuring people feel loved and at home, wherever they are in their lives or in their faith is a priority for the team. *“We don’t always put on overtly evangelistic events but want people to enjoy coming and feel comfortable with us. One lady said recently, ‘Is it ok if I keep coming even though I’m not a believer? I love the community atmosphere.’ I pray that one day she will come to know Jesus, but I’m glad that she wants to come, wants to get to know us and is part of our community.”*

Resources

The church doesn’t have a formal membership and because those who come are mostly young, many don’t have much money to give. *“We don’t make a big deal of giving,”* says Mike but amazingly people give generously (between £50,000 and £60,000 per month).

The church has seen God work in a powerful way, providing funds for extending the ministry through the generosity of the church family. At a recent gift day which focused on funds needed to finish the café, Mike told the church that £115,000 was needed:

“We met together, people offered their gifts and pledges and then the counters told me that people had given £195,000. I asked them to check three times and when I received the final confirmation by phone Andy and I were at the front of church and were so moved we were in tears.”

Staffing

The church is supported by a large staff team – some are full time, some part-time and some are volunteers. Alongside the staff team many of the church family are involved, people who want to serve and contribute to the ministry and mission of the church.

Soul Survivor – the Festivals

For many people, the name “Soul Survivor” is also synonymous with Festivals for young people which have grown out of the same ministry. There are now five different summer venues and each year 30,000 teenagers are welcomed to these events – 8,000 bookings have already been made for this year. Momentum, a similar Festival for “older” young people in their twenties also continues to thrive.

Both the church and Festivals are led by Mike and Andy, but they are two separate Trusts and deliberately so. Mike says: *“We want to maintain total integrity and so ensure that in no way do the festivals subsidise the church’s ministry or vice versa.”*

In practice there is some overlap however as people from the church feel connected to and enjoy the Festivals themselves with many going along to help in various roles.

Mike says: *“Two guys from our church who help regularly now and are key members of the team came to us from a background of homelessness and alcoholism. The church loved them and now they are part of the Festivals. Others from the church community come to cook, steward, pray for people – it is a huge thing for the church.”*

Conclusion

Soul Survivor, Watford is an example of how a focus on young people has led to dramatic growth over more than two decades. As a model it shows how young people who have been engaged from their teens have continued in faith and commitment to serving the church, their community and, in some cases, have gone on to become church leaders.

For further information, please go to www.soulsurvivorwatford.co.uk/#welcome

Developing a Vision for Growth

By Catherine Ellerby, freelance writer, in conversation with the Revd Roy Woodhams, Rector of St Nicholas Church, Cranleigh (Guildford diocese) and Georgie Hendy, Youth and Families Worker

Summary

This case study shows how a large parish church in the middle of a thriving Surrey community in Guildford diocese, is developing its vision to become a community growing in faith, hope and love, with an increasing emphasis on youth and families.

Introduction

St Nicolas Cranleigh is the parish church of “the largest village in England” with a population of around 11,500. Rector, the Revd Roy Woodhams, admits that a number of other villages make the same claim and that in reality Cranleigh is more like a market town and counts itself unique in Guildford diocese.

“The diocese is divided by the M25,” says Roy, “North towards Woking, it’s totally urban sprawl; South of the M25, bordering on to Sussex and Hampshire, it’s quite rural but with some urban population, that’s where we are. In terms of our social profile, many local people work close to home, although some commute to Guildford or Crawley. Many are employed at Heathrow or Gatwick airports and generally there is a low level of unemployment.”

Roy heads up a large team including the Youth and Families worker, a non-stipendiary priest, three licenced lay ministers, two retired clergy, one person on a preaching course, a part time parish administrator, a Director of Music and a Verger.

An early audit of church activities

Roy was appointed as Rector in autumn 2013. His predecessor had retired after 23 years in post and Roy knew that he would be a hard act to follow, describing his predecessor as having “a very charismatic personality” and loved in the church and the community.

“St Nicolas is a big church”, says Roy, “and it was considered to be successful - in many respects, that was true. There were and still are lots of things that the church does well, but I realised that it was time to look at some of the areas which we could do better... [and] address some of the issues which had not been tackled for some years.”

Roy’s first priority was to assess where the church was in order to plan ahead. He carried out his own audit during his first four months in post and presented this to the PCC in February 2014. His report focused on what the church did well, and went on to look at what they needed to think about under each area of church life.

Roy recognised openly that the report “was based on personal opinion, contentious in places” and was also open to challenge. He told the PCC that, if they endorsed the report, he planned to develop it into a Vision document for presentation at the APCM and wider consultation in the parish.

Of all the areas covered in the report, Finance and Young People – the subjects of this case study - stood out as two of the top priorities.

Today, the church’s Vision 2015 – 2019 has since taken shape around some of those early thoughts and many initiatives are beginning to bear fruit.

Addressing the financial challenge

When Roy arrived, there was a big hole financially and so, in order to resource other initiatives ahead, this was a priority:

“People hadn’t been asked to increase their giving for years so giving was well below what it could be. A number of things have helped encourage people to give including a conscious decision to include the parish mission statement in all communications, on-going attention to the planned giving target, encouraging all forms of tax efficient giving and encouragement to church members to include a bequest to church when making wills.”

“We are working through an on-going Time and Talents programme, “My Church, My Time” based on the 1 Corinthians 12 model. Where one is weak in one area, the others will be too.”

Alongside teaching from Roy, church members have been invited to complete a questionnaire to help them consider where they might offer time and talents. He says:

“It’s really important because giving of money and giving of time go hand in hand in resourcing church life. Giving money can sometimes be an excuse for not giving time, or vice versa, so we’re teaching on both aspects, first addressing the financial issue and then moving on to talents.”

In the coming year, the vision is to develop clear role descriptions for those involved in parish life so that everyone knows who is responsible for what.

Facing up to the challenge of an ageing church

The other aspect of church life which was clear to Roy when he arrived was the “statistical time bomb” which existed in respect of the church’s age profile. St Nicholas had been a lively but ageing congregation which had seen relatively little growth in families and children over the previous 15 years. His predecessor had taken some steps to address this but it now needed to be a top priority. Roy says:

“I upset quite a few people at the beginning trying to help people understand why change was needed, and highlighting the problem we have re our age profile. In one meeting, I challenged the congregation directly, suggesting that large swathes of them wouldn’t be around in 20 years time; that offended some I’m afraid but I needed to make the point that if we didn’t bring in younger people, numbers would decline.”

Addressing the challenge of young people and families

Work to bring young people and families in had begun under the previous Rector and curate who had appointed a full-time Youth and Families Worker, Georgie Hendy.

“This was a brave appointment,” says Roy. “Two years before I came, things had already begun to turn around. As we looked at developing the vision with an emphasis on young people and families we wanted to build on what had been started, firstly to look at and make the most of this vital role...Georgie was working on her own a lot and not many people really knew what she did during the week. Now we are working together which is much better for everyone and more effective in terms of the ministry. Youth and families are a priority for the church.”

Georgie grew up at St Nicolas Church and went right up through the Sunday school before being employed in the role. *“I remember when the Sunday School used to be much bigger” she says, “and there were up to 80 children each week – things were a bit different then as some of these would be dropped off by families and picked up afterwards. From about the year 2000 the number started to decline. When I took up the role, the Sunday school was down to two kids, three teenagers with no older youth group and a toddler group.”*

Working with Georgie, Roy has introduced a number of changes to the pattern of services and to specifically youth-focused ministries and activities.

Adapting the service pattern

On the second and fourth Sundays, the 10am service is a modern/traditional parish Holy Communion with a Sunday school - the children leaving to go out to their classes. The group, Kids of Faith, which is like a discipleship group, is small (normally about 6-10) and made up of children from a small group of very committed families – Roy would love this number to grow. Around 120–125 adults attend this service.

On the first and third Sundays, there is a Family Service which attracts fewer adults (90 – 100) but has seen a significant increase in younger people with up to 40 children attending. Thought is now being given to changing the name from Family Service to something which would sound more inclusive as it is aimed at welcoming and engaging people of all ages.

An evening parish Communion is held on the weeks when there has been a morning Family Service. This congregation is around 40–50 people. On the other weeks, Evensong attracts a slightly smaller group of 20-25.

“On the 5th Sunday,” says Roy, “we have introduced a Praise Service in the evening and are trying to make this a deanery thing, encouraging others in Cranleigh Deanery to come – rather like the minster model. The service is focused on teenagers – we decided that unless we change to a style which will appeal to them, they just won’t come.”

Another initiative which has worked really well and proved popular with local families is a monthly Messy Church¹. The service runs at 4pm on Sunday and has brought together a

¹ www.messychurch.org.uk/

new congregation of between 60–90 people, mostly newcomers along with others from the 10am service.

Roy says that it has been important to recognise that, although everyone is welcome to the Messy Church service, not everyone will choose that style or format of worship. *“It’s not for everyone,”* he says *“one of our most committed families wouldn’t ever go to Messy Church. But for others it’s great and opens up church for people who might not otherwise come to one of the more traditional services.”*

The service follows the pattern of the Eucharist beginning with a welcome, then a time of exploring the passage through arts and crafts or similar activity. There is then a short service of worship followed by a meal.

Apart from representing numerical growth, Messy Church is witnessing spiritual growth in faith and discipleship. Georgie says: *“We have just had our first Messy Church baptism which is really exciting. We offered the family the option of going to the church for the baptism or having it in our hall and they chose to have it in the hall with a paddling pool.”*

A team of around ten people currently run Messy Church including Georgie herself and her mum, Alison who is the diocesan children’s advisor for Guildford diocese. With people becoming increasingly committed to the service and spiritual growth evident, they would like to draw new leaders into the team.

Changing the culture in church

St Nicolas’ vision document states a desire to see younger people involved in every part of church life and to *“Seek to overcome a culture of ‘us and them’ between young and elderly”*. Change is happening in this respect for the good of the whole church community.

“We encourage the children to be involved in the services” says Georgie, *“so that on the weeks where we have Kids of Faith, the children come back into the service and feedback to the adult congregation what they have learned. We’ve found this is really successful and older people enjoy hearing about what the children have done.*

“Children can take on a number of things on family service weeks, e.g. do actions to songs, help with the projector, say prayers or do a reading or our ‘psalm slot’”. It doesn’t matter how old or young they are, if they would like to do it, we’ve even had a four-year old who wanted to read.”

Georgie is running a programme of discipleship groups for younger people, including Ignite, a new group for 10–13 year olds held on Wednesday after school which has so far attracted 9 people and ACTS, a group for 14-18 year olds, which attracts 7-8 people.

“With our teenagers,” she says, *“it is important to make the Gospel relevant for them and that they have time to explore it at their own pace. With our 10-13’s groups they are half church kids and half not, so they are all starting from a different place in their faith but that’s half the fun! We like to do Bible study with them, explaining and exploring but also tackling the issues of being a Christian teenager in this day and age. I don’t think a lot of people realise the amount of stuff teenagers in our churches have to put up with on a daily basis for their faith, to stand up and say you are a Christian is hard. We have a responsibility to our young people to equip them for this, to walk with them, support them and help them to understand their personal relationship with*

God. That is what our groups are about... obviously cake and biscuits are a vital part of this journey.”

At the lower end of the age range, Georgie oversees the St Nicolas’ toddler group which is now thriving and welcoming children and carers from the local community.

Arriving at this point, however, involved some fairly radical changes; one of the first things Georgie did when she took up her role was to close the toddler group which she says was running but not really working: *“It wasn’t really ‘owned’ by the church – it had started as a church group but over a number of years, it had been passed from loyal church members to friends, and then passed on again until the church link was much weaker.”*

Although it seemed strange to close something so soon after she started, Georgie feels it was necessary and easier for her to do as she had been part of the church for a long time.

Getting it up and running again took some effort but numbers have risen from a low of 7-8 families, to around 35 children each week. Previously run by one or two people, now Georgie has built up a team *“Finding volunteers initially was quite hard but we persevered,”* she says *“It’s all about relationship building and there was some “arm-twisting” involved – apart from three loyal helpers, it was a case of “who can we ask?” We went to the Mothers Union, approached mums whose children had started school and anyone else we could think of.”*

Last year saw the introduction of a Bible story slot and one of the team was delighted recently to overhear a little boy ask his mum: *“when it is time for the Bible story?”*

Working with local schools

A large part of Georgie’s work is now focused outwards, going into local schools. She and the rest of the ecumenical Open the Book² team visit the parish’s three schools (C of E, RC and Community schools) weekly.

“I spend a lot of time in schools,” George explains. *“People couldn’t understand why my post had to be full time but now they understand that it’s a big and vital part of my role. Being an ecumenical team is fantastic and a great help in the schools as there is no preference shown to any one church. Each week we act out Bible stories in the assemblies. Any church could do it...and I’d encourage them to look into it.”*

Church Holiday Club

The church’s Holiday Club ran for the second time in 2015 and around 60 children attended.

A third of those who came were from the church; a third from the school and about the remaining third, Georgie says: *“I have absolutely no idea where they came from! It was an incredible experience and volunteer based – people can be slow to get on board but it’s significant that some have become involved having been challenged by the Time and Talents programme.”*

² www.openthebook.net

Engaging with the Community - Looking Outwards

Children and older members of the congregation alike have been involved in a number of events which have brought the two age groups together as well as helping to raise money for charity and engage local people. These have included a joint children's and church choir concert with the local Rotary Club and a Christmas Trees Festival event.

Roy says: *"We're actively looking at a raft of things to bring people into the church. We already hold concerts in the church of all types; as a medieval church it is a great venue and we're looking at how we can make the most of every opportunity to be involved with village events and other activities in keeping with our vision to reach out into the heart of the local community."*

Lessons learned - planning for growth

Asked if he has learned lessons from the experiences of the last two years at St Nicholas church, Roy says that he's realised that *"most of the church congregation don't really know what we're trying to do unless we communicate well – we're trying to do that better for example via the parish magazine or on the PCC Away Day."*

He has also seen some nervousness about change: *"People get very nervous of changing stuff but it's about taking time to answer people's questions and address reservations. It's also about keeping them informed, communicating with them and getting them involved."*

Roy admits that for some of the last two years he has felt on a steep learning curve – in particular he has often had to defend the family services to encourage people to believe that all ages really are welcome.

Conclusion

Roy says: *"Now we have reached this point, the PCC is taking a more strategic direction and taking responsibility for different areas. There is an emphasis on children and young people and increasingly on discipleship and growth."*

By taking an honest look at the church's situation, working with the leadership team and PCC to develop a vision together and by intentionally prioritising youth and families, St Nicolas church, Cranleigh is starting to see growth.

For further information, please go to www.stnicolascranleigh.org.uk/

From Evidence to Action: One Year On

By the staff of the Resource Strategy & Development Unit

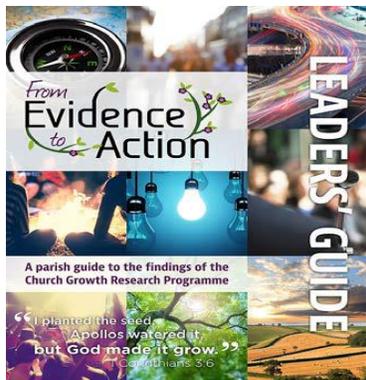
Church Growth – From Evidence to Action

February 2015 saw the launch of From Evidence to Action, a toolkit to help parishes reflect on the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme, published in January 2014 in the summary report *From Anecdote to Evidence*. Since then over 4,000 toolkits have been distributed in response to requests from parishes and diocesan teams (with more copies downloaded from the website). This note re-caps the tool kit's key features and gives examples of how dioceses and parishes have used it.

What does the toolkit aim to do?

The toolkit provides churches and church leaders with accessible summaries of the key research findings and tools to help reflect and act upon those findings. It includes resources and materials to help prompt those seeking to make new disciples of Jesus Christ to consider the factors linked to numerical growth and how they can be applied in their own contexts. It does not claim to provide easy answers, but aids reflection. It is designed to complement other planning tools such as 'Mission Action Planning.'

What does it contain?



The core materials of the toolkit are available in printed form.

They include:

- A guide book for leaders (lay or ordained) explaining ways to use the toolkit.
- Worksheets structured around the key factors linked to growing churches.

These core materials are also available at www.fromevidencetaction.org which also contains the following additional resources which form part of the toolkit:

- Sermon plans and audio files of sermons on church growth and the research findings.
- Bible studies for groups to use alongside the worksheets.
- Case studies of churches in different contexts.
- Less structured worksheets for groups who prefer more flexibility
- Interactive exercises

- Slide presentations and graphs – containing the key findings and figures from the Church Growth Research Programme
- Links to *From Anecdote to Evidence* and the full research reports.
- Suggestions of (and links to) resources to inform and help parishes in applying different aspects of the findings to their own contexts.
- A chance to contribute to the on-going conversation about church growth.

How are the materials structured?

The website and worksheets are structured around eight common factors associated with growth. The research suggested that a growing church is likely to:

- have a clear mission and purpose and clergy and congregations who are intentional about growth;
- understand its context, actively engage with it and with those who might not currently go to church;
- be willing to self-reflect, change and adapt according to its context;
- be welcoming and build on-going relationships with people;
- have lay people as well as ordained clergy active in leadership and other roles;
- actively engage children and young people;
- nurture disciples (encouraging people to explore and deepen their faith and live it out in their daily lives).



How can the toolkit be used?

The toolkit is designed for use by leadership teams, small groups or PCCs. These working materials encourage churches and leaders to:

- **Review** where they are currently;
- **Choose** priorities based on where they would like to be;
- **Plan** what needs to be done next;
- **Act** on those priorities (setting a date when action will be complete and a date to review again).

Each worksheet presents a factor linked with growth and a few key facts from the research relating to that factor. Questions and conversation starters are then suggested to stimulate discussions and provide a framework for prayerful consideration and planning.

Groups can work through all the worksheets one by one or focus on those which are particularly relevant to their context.

Some examples of how the toolkit has been used

Guildford diocese's Parish Development and Evangelism Team, led by the Revd Alan Hulme, has been encouraging parishes to make use of the toolkit. Alan and his team promoted the toolkit (and the wider range of services that his team offers) through a series of roadshows in different parts of the diocese. A number of parishes have been using the toolkit with their PCC's.

Whilst it is too early to measure the toolkit's impact, Alan comments that *'it has been a very helpful tool in focusing parishes on the right issues'*. His team has encouraged parishes to use the toolkit in two ways:

- As a 'tow in the water', an easy way for parishes to begin the process of prayerful strategic planning. This can then lead on to a more full scale vision development process.
- Parishes that are specifically working on their Mission Action Plans on issues relating to those on the cards are encouraged to use the cards for PCC discussion.

The Guildford team are also working on extensions to the tool kit to provide more resources on prayer and to develop the material on working with children and young people. The tool has encouraged parishes to ask Alan's consultancy team for help.

Peterborough diocese are also planning to promote the toolkit as part of a series of roadshows that they are running. The Revd Canon Miles Baker, Director of Mission, describes the tool as *'a wonderful resource for PCCs and Church Leaders...helping us to maintain focus on mission and church growth'*. A section on the toolkit has been included on the diocesan website¹.

¹ www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/mission-shaped-ministry/mission-shaped-ministry

The Priest-in-Charge of Christ Church, Northampton (and Area Dean for Northampton) Canon David Wiseman says that Miles Baker had worked with the PCC on one of the themes in the toolkit: being willing to change and adapt. After the initial meeting focusing on that theme they decided to focus on a different theme at each PCC meeting. At the next meeting, they tackled the theme of creating a welcoming culture. Canon Wiseman commented that *'a few weeks later we had a visit from a Mystery Worshipper writing on the Ship of Fools website and we had put in place one or two ideas from that meeting...the good thing is that [From Evidence to Action] is keeping growth on the PCC agenda. It allows us to take small steps without feeling overwhelmed and it offers the opportunity to review what we have achieved'*.

Another parish exploring the usefulness of the tool is St Luke's, Prittlewell, near Southend in Chelmsford diocese. The parish priest, Fr James McCluskey, says: *'personally I think the report is one of the best aids to action towards Church growth for many years...the strategy is proving a blessing with regards to actively engaging children and young people. We are, it seems, experiencing a growth in attendance of families/single parents bringing their children to church on Sundays. Average attendance of children aged under 16 has gone from 10 to 20-25 per week. This is because we have done some work on self-reflect, change and adapt according to the context of our Anglo-Catholic tradition.'*

We welcome feedback from parishes who have used this tool and additional relevant resources to expand the toolkit. Please contact Isabel.White@churchofengland.org

Finding out more

Copies of From Evidence to Action, a parish guide to the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme, can be obtained from Isabel.White@churchofengland.org

The guidebook and the wider resources can be downloaded from www.fromevidencetoaction.org.uk

The popular summary of the findings from the Church Growth Research Programme – From Anecdote to Evidence www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report

The full research reports are available at www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports

Funding for Mission in New Housing and Other Development Areas: Key Learning Points

By the staff of the Resource Strategy & Development Unit

Introduction

In 2008-10, the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners made £7.25m available to support mission in new housing and other development (e.g. business or retail) areas. The funding was shared between 15 dioceses, of which 14 were allocated £500,000 and one was allocated £200,000.

The aim of the funding was to extend the Church's witness into new areas and to build sustainable Christian communities in those areas. It has mainly been used for pioneer ministers or other outreach posts, for infrastructure projects and to set up mission funds to support parish level mission.

Key learning points are summarised below. These are drawn from seminars, visits to - and reports from - projects, and from an external evaluation¹ of the funding programme.

1. Project Planning

The more information that a diocese can gather about the new developments that are planned, including their likely character and demographics, the more effectively it will be able to plan for mission to them.

Some dioceses facing large-scale new housing developments have **mapped** all the new developments in their area. They have found this research valuable in informing their choices about which new housing developments to focus on and when. Mapping is also helpful for parishes to keep them up to date with what is planned for their area.

Early engagement at parish level allows the diocese to tap into local knowledge, gives churches the opportunity to contribute to and shape the plans - and share their own - and helps achieve local buy-in and support for the plans. It also helps the diocese assess the extent to which local churches are able to support pioneer mission in new housing areas.

2. Engagement with Planners and Developers

Early engagement in the preparation of local planning documents - and cultivating constructive relationships with councillors, planning officers and developers – is crucial if the diocese is to influence new housing developments both in relation to its own aspirations (for example, building a church or school or seeking the provision of a faith space) and to service provision and community facilities. It is sometimes necessary to keep

¹ www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/news/30.

pushing very hard on community facilities: there are several instances of developers renegeing on their undertakings to provide them.

Guidance on the planning process and on engagement with planners prepared by Peter Morgan, New Communities Development Officer at Oxford diocese is at www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Jan_2013/Responding_to_Local_Plan_Making_Consultation.pdf

3. Role of the Local Church

Pioneer work in new housing areas often involves change management in local churches which also need to develop the way in which they work. For many of the projects, the strength of the local church has been a key success factor. Strong active local churches with vibrant congregations have generally been able to help support pioneering work in new housing developments.

Where a new housing development is reasonably small, a vibrant local church may be able to undertake mission to the area on its own, perhaps with some additional support from the diocese. In larger developments, the local church may be able to assist with a specific pioneer project, e.g. by providing line management for a post-holder, administrative support, or by congregation members forming a team to support the project.

Peterborough diocese has developed a tool for assessing proposals from churches for new housing projects:

www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/July_2014/05_Peterborough.pdf

4. Timing

There is no “one size fits all” model of Church for mission in new housing areas. The research undertaken at the project planning stage will help to identify the best model, for example, a church plant, a pioneer minister, a schools or families and children’s worker, or an extension of the ministry of an existing church.

Whatever the model, the key is to get the mission work going very early on in the life of the new development – preferably at the beginning. Project workers commonly speak of the ‘window of opportunity’ that exists in the early days of a new development. At that stage, people are at their most open to being visited and to being invited to be involved in the emerging life of the community.

5. Intentionality

There are indications that ministry in new housing areas is most effective when it combines a focus on community engagement with intentionality about mission from the beginning.

6. Pioneer Ministers

The Council’s and Commissioners’ funding for new housing areas is supporting several pioneer ministers. Learning points include:

Recruitment

It can be difficult to recruit to pioneer ministry posts in new housing areas but it is crucial to take time to get the appointment right. Rushing to fill a post has on occasion led to appointing the wrong person, with negative consequences for the project and post-holder.

Posts can be lay or ordained and can be drawn from another denomination.

The job description should include milestones, clear outcomes and timescales.

Length of appointment

It generally takes a considerable amount of time for a pioneer minister to establish a worshipping community in a new housing area. Three or even five years is not usually sufficient: it is more realistic to plan for seven or even ten years.

Support

An important part of the preparatory work for pioneer ministry in a new housing area is to invest time and resources in putting in place a team to support him/her from day one. Placing pioneer ministers on their own in new housing developments does not work well. It can lead to their initial energy and time being channelled into creating a team to support them – which can take an inordinately long time – at the expense of effective mission to the community they serve.

Other support should include

- a clear reporting structure
- mentoring
- providing somewhere safe for pioneers to express their concerns and struggles
- regular reviews of the 'starting' outcomes and flexibility to change them as needed
- HR support from the diocese

Location

A pioneer's ministry is most effective when s/he lives on the development to which s/he ministers. Ideally, s/he will be amongst the first to move on to the development.

Sustainability

Sustainability should be built in to pioneer ministry from the beginning, otherwise there is a danger that the work will simply fizzle out when the pioneer post comes to an end. Pioneers themselves should be encouraged to have an early focus on sustainability, both in terms of finance and people.

Funding can be stretched further by using part-time pioneers (many new housing developments have a young demographic and, with residents at work or school during the day, the focus of pioneer ministry is often on the evenings and at weekends), house for duty, or volunteer workers.

7. Buildings

Projects have mostly found that having a space where a worshipping community can meet is important.

Community halls and schools have been found to work well as venues that are inexpensive compared to the cost of a new church building and they provide links to dechurched and non-churched people. Clarity is needed in relation to, for example, insurance, key holders, access and storage space and on health and safety and safeguarding issues.

8. Partnership working

It is essential that those who are responsible for leading mission in new housing areas are skilled at – and enjoy – working with a wide variety of people and organisations because partnership working is key to effective mission in new housing areas. All the projects have engaged in partnership working with other churches and denominations and/or the public and private sectors and/or local trusts and charities.

Some denominations which may not be part of traditional ecumenical groupings (e.g. New Frontiers and Hope Church) are keen to be involved in mission in new housing areas.

Churches Together in England runs a new housing network which meets regularly and makes resources available.

www.cte.org.uk/Groups/44993/Home/Resources/New_Housing_Areas/New_Housing_Areas.aspx

9. Diocesan input

Planning for, executing and overseeing projects in new housing areas can demand substantial amounts of diocesan time. The work needs to be resourced properly at diocesan level if it is to be carried out effectively.

10. Outcomes and Monitoring

To keep the focus on what needs to be done, identify what outcomes (i.e. the changes, impacts, benefits or any effects that take place because of the mission work) the project should, realistically, seek to achieve in the short, medium and long term.

Information that will help to check progress towards achieving outcomes should be collected routinely and systematically from the beginning. Identify the outcome indicators (which describe the progress towards achieving an outcome) and think about how often they will be monitored. There should be a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Information might be gathered using, for example, attendance at worship data, numbers being baptised, giving figures, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and diaries.

Ensure that reporting mechanisms work well so that lessons from the project are learned and that there is flexibility to refine the outcomes as necessary in the light of the learning.

Further information

For more information, please contact catherine.dorman@churchofengland.org