

Children and Young People Framework



A Shared Journey

A Vision and Principles for Ministry with Children and Young People

*We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we're liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.*

Extract from 'Our Deepest Fear', Marianne Williamson

1. Changed Lives, Changing Lives

Throughout the Bible there is an undeniable sense of connection and interaction between generations as faith communities are gathered together; communities creating space and opportunity for the whole people of God to worship together and learn from each other, reaping the blessings of discovering the richness of faith as it is passed from generation to generation.

So how might we continue to see children, young people and households coming to faith, growing in discipleship and contributing confidently to the Kingdom of God?

By declaring a bold **vision**:

'To ensure that every child and young person in the Diocese is at the heart of mission, having the opportunity of a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ; that they reach their God-given potential and are an integral part of church life.'

...underpinned by a challenging **question**:

What if ... we experienced a culture change within the diocese - a renewal of hearts and minds such that it became second nature to see every decision through the lens of what it means for children and young people?

2. Principles

We believe that such a cultural shift is possible where:

- Children and young people are at the heart of all dialogue that promotes discipleship, evangelism, mission and leadership
- Value is placed on the goodness and diversity of all individuals and their God-given gifting
- We prioritise lifelong formation that leads to individual transformation
- Parishes create expressions of church where children and young people are equal partners with adults in the life of the church; their witness and voice is heard and they are actively involved, growing spiritually and knowing belonging and significance
- Congregations (including lay and ordained leaders, grandparents, Godparents and other laity) nurture and support the faith of children and young people
- Households (especially parents) see the imperative of the story of our faith, and become articulate and confident in sharing and nurturing faith
- We support flourishing Church of England schools which are authentically Christian and encourage spiritual development, growth in discipleship, and provide a rich experience and understanding of Christianity

3. Themes

These principles are illustrated through four permeating themes: Seeing the Child, The Child as Fellow Pilgrim, The Community with the Child and The Learning Child, through which strategy and priorities can emerge which reflect and complement the ambition and vision of 'Growing Faith'¹.

¹ General Synod GS 2121 (2019) Growing Faith: Churches, Schools and Households

3.1 Seeing the Child

People often speak of a ‘vocation to teaching’, a ‘vocation to youth ministry’ or other variations on this theme – then when this statement is unpacked they reveal a deep-seated passion not for the activity or work itself, but the children and young people they seek to serve. They ‘see’ the child or young person and use language of inspiration, transformation, of making a difference. All too frequently, however, this can be obscured by pressure on outcomes and gains - more children in church, higher assessment or examination results – or overlooked in favour of set programmes and inflexible methodologies.

Yet the life and message of Jesus Christ resonated with acceptance, welcome and inclusion and the creative breath of God, or life-giving Spirit, gives permission for innumerable possibilities.

The Gospel brings blessing to all; young and old, adherents and non-adherents alike.

So, we advocate a ministry with children and young people that imagines homes, churches and schools as places of community in which people get the distinct sense that God loves them. We ask questions about how we ‘see’ children and young people and bring them to the heart of our conversations, our culture, and our service; how we accompany them in pilgrimage, discipleship and spirituality.

We believe that all human beings are made in the image of God and are precious and valued in God’s sight. Each one possesses God-given gifts which, as they are nurtured, are revealed to others. The Church’s task, wherever it is engaged with children and young people, is to accompany them, to equip them in asking questions in a complex world, to encourage values of openmindedness and an exploration of truth. Furthermore, we should model healthy, holistic relationships and bring people to a place of relationship with God and one another.

We hold dearly the idea of formation as lifelong and not always continuous, valuing each individual as they present in the ‘now’, with openness to possibilities and opportunities to grow a servant identity. Children in particular should feel loved and hopeful about making a difference; their experience being underpinned by encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ and with others.

3.2 The Child as Fellow Pilgrim

Children are not a means to an end – a consumer being prepared for wealth production, or a line of data on a school’s assessment record, or a marketing tool to attract adults into faith-based activities and events at church. Rather, we must find a real passion to see children and young people become equal and integral members of our community and worshipping life, embracing whatever changes such a shift in culture might demand of us.

In a church context, seeing the child as a *Fellow Pilgrim* requires a change in both culture and language. We engage in ministry *with* them, not to them – because they are the church of *today*, not tomorrow. To ‘see the child’ advocates models of ministry that prioritise intentional discipleship over programmes of teaching, and encourages multi-generational worship that is inclusive and accessible and where children are welcomed unconditionally.

Children's Spirituality

These *Fellow Pilgrims* have an innate spirituality that is too often missed at home, in school and in church, so their description and sense of 'the other' can remain unheard. Perhaps rediscovering our own spirituality is key to recognising and encouraging it in the children and young people we serve; knowing how to value being still and silent, embracing patience, having a feeling for the awesome wonder of life and comprehending the reality of other people's needs.

As we ourselves discover what is life-giving, our ideas and aspirations for children's spiritual health will increase; and if we see children and young people as equal disciples, we understand that they can enhance our spiritual journey as much as we can enhance theirs. An encounter together may reveal the divine beyond our experience, or draw us towards the divine, where each may flourish in Christ.

3.3 The Community with the Child

'The community both forms and protects its members - forming them in communal sensitivity and protecting them from other people's insensitivity'²

We are all called to care and tend so that all can flourish. Formation and discipleship take place within safe spaces, where individuals' needs and differences are valued; so the school, church or family community should be a place of love, of building peace in relationships, of sanctuary. It will offer children and young people both formation and protection; moreover, you can tell the strength of a community by the way it treats those who are most vulnerable.

The community with the child offers them a space to tell their story and is a place of self-expression; it encourages individuality in the sense of their bringing a particular contribution to bear on the community's life. It also focuses on possibilities; communities grow in service together, valuing all equally in that process of lifelong formation.

3.4 The Learning Child

Children thrive in a space for learning in which they listen and ask questions; the process of learning is exploratory, not the passive transmission of a canon of knowledge. In this space each should find a sense of belonging, a thirst and aspiration for discovering the 'what else' and their unique God-given gifting. This inwardly formed learning must also be rooted in the words and example of Jesus.

4. Growing Faith

The 'Growing Faith' vision is rooted in significant culture change: the challenge to ask the question constantly, 'What does this mean for our children and young people?' It is focused on building strong relationships, encouraging growth in the intersections between the spheres of church, school and home. We endorse this wholeheartedly, aiming to be an agent of sharing good resources and projects for ministry, networking between the three spheres as well as reaching to the edges and removing any barriers to fruitful ministry and evangelism.

² Abbot Christopher Jamison (2010), *Finding Sanctuary*

4.1 Growing Faith in Churches

Growing Faith in churches requires a commitment to the idea of **Whole Church**, which expresses the notion of a shared journey and is distinguished by two characteristics: recognising all ages as Fellow Pilgrims and working intentionally towards becoming intergenerational communities that enable individual transformation.

We recognise that an individual encounter with God is the start of the faith formation process, then telling the story of that encounter is the next step. A *Whole Church* approach means that stories are shared and reflected across generations, encouraging mutual learning and discovery. Children are viewed as equals, so grown-ups are just as likely to learn about God through them – enabling the community to grow in discipleship and faith together.

A commitment to *Whole Church* demands *Equality* and *Inclusion*

- Children and Young people are treated as *equal* members of the Church, participating in its life, leadership and decision-making
- Children and young people are *included*: they are part of the whole church family rather than being artificially separated. An intergenerational approach has been highlighted as being important in the growth of faith (*Rooted in the Church, Church of England Education Office 2016*)
- Those who minister with children and young people are valued *equally* and receive relevant, high-quality training and development - their role is viewed as a sacred vocation and a potential bridge between generations

Finally, *every* member of a congregation should recognise the part they play in how children and young people understand life as a Christian - and be equipped to become confident in sharing their own faith.

4.2 Growing Faith in Schools

All schools, regardless of status, can and must be places that embody compassionate hospitality, diversity, creativity and joy, in which children and young people know their ultimate worth and recognise this in others. In Canterbury Diocese we continue to believe that schools remain at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation, the heart of local communities, for children of all faiths and none. Our church schools promote and exemplify distinctively Christian communities of learning that seek to be underpinned by values sourced in the Gospel narrative, enriching the whole educational experience.

We hope that in these schools, children will encounter a real experience of God's love for all humanity and receive affirmation that they are a beloved child of God - a spiritual, embodied being with all the grandeur and wonder that entails. Church schools should be communities of nurture, where learning is lifelong, and children learn to be centred and held in the Christian tradition.

We commend and celebrate The Church of England Vision for Education, '*Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*' as a 'fresh articulation' of a vision for education, its narrative permeated with such an ambition of human flourishing. Underpinned by a theological rationale, it affirms how schools can be signs and expressions of the fullness of life, through an approach founded on four interrelated elements - *Educating for Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills; Educating for Hope and Aspiration; Educating for Community and Living Well Together; Educating for Dignity and Respect.*

4.3 Growing Faith in Households

Foundations for faith are often laid in childhood, so a focus on how clergy and lay ministers support and advise parents, Godparents and grandparents is essential. Christian families do not always find it easy to model living and sharing faith together, perhaps lacking confidence in developing a rule of life or patterns of prayer, or using music and digital resources for faith formation.

Our aspiration is that all Anglican parents become actively engaged in this responsibility; resourced through local training as well as signposting to national online resources promoting nurture and discipleship.

5. A final thought

By placing children and young people at the heart of our narrative, discipleship and mission responsibilities, through a transforming relationship between church, school and home, we will undoubtedly share the experience and understanding together of drawing deeply on the unfolding journey of the people of God.

*This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.*

Extract from A Future Not Our Own (also known as 'The Long View'), Archbishop Oscar Romero