



ANGLICAN FUTURES

THINKING TOGETHER

YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK: BEYOND BABYSITTING

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Gafcon UK provides hope and a home to all who affirm the 2008 Jerusalem Declaration.

Anglican Futures is one way in which we equip faithful Anglicans by encouraging us all to:

- Think Ahead (in the light of today's evidence)
- Think Afresh (in the light of eternal truth)

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Youth and Children’s Work: Beyond Babysitting

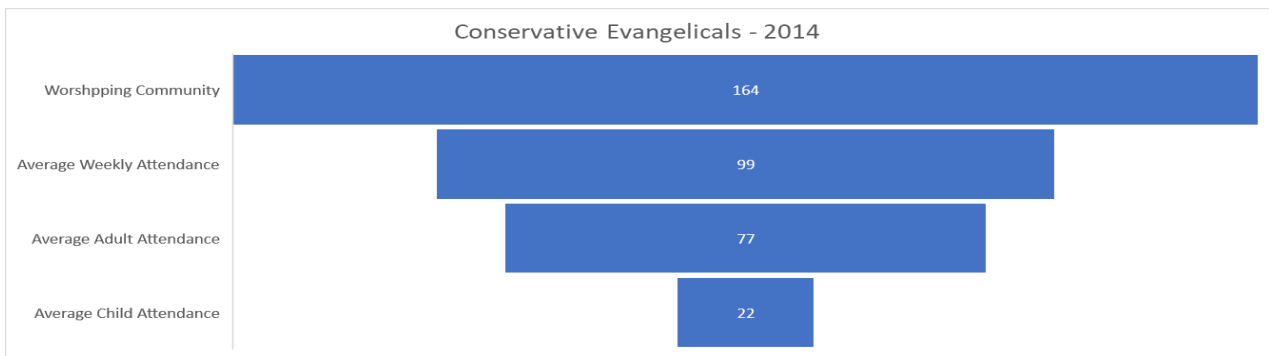
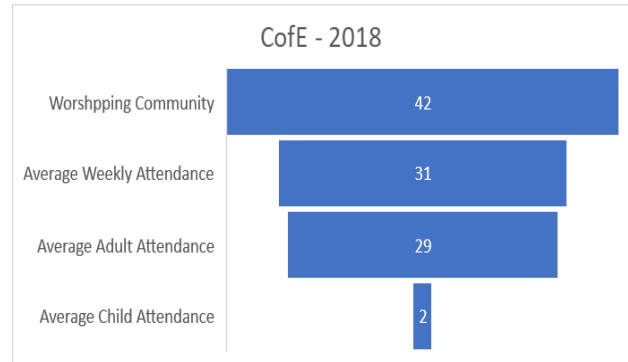
1. Learning from the Experts - Where to Start?

A Few Facts

In 2018, only 2 children (under 16) attended the average Church of England church.

Things were a bit better in larger churches—with churches that fall in the top 25% of AWA averaging 11 children in the largest 5% an average of 35.

In comparison, research I did in 2014 among conservative evangelical churches showed a funnel something like this:



The evangelical churches were larger overall, had a proportionately bigger ‘fringe’ who had a connection with the church but did not attend every week and proportionately more children. This is encouraging.

Yet, data collected by the Australian National Church Life Survey¹ and quoted by Rev Craig Roberts during our online discussion, suggests that:

- 80% of adults attending church today made a decision to follow Jesus before they were 18.
- 40% of young people in church today, will have given up on Jesus before they leave home.

If these statistics were true of the average conservative evangelical church in the UK - the current cohort of children (0-16) would produce 17 adult believers. If we multiply that generation by 4 (to compare with the adult statistics above) there would be 68 adults attending church in the future.

Obviously this figure has all kinds of built in assumptions (including the view that only children who attend church make a commitment to follow Jesus before they are 18) but it doesn’t bode well if even the healthiest, biblically based churches are likely to decline in future.

So, what do we need to do?

¹ <http://ncls.org.au/research/>



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2. Learning from the Experts - Where to Aim?



It was great to welcome Rev Craig Roberts, the leader of the Gafcon Youth and Children's Ministry Network¹ and the CEO of Youthworks (the Anglican Diocese of Sydney's Youth and Education Department)² to our Anglican Futures event.

We asked him a few questions:

What should we be doing?

First up, if you aim at nothing you are sure to hit it - so let's find a worthy goal, a worthy aim. One that's informed by Scripture and driven by the Gospel and one that I had when I was the rector of a church in Sydney - it was to -

Raise up the next generation of mature, lifelong, disciple-making disciples of Jesus.

How do we start?

It starts by examining our assumptions, about youth and children.

Do we see them as Christians in waiting - so do we see Sunday school and youth and children's work as babysitting?

.. or do we see our youth and children's ministry as age appropriate church - where young people can come to make an informed, all of life, head and heart decision to go all in on Jesus?

[...more in Section 3]

How would we avoid the spiritual 'kill-zone' of adolescence?

Research³ suggests there are three things that can turn the 'kill-zone' of adolescence into a season of growth, of spiritual flourishing and maturity - and the three things are:

- A young person has 5 non-parental role models
- A safe place to express their doubts
- Opportunities to serve

[...more in Sections 4-6]

If parents have the primary role of discipling their children - how can we support them?

"Great question - being a parent is a tough gig, it is hard work... it's like chaos on wheels some days in the Roberts' household, so we need to make sure we are supporting the parents, giving them the resources they need..."

[...more in Section 7]

¹ <https://www.gafcon.org/networks/youth-and-childrens-ministry> ² <https://youthworks.net/>

³ Sticky Faith Project - <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith/leaders>



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3. Back to Basics: Examining our Assumptions

We can't think about youth and children's work in a vacuum - so one place to start would be to take some time to think about the following questions with your PCC or church leadership team.

1. How do we view church?

We know that church is not just the building and not just for Sunday. We know that church is the gathering of God's people - a family of broken divine-image-bearers brought together by the saving love of Jesus to encourage one another and show something of His redemptive love to a watching world.

But do we act like that? We may not all wear our "Sunday Best" - but do we put on our "Sunday Smiles" ? Do we head to church on a Sunday longing for our children to behave, our teenagers to be seen to be following Jesus and hoping that the other folk won't see the reality of our own failures and foibles? Is church the place where we are most ourselves - open about our need of grace and thankful for those God has placed alongside us as we serve him together?

2. How do we view the children and young people God has given us?

Similarly, in theory we recognise that the children and young people are a vital part of today's church not just "Christians-in-waiting." We understand that they are potential disciples of Christ - who, whether they are five or fifteen - need to wrestle with what it means to serve and live life in all it's fullness.

But, does the way we treat them suggest otherwise? Is there a danger that we think of Sunday School or Youth Groups as a form of babysitting - somewhere to keep the kids happy while the adults get on with the serious job of doing church together? Whose needs are prioritised when we segregate children and young people? In our desire to avoid young people being 'put off' church, do we unwittingly encourage our children to become church-consumers?

3. What do we think the church should be doing for our children and young people?

Perhaps these assumptions come to the fore when we are asked to describe what our church offers (or doesn't offer) for children and young people. Do we talk about the number of Sunday school groups, the work of the toddler group or the youth group weekend away?

Or, do we talk about the nature of the church family? The support given to parents as they seek to bring up their children to know the Lord? The work that is done amongst the men - to equip them to love their wives and take spiritual responsibility for their families? The efforts made to get to know the families of young people who come from non-Christian homes? The opportunities our children and young people are given to develop their gifts through self-sacrificial service of others? Do we recognise that it takes a church - a family of families - to raise a child?

Listen to Ed Drew interviewed by Glen Scrivener and Paul Feeseey

<https://speaklife.org.uk/2020/06/29/slp313/>



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4. Intergenerational Relationships: Five Non-Parental Role Models

For many at the Anglican Futures events the idea that children and young people should have five non-parental role models in their life raised all kinds of alarm bells:

- How can we recruit that many leaders into our programmes - we struggle to safely staff Sunday School as it is?
- Imagine the database needed to keep track of that!
- What about safe-guarding - would everyone need a CRB check?

This response was not surprising - for decades we have worked hard at providing relevant, age-appropriate groups for our children and young people - and there are powerful and important reasons for gathering according to age and stage. However, as Ed Springer, of Youthworks, writes, *"our narrow focus on these siloed programs has resulted in us neglecting the benefits and essential need of the wider church in growing the next generation.....intergenerational ministry is difficult to define because it is a philosophy of ministry rather than a program. Its goal is to strategically build significant and purposeful interactions between the generations within the structures of a church."*

So as we talked we recognised that it wasn't that we needed to stop age-appropriate work - but that we needed to change the culture of the church so that intergenerational relationships were the norm (and that included older adults with younger adults).

Here are two great articles to get you thinking:

Ed Springer: An Introduction to Intergenerational Ministry

"The key components of intergenerational ministry are interaction and intentionality. Intergenerational ministry is more than bringing the generations into proximity with one another. It is intentionally building mutual and influential relationships with a degree of regularity between the various generations. "

<https://youthworks.net/articles/an-introduction-to-intergenerational-ministry>

Ed Springer: Understanding Intergenerational Ministry

"Why consider intergenerational ministry? Our young people need it. They need to know they belong to the Body of Christ, not just to their generational community. They need a network of caring believers who pray for, mentor and share their lives with the next generation. They need the stories and experiences of other generations to put flesh on their faith."

<https://youthworks.net/articles/understanding-intergenerational-ministry>



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4. Intergenerational Relationships: Five Non-Parental Role Models (continued)

Here are some of the ways that the participants in Anglican Futures could see these kinds of relationships developing in their churches

- 1) Recognise that there is a difference between mentoring a young person and being a role-model - not all role-models will meet one-to-one or read the bible or pray with the young person - they may just take an interest in them and 'model' the Christian life in a way that offers a different perspective.
 - Recognise that role-models may be 'big brothers/ sisters' or 'aunts/uncles' or 'grandparents' - it's not a case of one-size fits all! Godparents, camp leaders, parents' friends etc may already be offering this kind of relationship for many young people. They may be a young single friend, or empty nesters, or a widow/ widower or a family with similar aged children - the idea is to encourage the adults to model sharing life together, enabling open, honest relationships to develop.
- 2) Encourage parents to intentionally help their children develop relationships with other adults
 - by including them in family time; meals, activities, holidays.
 - by suggesting they speak to a particular adult at church about a particular question they might have.
- 3) Encourage one-off visits from adults to the youth group - people could share something of how they came to faith, or that God has been teaching them -through a particular experience - illness, or grief, or success or failure at work - through service or study.
- 4) Recognising the opportunities that serving alongside one another offers - sitting at the sound desk, serving the coffee, cooking a meal, playing music, singing, working parties on the church - can all help develop healthy relationships between adults and young people.
- 5) Recognising the opportunities that playing together offers - this comes naturally when children are very young—but is there a way to encourage 'play' after the service for older children/young adults? Is there somewhere to kick a ball around or a place for a table-tennis table or a play station?

SAFEGUARDING - Encouraging a culture of intergenerational relationships should create a safer church - as children and young people would have a web of trusted adults to speak to about anything that concerned them. However it also means the church needs to have clear guidelines for all interaction between adults and young people so that no one is put at risk.



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5. A Safe Place to Express Doubts

We all need to be able to explore our doubts and recognise it is OK to ask questions and wrestle with God. We know that the answers that satisfied a five year old may not satisfy a fifteen year old or fifty year old - but how good are we at wrestling with the tough stuff?

Brad Griffin (Fuller Youth Institute) writes:

"In our research with young people across the past decade, we have become more and more convinced that it's not doubt that is squelching young people's faith. It's not spiritual struggle that drives them away from church. It's not questions that distance them from God.

It's silence.

It's well-meaning adults who shut down hard questions about God.

It's protective parents who shield teenagers from conversations that feel too hard to navigate.

It's ministry leaders who think they have to have it "all together" to be qualified to disciple teenagers who want to follow Jesus."¹

As we discussed this in break out groups there was an acknowledgement that for many of our churches this would also involve a culture change.

Young people are taught very different values at school and by the media - they live in a world of multiple gender-identities; with friends who are transitioning or coming out as gay; where social justice matters; where Christians are seen as hypocrites and Christian values are considered evil rather than old-fashioned.

These questions matter - and need to be taken seriously - and answering them may take months rather than minutes.

- Can we start by admitting we all have questions? That it is alright to say, "I don't know - I'll try and find out."
- Hot potato questions are often tackled in one-off sermons or seminars - which can be very helpful - but hard if at the end of the seminar you have more questions than you started with and you have been given the impression that the seminar should have 'fixed it.' How do we keep the conversation going?
- Can we tackle these questions together - can we model discipleship to our teenagers by planning a series and learning with them and possibly from them?
- The Good Book Company offer a series of short books - Questions Christians Ask² and Fuller Youth Institute offer a curriculum called Can I Ask That? ³These may offer a starting place for open discussion about difficult questions.

¹ <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/why-doubt> ²<https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/series/questions-christians-ask/>

³ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Can-Ask-That-Questions-Curriculum/dp/0991488008/>



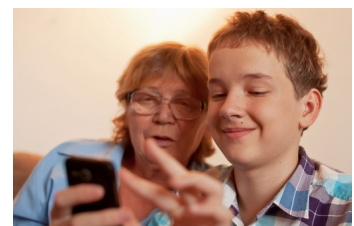
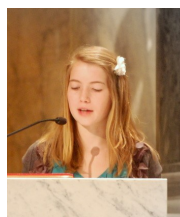
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6. Opportunities to Serve

If we view children and young people as Christians in waiting we may also suggest they are servants in waiting. But as we have already seen serving together can really help build intergenerational relationships and encouraging children and young people to serve can help them to feel a valued part of the church family as they transition from being a 'child' to an 'adult'. HTB have apparently worked on the principle that youth either lead or leave for years.

The opportunities for service will be as broad as the gifts God has given the children and young people in your church family.

- It can start young - one church has fallen into the habit of sharing their donuts with the local ferrymen after the service - the three to five year olds see this as their job each week - aided by two appropriate adults.
- It can be part of the Sunday school curriculum - we heard of children decorating cupcakes or other 'treats' during Sunday school and sharing them with the adults afterwards.
- It can be part of everyday life - children helping with 'welcoming' alongside their parents or another safe adult (depending on age of child) or children helping to 'order' or 'pack-up' the church after the service.
- It can teach new skills (including sharing their own skills with others) - young people can be involved in every area of church life, learning alongside adults and even helping them - how many older people would appreciate an introduction to their new mobile phone/ TV/ I-pad by one of the younger members of the church?



As young people get older they can be encouraged to think about the gifts God has given them and how they might best serve the church with them - Youthworks in Sydney run a three-year program based around a summer camp called Leaders in Training¹ - where they partner with churches to develop the gifts of young people aged 14-18. Would something like that work in the UK?

¹ <https://youthworks.net/lit>



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7. Supporting Parents as the Primary Carers

The BCP Marriage Service reflects the biblical mandate that places the primary responsibility for the spiritual well being of children in the hands of their parents. Marriage it says was, *"First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name."*

Churches need to honour this responsibility and support parents in their duty rather than take on this responsibility themselves. Children's work and youth work is most effective when done in partnership with parents.

Encouraging Parents to be Part of the Church Community

It is tempting to shape our church services around attracting children - but the research shows again and again that in the long term shaping our churches ministry around attracting parents - and particularly fathers - is more important.

One of the best forms of support for parents will be honest relationships with other adults - who have been there and done that and can offer wisdom or who can just offer a helping hand.

Establish Good Communication Channels with Parents

Regular emails, a WhatsApp group and other social media contact can be useful - but nothing beats face to face contact (or Zoom meetings if necessary) or a phone call.

- Let them know what the children and young people have been doing or talking about - this will empower Christian parents and reassure non-Christian parents that you are not doing things in secret.
- Tell them how encouraged you are by their children's contribution - parents love to hear the positives.
- Don't assume parents are aware of the safeguarding guidelines you have in place - it's worth pointing to these on a regular basis.
- Ask parents if there is anything you can be praying for the family

Empower Parents to Read the Bible and Pray with their Children

- Don't assume they know how to do this - start small. Here are just a few resources.
 - Faith in Kids are running a training day 21st July¹
 - 555 Five minutes a day, Five Days a Week, For Five Weeks²
 - Devotional Dippers - a theme, a bible reference, a question and a prayer³
 - Prayer Cards for early readers and better readers⁴
 - Video - Mark's Gospel⁵ and Faith in Kids You Tube Channel⁶

(Resources on the final page)



Youth and Children’s Work

8. Where Do We Go Next: Planning for the Future

Anglican Futures is all about thinking proactively and thinking about how you would like your church to look in two or five years time.

We are aware we need to think more about the long term future of youth and children’s work in our churches and we are likely to have further events on these topics. But why not start by sitting down as a church leadership team (not just the youth and children’s team) and begin the process of transformation:

- 1) Think about your assumptions about church - suggest people listen to the Ed Drew interview or read Ed Springer’s articles on Intergenerational Ministry in preparation.
- 2) Consider **whether** you think intergenerational ministry would benefit your church family.
- 3) Consider how you would need to change to become more intergenerational as a church.
 - ⇒ Begin with an audit - what is happening in your church today?
 - ⇒ Then take the same table and ask - what would you like to see in two/five years time?
 Don’t be afraid to think big - and then break it the change down in to manageable tasks.

| Age | How does this age bless our church family? | Support for parents of children of this age | Encouraging relationships with other adults | Enabling them to express their doubts | Enabling them to serve the church family | Any safe-guarding alarm bells |
|-------|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 0-3 | | | | | | |
| 4-6 | | | | | | |
| 7-10 | | | | | | |
| 11-14 | | | | | | |
| 14-18 | | | | | | |
| 18-25 | | | | | | |

- 4) How might you teach the church family to explain why you are making changes? Application of sermons? Specific teaching?
- 5) Identify 6 practical changes that would help your ministry amongst children and young people - and introduce one each term for the next two years - this will allow each one time to embed before you start the next thing.



Footnotes and Resources

Some Resources To Help Equip Parents

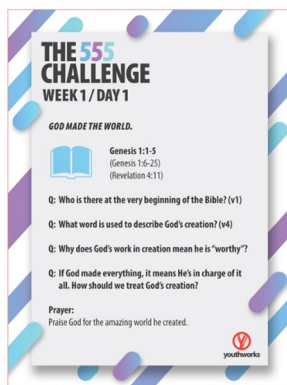
¹ Faith in Kids webinar 21st July

<https://faithinkidsevents.yapsody.com/event/index/576626/bdo-encouraging-parents>

² The 555 Challenge <https://youthworks.net/555> (free to download)

³ Devotional Dippers <https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/24362/devotional-dippers-3-pack>

⁴ Kids Prayer Cards <https://youthworks.net/kidspray> (free to download)



Early reader prayer cards



⁵ Video of Mark's Gospel in www.epicstory.net/

16 short videos - Epic Story [http://](http://www.epicstory.net/)

⁶ Faith in Kids YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjsrpzbSmvdxflD0emk88Yw>

The 7 Principles of Effective Youth Ministry

Craig Roberts also shared with a resource that Youthworks has created - it can be downloaded for Aus\$ 19.99 from their website (about £15). The cost allows them to distribute free copies in Swahili, Kurundi and French for use in Africa. The seven principles are:

1. Teach young people God's word through relational discipleship
2. Equip parents to disciple their children in partnership with the church
3. Integrate young people into the household of God
4. See young people coming to genuine faith in Christ
5. Effectively train leaders for gospel ministry to young people
6. Invest in spiritually and emotionally healthy youth ministry workers who lead with intent
7. Collaborate with other churches in effective ministry to young people

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"Outside the Box: Church Without Walls."

There is no doubt that necessity created by Covid-19 has given birth to all sorts of inventions - drive-in churches, outside broadcasts, and the purchase of many a gazebo - but are these just fads? Or do we need to plan to get outside the box even when we no longer need to wear a mask?

We'd Love You to Join the Discussion

Wednesday 22nd July 10:30am

Wednesday 22nd July 7.45pm

Friday 24th July 10.30am

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/gafcon-uk-18387367857>

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