

How can a Diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith approach to best realise a vision to make Jesus known, recognising the unique opportunity that sits at the interface between church, school, and household to achieve this with younger generations?

Introduction

Since 2009 there has been a 66% decrease in the number of young people actively involved in their local church across Salisbury Diocese, ie 1200 children. The absence of young people in our churches is even more stark when over 43,000 young people attend a CoE School. It is a pattern repeated in many Dioceses across the country.

Since 2019 Growing Faith, work at the interface between Church, School and household has been recognised as the nexus of energy to enable mission and ministry with children and young people, in a context where the Church of England aims to become 'younger and more diverse'.

In parallel with this has come the development of the vision for church school flourishing and the advent of academy trusts which has given us new possibilities for schools, Church and wider community.

This research is a unique opportunity to draw on the research of others in the field, including the Growing Faith Foundation and other Diocese to ensure we best enable courageous Christian leadership which creates opportunities for children and young people to flourish and explore faith.



Photos: Neil Turner, Lambeth Palace

Methodology

1. Structured interviews with 51 participants: of whom there 26 local practitioners, 15 church leaders, 11 school leaders and 25 Diocesan advisers or leading practitioners from across the country
2. Analysis revealed key themes that were explored further with four focus groups of local and national advisers and practitioners, including young people.

Key findings and analysis

A Diocese can best creatively and strategically utilise the Growing Faith approach through:

Creative, aspirational, innovative leadership

Shared leadership between church and school which is truly joint. Many of the models being developed are church centric in working if not intentionality.

Young people's voice and leadership is key as convenor and catalyst drawing in increased numbers of volunteers and potentially impacting discipleship across the generations, though many locations recognise they are not yet prioritising this.

Recruitment, induction, training. This pipeline needs to build partnership and collaboration, then enhance it through induction and joint training in both sectors.

Recruit to meet shared vision in both sectors. Schools/trusts and church teams both need leaders who understand Church, faith development and the depth of church school flourishing.

Local Capacity. This is a barrier but the web of factors around Growing Faith work also contains potential solutions.

Strategically establishing practice

Grow from the church school – where church and school teams have built their collaborative work on aspects of strong church school flourishing, the success is greater.

Building a team of 'specialists' who are centrally employed and locally deployed is a key pattern in success, including people for whom this is THE priority in their role.

Faith into action To engage successfully with young people and their diverse communities the church needs to attend to issues and questions young people have, led by young people to change their communities around issues of equity, diversity and social justice.

A 'mission plan' underpins the most successful work.

Volunteer capacity the voice and leadership of young people draws in significantly increased numbers of volunteers.

Collaboration across school and home

- **Belonging** – developing belonging is fundamental to success both for children and families, church schools are already an established base for this.
- **The creation of safe spaces** for spiritual growth is not new thinking, but recognising schools as those spaces is a helpful step.
- **Home and parents** What has been evidenced is the possibility of empowering children to lead their families in their faith journey and the need to better understand the impact of their parents' perspective on faith when they were young people themselves.

Intent to transform culture

- All the above creates a net of the **conditions to intentionally** transform culture.
- **Vision and intent/purpose:** Aligning your why at Diocesan and local levels across sectors is pivotal.
- **A strong relationship between DBE and DBF** secures the cross over innovation needed.
- **The most significant barrier** is created when leadership thinking is caught in an ecclesiocentric model rather than a Christological one.
- There is a need to recognise **the church school** as a 'shelter of plausibility' for faith generation, where young people engage in actively shaping their faith identity.
- **The number of barriers** to the Growing Faith approach are hugely outweighed by the number of factors to enable success



Conclusions and recommendations

Growing Faith is about cultural change: effective, high impact mission and ministry with children and young people is achieved when creative, aspirational and innovative leadership from schools and churches and young people works jointly and collaboratively with shared vision and intent across church, school and home. When it builds on the achievements of church school flourishing strategically establishing practice which is characterized by its intent to transform culture. There is a net of practices which create the primary conditions for high impact Growing Faith work.

At local level, facilitated by the Diocesan team:

- Embed the centrality of the voice and leadership of children and young people as catalysts for change and leaders of mission across church, school, household, and community.
- Church and school/trust leaders, recruited with an intent to become a Growing Faith community, enabling work in equal partnership around a local shared vision which builds outwards from church school flourishing.
- Extend the roll out of the Growing Faith Strategic Leaders Programme and the Programme for Church School Flourishing to create joint access to ongoing learning and development in a multi-disciplinary leadership pathway.

At Diocesan level:

- Establish a Growing Faith approach to mission and ministry, through the creation of a multi-disciplinary Growing Faith team, working across the DBF & DBE, drawing on the expertise of Office Holders and centrally employed, locally deployed practitioners to maximise the missional impact of the work.
- Audit the Growing Faith net, identifying high impact facets for focus e.g. young people's voice and leadership, church school flourishing, social/climate justice, Flourish, volunteer organisation, chaplaincy.
- Establish and resource a shared vision of young people's spiritual flourishing and faith generation resulting in 0-25 discipleship pathways.
- Establish the mechanisms and approaches at Diocesan and local level to enable the catalytic, convening and architectural power of young people's voice and leadership.
- Equip and enable the Vocations Team to better identify and respond to those whose giftings are in work with and amongst children and young people, including children and young people themselves.
- Establish a Growing Faith approach to deployment, where all curates and LLM's experience ministry in a children/young people orientated context and chaplaincy and pioneering are core strategies.

At national level:

- Create a demonstratable experience of cohesion in approach to young people's spiritual development and faith generation between the Vision and Strategy team, the Growing Faith Foundation and the Education Office.
- Establish the mechanisms and approaches at national level to enable the catalytic, convening and architectural power of young people's voice and leadership.
- Enable a Growing Faith approach to vocations and the formation of those (lay & ordained) discerned for a public ministry.

To read the full report, visit: salisbury.anglican.org/missionandministry/growing-faith