



Crafting the Net:

How can Salisbury Diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith model to best realise our 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?

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growing
faith

The logo graphic for 'growing faith' consists of three overlapping circles in purple, blue, and green.

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Table of Contents

Abstract	p2
Theological reflection	p3
Introduction	p4
Literature review	p6
Methodology	p21
Findings	p24
Analysis and discussion	p36
Conclusion and recommendations	p50
Appendix 1 – Systems mapping of metanarrative and narrative factors	p54
Appendix 2 – factor frequency analysis word clouds	p56
Bibliography	p57

Abstract

This paper explores the creative and strategic implementation of Growing Faith at a Diocesan and local level, intending to learn what are the factors and characteristics in effective practice that enables true collaboration between church school and household and how can they be applied. Since 2019, the establishment of the Growing Faith work, the interface between Church, School and household has been recognised as the nexus of energy to enable the flourishing of a younger church.

This research is an opportunity to draw on the academic and practical research of others in the field, to inform our strategy and practice for the flourishing of mission and ministry with children and young people. Due to the nature of the Growing Faith sphere this work draws on research from across a number of disciplines, including education, church school education, Christian youth and children's work, spiritual development and faith formation and leadership. Added to this is work in the sphere of church- school partnership and household and community, which is relatively new.

This research drew on 51 structured interviews across the country and included local and Diocesan leaders, lay and ordained, church and school. Systems mapping and frequency analysis supported the process of analysis. The findings demonstrate that in any Diocese there are a net of factors which need to be in place to enable effective Growing Faith, some are more significant than others and each can be developed to enable Growing faith to flourish. Effective, high impact Growing Faith with children and young people is achieved when creative, aspirational and innovative leadership from young people and schools and churches 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 characterised by its intent to transform culture and its intergenerational impact.

Theological Reflection

Our Diocesan vision challenges us to make Jesus known so that all might flourish and grow. In Luke chapter 4 we see Jesus making a declaration at the start of his public ministry. He draws on the prophet Isaiah and stands up in the synagogue and says:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' (Luke 4: 18-19)

As a diocese we are seeking to respond to this, to see it fulfilled in our churches and our communities. What follows in the Gospel stories is how Jesus lived this out and how he called others to do so. We see who he spent time with, how he told stories and asked questions and how God chose to be a part of humanity. It is here, in learning to be with God, with one another and with our neighbours and the stranger where the kingdom, and glory of God is found (Wells S. 2015). It is being in that space alongside others that we will enable us to know and make Jesus known.

At the heart of the Growing Faith approach is to come alongside people: in the spheres of family life, in schools, in our communities, being with children, young people, households, churches and schools, seeking God's kingdom in these spaces. It is through being with children and young people that we can all learn and explore together. It is through this that we will equip leaders and change culture. Together with children and young people and their families we can live out this Gospel message of freedom, healing and abundance. Finding new ways to encounter God, to ask questions, to learn from and be challenged by one another and to meet practical needs as we see Jesus do. Creating a holistic approach in which all can flourish and grow knowing Jesus and making Jesus known.

Introduction

There are generations of children and young people, who alongside their families are not being effectively provided with opportunity for spiritual flourishing, faith development and to engage in, experience the impact of, and lead a life lived in mission. The Church of England has a vision to become 'younger and more diverse'. The Diocese of Salisbury has recently established its vision and strategy Making Jesus Known, which frames how the national vision will be outworked in this Diocese. At the heart of this is a recognition of the unique opportunity that sits at the interface between church, school, and household for the work with children and young people. Growing Faith provides a vehicle for engaging with this opportunity.

According to the Mission Stats nationally from 2013 to 2022 there has been a decrease in the number of young people attending the local church, from 160,000 to 82,000, almost half. In the Diocese of Salisbury since 2009 there has been a 66% decrease in the number of young people actively involved in their local church, ie it now stands at 1200 children. This is in a context of a diocese that has over 100,000 under 18's. The absence of children and young people in our churches is even more stark when over 43,000 young people attend a Church of England school, indeed Church schools equate for 50% of the schools across this Diocese. It is a pattern repeated in many Dioceses across the country.

Since 2019 the establishment of Growing Faith, 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 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 structures and possibilities for schools and education, but also for those who work with them in Church and the wider community. The Salisbury DBE is reframing its working practices around work directly with Trusts, supporting and challenging them in their development of flourishing Church schools and enabling leaders to be equipped to achieve this.

This research aims to understand:

How can a diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith model 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?

This research is undertaken at a unique point in time when the Church of England feels itself to be on a precipice of declining church attendance but the depth and breadth of church school flourishing, underpinned by deeply Christian vision has transformed church school education, where young people are part of a generation with more big questions and a greater sense of social justice than for many generations. Growing Faith has stepped into this space and through the work of the Growing Faith Foundation generated a very significant body of practice, research, learning and support. This research is an opportunity to draw on the academic and practical research of others in the field, including the Growing Faith Foundation, other Diocese and practitioners within this Diocese to ensure we best enable courageous Christian leadership which creates opportunities for children and young people to flourish and explore faith. It is also intended to offer this learning back into the wider national forum.

The Diocese is at a pivotal point in its life. The new diocesan vision seeks to establish creative partnerships in local mission which will be centres of learning for new approaches in mission and ministry and in that context creative and innovative thinking and planning needs to be developed as to how we best realise a younger and more diverse church across our school and church communities. This project will develop, in tandem with the establishing of missional pathways and models of church, which will be centres of learning in the new approaches to mission and ministry, all part of creative partnerships in local mission. Within this context the project will also look to identify how working for justice, including climate justice can be most innovatively and effectively enabled.

Literature Review

This literature review is both integrative, summarizing past research and theoretical, focusing on relevant themes from educational, theological and leadership thinking to provide a critical context and potential framework for the findings and analysis of this research.

Church - School - Home Partnership

This appears to be a space in which, with some notable exceptions, comparatively little has been written in the public sphere. A significant voice came from the Faith in the Nexus (Casson, 2020) report, focusing on Church schools and children's exploration of faith in the home. It was followed by the publication of 'Preparing the Soil: Growing Faith a Collaborative Approach' whose conclusions give some useful themes to be built on but whose detailed findings and recommendations focus on the characteristics of the ethos of a school where spiritual development flourishes (NICER, n.d.).

Growing Faith, encourages every Diocese and local leaders to focus on the impact of working in the places of cross over between these three spheres of church, school and home. It is the vision set in 2019 by the House of Bishops of the Church of England to ensure a national commitment to achieve a significant culture change within the Church so that every aspect of mission and ministry is seen through the lens of what it means for ministry with children, young people and households. (Education Office of the Church of England, 2018) The Faith in the Nexus report (Casson, 2020) and the Growing Faith Foundation's research in 2023 affirms this approach, 'Research indicates that when school, home and church work together, children and young people's spirituality has the best chance of flourishing.' (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 2) This research also identifies four key connections as vital: voices, relationships, rhythm and purpose, (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 7) which we will return to later in this review.

The work of Swanner and Wolfe helpfully extends our explicit parameters to add community to create a four-way dynamic and nexus 'we propose a "4 legged table" of school, family, church and community as a more suitable metaphor (Swaner, 2021, p. 64). While only one

person can sit on a stool, many people, students, educators, family, clergy and community members – can fit at a table. This new image encourages schools to become places where we can all meet together and break bread’ (Swaner, 2021, p. 64)

Church School Flourishing

Church of England schools, make up 25% of the state primary school estate and 1 in 16 of all secondary schools in England. Since the publishing of *The Way Ahead* (Dearing, 2001) in 2001 Church schools have been supported and challenged to a journey of development and improvement as distinctively Christian organisations which has transformed the sector, placing Church schools at the heart of the church’s mission. The bar was raised still further by the Chadwick report in 2012: Church schools must be responsive to parents and the communities they serve while celebrating their distinctive Christian ethos (Chadwick, 2012, p. 4). The consequent SIAMS schedule (2013) reinforced this:

‘The principal objective of the inspection is to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a church school. How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners? (The National Society, 2013)’

At this time we see not only that a Church school had to be distinctively Christian but that that had to have an impact to be effective. Prior to this distinctiveness was enough. It is also in this framework that Church school education moves beyond just a focus on Christian values to adding Christian vision. There is also increased expectation of the relationship between church and school moving from strong mutual support to ‘parents, the local church, the diocese/district and the wider community contribute fully to school life so that there is mutual and substantial benefit for all groups’ (The National Society, 2013).

In 2016 the next step is taken as the publication of the Vision of the Education Office of the Church of England, raises aspirations further. It expects Church schools to become ‘deeply Christian’ and in doing so ‘to serve the common good’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2016, p. 2). The purpose of the Church in education is described:

‘Our purpose in education is to enable the children, young people and communities we serve to flourish as they experience education for wisdom, hope, community and dignity and discover life in all its fullness which Jesus offers’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2016).

The subsequent inspection schedule looks to evaluate, ‘How effective is the school’s distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2018, p. 2).

From 2016 to 2023 the Education Office of the Church of England develop a wealth of depth and breadth of thinking, learning and professional development around church school flourishing and the centrality of a deeply theologically rooted Christian vision underpinning every Church school vision.

‘What is the relationship between the school/trust and local church/es? How do these relationships enhance the school’s ability to live out its Christian vision and to live up to its foundation as a Church school, enabling people to flourish?’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 7)

How does the school’s theologically rooted Christian vision enable pupils and adults to flourish? (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 8)

This impact of this is evidenced, including in the NICER research which tells us that church schools can and are ‘confidently Christian. We seek the right to serve society from the resources of the Christian faith.’ (Casson, 2017, p. 91)

Most recently the publication of ‘Our Hope for a Flourishing School System’ by the Education Office is focused on encouraging church schools and the wider sector to continue to deepen the focus on the flourishing of all (The Church of England Education Office, 2023). It makes recommendations for how this can be achieved at school, trust, Diocesan and Government levels.

Parents and home

The Faith in the Nexus research focused on the connection between Church schools and children’s exploration of faith in the home. It noted that if families perceived a strong active relationship between church and school then there was more evidence of faith related activities at home. Notably the level of positive relationship needed for this impact to occur was not especially high. It was characterised by invitational worship, the celebration of key festivals together, the presence of the minster in school and a sense of belonging to the church community or building (NICER, 2023). The report is clear that connections need to be strategically prioritised because,

‘our evidence highlighted the powerful impact that positive relationships have on aspects of family faith life is mostly unseen’ (NICER, 2023).

The report recognised that a broken connection between church and school has significant impact on the exploration of faith at home, but that schools particularly, were trying innovative methods to address this. It is notable that suggestions here come from a particular perspective, perhaps reflecting the challenge of this aspect of the Growing Faith nexus? However, there is a clear connection between their finding that families talked about faith more at certain times of the year linked to festivals as school activity rippled into home (Casson, 2020, p. 70). This is supported by the Growing Faith connections report which identifies rhythm as a key factor in Growing Faith between churches, schools and homes, highlighting that these seasons provide natural points of connection (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 16).

Casson et al identify that whilst conversation about faith and spirituality take place in church schools, in the home parents are challenged by providing answers, having the correct language, lack of knowledge and not sharing the same Christian beliefs as the schools their children attend (NICER, 2023). As this is a significant element in the difficulty in engaging in the home sphere a reflection on Mayo’s research maybe helpful. Her research with generation Y (defined as born 1981-96), identified the 'Happy' mid-narrative: which says, 'this world and all life in it, is meaningful as it is'. The young people believed life was okay and the world was a benign place, difficult things do happen but there are enough resources, for example in friends, media for happiness to prevail. Therefore, there is no need of or place for God (Mayo, 2006, p. 37). This would appear to be in direct opposition to the perception of generation Z reported for example in the Good Childhood Report (The Children's Society, 2023).

Relationships

The theme of relationships is unsurprisingly common to much of the literature. Coy in looking at the characteristics of churches with growing populations of children and young people in her Diocese, found they emphasised relationships and community (Coy, 2023, p. 1), ‘growing churches have adults within the congregation who work hard to act as bridges between the children and young people and other adults, helping to build relationships across generations’ (Coy, 2023, p. 4), demonstrating at a local level the findings of Rooted in the Church (The Church of England Education Office, 2016). Bright and Simpson’s Growing

Faith research is clear, children told them, ‘relationships really matter and make a difference’ (Bright, 2023, p. 3) The work of the Growing Faith Foundation is equally clear

‘We build connections when children and young people have the opportunity to:

- form the long-term, diverse, and cross-generational relationships that build genuine community;
- develop strong and multiple connections between church, school and home; these develop through the complex interconnection of resources and people – not just through a vicar or youth worker’ (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 12).

The NICER research into spiritual development in church secondary schools emphasised nurturing the sense of community with others as one of the 6 key factors enabling impact; ‘Nurture a Sense of Community People flourish within community; being with others is essential to developing fully as a human being’ (Casson, 2017). This theme is picked up by the Education Office, which recognises that adults (in the context of education) flourish together not alone and need a deep sense of connection in community defined by collective outcomes (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 12),

‘Our flourishing is dependent upon who we are with—together in community. As relational beings, the degree to which we value, honour, and care for each other— students, teachers, leaders, and families alike—impacts our mutual flourishing. School communities that are characterised by a sense of belonging are places where we can flourish together’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 4).

Could this not equally apply to a community defined by church, school and home?

Swanner and Wolfe unpack this further, asking is the relational culture in a school, for example between school, families and students transactional, one of consumer and service provider or a collaborative partnership that builds common vision? (Swaner, 2021, p. 63) This thinking could be extended: can we not look for the same transcendence in the wider partnership model of church, school, household and community? Their research looks at the importance of building positive relationships with the community immediately connected to the school beginning by engaging families, through staff getting to know parents and creating shared vision for partnership. The concept is that if we invite others to join these relationships, we must find ways to remove barriers that hinder them from doing so and so schools must actively and purposefully remove barriers to community engagement (Swaner,

2021, p. 65), enabling diversity further. They propose that in terms of building relationship in community, schools first steps are to break down silos, but then to adopt Pampuch and Iselin's 'shalom in action'. Where shalom is 'a vision of what constitutes human flourishing' at the heart of which are 'right relationships to God, to one's fellow human beings, to nature and oneself'. They propose allowing relational shalom into everyday experience in school, first identifying who is my neighbour and developing proximity to those they do not usually engage with. The long-term strategy is to move into the neighbourhood, developing 'faithful presence' in their communities (Swaner, 2021, p. 66). In doing this schools start to actively remove the suspicion of the other, develop new and inclusive language, shaping a school culture characterised by engagement, empathy and redemptive work (Swaner, 2021, p. 67).

Belonging

The culture of schools typically includes a sense of community and belonging, developed around shared vision, created both relationally and practically, for example through uniform. This sense of belonging to the community is a key factor of spiritual development in schools bringing 'a sense of who you are in connection to each other' (NICER, n.d., p. 5).¹

The Faith in the Nexus report gives us opportunity to expand this,

'Positive relationships between church and school are characterised by a sense of belonging and connection to the church community and building' (Casson, 2020, p. 1).

So that for church schools the sense of belonging is extended invitationally to the church and to faith. This can often include parachurch organisations. The Faith in the Nexus report further helps our understanding of the pivotal role of church- school collaboration in furthering conversations about faith and faith development in the home. Parents described school as like a family where they have a strong sense of belonging. If the school and church have positive relationships, then parents view themselves as 'occasional belongers' (Casson, 2020, p. 3). The research showed that parents' sense of belonging to church was not defined by regular attendance on Sunday, but by participating in community service projects, activities like Messy Church and services at key festivals. Parents perception was that this was enabled through a strong connection to church through school.

¹ PREPARING THE SOIL: GROWING FAITH, A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH, p5

Creation of space

The need to create or co-create space, in the form of time, appears in much of the research and literature in this area:

‘creating time for children and young people to ‘be with God’ and recognise Him in the whole of life - in the everyday and extraordinary is essential to growing an inquisitive and holistic faith’ (Bright, 2023, p. 5).

Csinos’ spiritual styles all require space and the appropriate conditions for growth (Csinos, n.d.). We see this reflected in a number of the iterations of the SIAMS framework around collective worship which should ‘offer the opportunity, without compulsion, to all pupils and adults to grow spiritually through experiences of prayer, stillness, worship and reflection’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2021, p. 3). Casson also identifies the same element of invitation and therefore choice in entering the space as key to the young person engaging (Casson, 2020). It appears again in the Church Army materials, based in the thinking that deliberately creating space for spiritual conversations, helps them happen more frequently (The Church Army Research Unit, 2019). One of the findings of ‘Lessons in Spiritual Development’ is how schools can be a,

‘safe space to encounter, explore and reflect on religious experience’ and that children and staff value this (Casson, 2017).

There is, though, very little exploration of how church, school and home partnership can enable this. This theme of school as a safe space to explore spiritual matters returns in ‘Faith in the Nexus’ (Casson, 2020, p. 12). The report also noted that children actively seek out space and time at home to reflect, think or pray, but few see Church as a space to do these things. Equally space and time is essential to spiritual well-being, yet many had little or no time in daily life. To be at their most effective these spaces must work from a culture in which children and young peoples’ opinions, questions, ideas and feelings are genuinely respected (Nye, 2017). These are spaces which should not be rigidly planned to a program but should enable experimentation, questioning, reflection, wonder, worship and encounter (Csinos, n.d.). Shepherd takes this thinking a further step, considering the extent to which

young people can be offered ‘places where faith becomes more plausible, more meaningful and more tangible’ (Shepherd, 2016, p. 171) and Peers in his commentary asks can church schools can offer young people ‘plausibility shelters’ to explore belief? (Shepherd, 2016)

Spiritual Encounter

Church schools are expected to embed spiritual development as an intrinsic part of the curriculum (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 10), with the Education Office’s most recent thinking explaining,

‘Whilst learning involves acquiring knowledge and refining skills, it is the deepening of wisdom that truly demonstrates flourishing, through ethical thinking, character development and spiritual formation.’ (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 5)

Research from NICER is clear, however that this happens in an inclusive context, where everyone flourishes and does not have to have a faith to develop spirituality within Christian ethos education (NICER, n.d., p. 7). If we want to nurture children and young people’s spirituality we need to take account of their spiritual styles, the way in which they come to experience and know God. Csinos proposes four alternative routes for this;

- Path of the intellect (word)
- Way of the emotions (emotions)
- Journey of mystery (symbol)
- Road to justice (action) (Csinos, n.d.)

This model proves helpful as we move forward in this discussion into the relationship between social action and faith development. Alongside this, Nye suggests building on children’s natural spiritual capacity using six criteria: space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy and trust (Nye, 2017). Here we see the interconnections to the recurring themes around space and relationship.

It may also be helpful to consider the division of spirituality into formative and transformative: formative being a fundamental potential within an individual that may or may not be recognised by them, whilst transformative involves the individual in a conscious attempt to move beyond formative spirituality in order to touch the transcendent (Mayo, 2006). So church schools in working to deepen wisdom through spiritual formation, offer opportunity whether that be, for example, in Nye’s ‘spaces of relationship or imagination’ (Nye, 2017) or Csinos’ word or action (Csinos, n.d.) for transformational spirituality.

Faith exploration and development

Root identifies that we live in a secular age, where religion is just one of a surfeit of options, where the perceived crisis of falling numbers in churches is only a symptom of the real crisis, where people have a harder and harder time understanding how a living God encounters them and moves in the world (Root, n.d.). In this context he argues the highest good is not to follow the tradition of your culture/family but to find your most authentic way of being you. This means as a culture no one story is greater than another, but faith comes from experiencing God's action and encountering Jesus and this we do through story because human beings are creatures dependent on narrative (Root, n.d.). This pivotal role of story in passing on faith is backed by Shepherd (Shepherd, 2016, p. 5) and Edwards (Edwards, 2021, p. 20) who identify narrative as an important element in enabling children to understand and participate in faith.

Edwards points out that earlier models of faith development, e.g. Fowler's 'Stages of Faith', are increasingly critiqued in the light of the development of understanding of children's spiritual development (Edwards, 2021, p. 13). For example, Nye perceives 'development' to be too linear and argues 'journey' would be a more helpful metaphor (Nye, 2017). Edwards concludes though, there are a variety of faith development models that are based in an outdated model of child development (Edwards, 2021, p. 40). This conclusion is shared by Shepherd, who identifies that both Fowler and Westerhoff's models of faith development are based on outdated models of child development, such as Piaget's (Shepherd, 2016, p. 119).

Shepherd's text 'Faith Generation' speaks into this space, both in terms of models of development and our current more secular culture. He proposes that young people see their faith as part of crafting their lives, which connects us to Root's sense of culture expecting individuals to be authentically themselves (Root, n.d.). But in Shepherd's text it is an opportunity because young people are not the passive recipients of what the church does but active in generating their own faith. He recognises the challenges young people face in 'trying to be Christian; in a culture that is indifferent or hostile' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 3). Root's secular culture is also recognisable in his work, therefore Shepherd concludes faith needs to be stimulated and supported, hence his term 'faith generation, whether children are from

Christian families or from outside' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 4). The important question is what do we need to do to provide the conditions and catalysts for faith generation? He argues that when we look to provide these conditions for young people, it not only impacts on them but acts as a stimulus for growth within church communities and for the local church within its community. It is worth noting that most of Shepherd's text seems to be working from 'young people trying to be Christian' and therefore that does not appear to include those outside this group. He usefully identifies 3 challenges to faith generation young people must engage with:

- Making the implausible choice
- Making coherent sense
- Making reliable use of faith (Shepherd, 2016, p. 6)

However, these would seem to be the same challenges any individual, young or old would need to face and if we consider this thinking alongside the previous paragraphs on spiritual development and church school flourishing we can perhaps recognise the increasing role of church schools in this space. It's also worth noting that whilst much of Shepherd's work refers to youth ministry, he does this in the context which reflects on the challenges of the home sphere and the possibilities of the school sphere. He writes of the 'reasonable porousness' which is required between areas of a young person's life, (church, schools and home) and therefore how 'a focus on faith generation requires rebuilding the ecology of faith in a local area' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 154). A focus on faith generation requires a whole community response to the challenges of faith in a secular age.

The meeting of the two

In the context of Growing Faith, the two previous sections, spiritual encounter and faith formation or generation, are not always perceived as comfortable bed fellows. Edwards comments that there is 'a concern that by concentrating on spirituality and not faith we are being too "broad and floppy"' (Edwards, 2021, p. 13). Faith in the Nexus research also highlights the complexity in this relationship stating their findings provide a strong impetus to ensure children have space in the nexus to explore faith and spiritual life, but we need to establish an inclusive shared understanding that overcomes the challenges associated with the terms of 'spirituality' (Casson, 2020).

This is an apparent divide articulated again in the split between ecclesiological and Christological approach. The work of Simpson (Bright, 2023) and Ward recognises that the ecclesiocentric nature of much traditional youth ministry and church activity acts a potential barrier,

‘Here though the question of ecclesiocentrism remains an issue. My own experience has been that many young people are open to experiencing faith and exploring spirituality but what they are less willing to do is join a Church.’ (Ward, 2024, p. 9)

Ward explains the need not to diffuse the current model of Church but to translate into something different. He argues that church is always seen as a meeting, a gathering of people in the same place to do the same thing ‘we could think about church starting in a different place to a meeting.’ ‘Christians might engage with the spiritual life and practices that are outside the church and see these as a missiological starting point for ministry’ (Ward, 2024, p. 3).

Identity and culture

Ward’s unpacking of the need to move from diffusion to translation helps as we consider young people’s needs in spiritual encounter and faith generation. Shepherd explains that belief and therefore faith is part of our identity choice, unlike family for example, it is not ascribed but achieved,

‘it requires the freedom to explore their sense of self and how being Christian contributes to this’ (Shepherd, 2016, p. 123).

Shepherd argues that our philosophy assumes many Christian practices, e.g. worship and baptism contribute to forming Christian identity but doesn’t attend to a current reality, the way in which young people are already going about this. They are drawing self-identity from narratives and participation in consumer and media lifestyles. This thinking is reinforced by Edwards who identifies the national cultural context and four factors, including individualism and consumerism, alongside multimedia engagement as having significant impact on spirituality and faith development (Edwards, 2021, p. 21). Which is why as Shepherd proposes, forming self-identity must return to the issues and questions young people have (Shepherd, 2016). Ward argues that our dominant diffusional model of church youth groups and large worship events assumes how young people meet with God and shapes what that encounter looks like,

‘a missional approach to youth ministry is effectively the pursuit of a new understanding of how God might be at work and indeed what the social, ethical, and personal implications of meeting God in new ways might be. Ecclesiocentrism is ill at ease with the theological implications of contextualisation’ (Ward, 2024, p. 9).

Young people as active agents

Key to your identity is your sense of voice and agency. A range of research in the last ten years has highlighted the key place of young people’s voice and moving beyond this their active agency and leadership. Casson et al do this in their work on young people’s spiritual development in secondary school and it is picked up again by Casson et al as they research church schools and their impact on children’s faith development in the home (Casson, 2017) (Casson, 2020). They identified that children are the initiators of dialogue, leaders of faith and spirituality, stimulated by the curriculum and worship. Leadership opportunities in school give children confidence to take ownership of their own spiritual development, not be passive recipients. They note, a ‘picture emerges of confident articulate young people offering leadership and insight as they seek meaning on faith related matters. There is little evidence of this rippling into the church environment’ (Casson, 2020).

The research of the GFF Connected Faith team supports this,

‘Young VOICES at the centre of delivery and decision-making rather than children, young people and families as relatively passive recipients of centrally provided programme’ (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 17).

This research is clear this is not just about young people providing feedback but giving ideas as part of a process of growing faith for the whole community. The research cross references with Nye’s concepts of space, imagination, relationship and trust (Nye, 2017), for example for young people to use their imagination to make the link between knowing and living faith and to be able to talk about this within relationships of trust (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 9).

Shepherd brings further depth to this work, for him young people’s opportunity to actively engage in shaping and expressing their faith identity is one of the three cornerstones of faith generation. (Shepherd, 2016, p. 150) He shares Casson’s belief that ‘young people’s disruptive presence can be provocation for godly growth’ (Shepherd, 2016, p. 152) so that young people’s contributions are ‘received as a gift to steer us towards new ways of being

churches that grow in depth as well as size' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 152). He recognises the need to receive young people as our co-learners as does Casson,

'Young people are not a blank slate, they are active in their own spiritual development. It is important to remember that the students are leaders and role models among their peers today' (Casson, 2017, p. 90)

Faith development as social action/courageous advocacy

Shepherd argues that for successful faith generation young people need to demonstrate to themselves that a life of faith is useful, 'being Christian ought to help lead us towards an abundant life, a meaningful life and a sense of a fulfilled life' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 7), recognising also that it may look different from the life of adult discipleship. Whilst speaking in the context of mission projects and youth groups as intentional Christian communities, he identifies that these 'must attend to the issues and questions young people have', 'finding practices that help young people to deal with the stuff of life – drawing their relationship with God into this practise' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 125).

Wolfe and Swanner's thinking can be used to build on this. Their image of the four-legged table of school, family, church and community is connected to the research that community engagement links directly with flourishing outcomes, including spiritual formation (Swaner, 2021, p. 64). The research also showed flourishing outcomes were linked to students seeing themselves as part of God's story, where they were part of His bigger plan to make a difference in the world. They note the current ground swell in student activism, volunteerism and community outreach across a range of issues and consider how a Christian vision of educational flourishing can intentionally nurture this sense of purpose. They reflect that this model is Biblically faithful, for example Jeremiah instructs the exiles in Babylon 'make yourselves at home there and work for the country's welfare' (Swaner, 2021, p. 24)². This vision of the focus of church schools is underpinned by the expectations in the SAIMS framework,

'How does the school's theologically rooted Christian vision create an active culture of justice and responsibility? - 'How does this culture encourage justice and courageous advocacy, enabling pupils to make ethical choices and to be agents of change?' (The Church of England Education Office, 2023, p. 12)

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Simpson and Bright's recent research with children and the adults connected to them, reflected the,

'need for church to change and adapt its priorities and approach in order to be meaningful to the exploration of children and families faith. It is clear children need the church to engage with issues which are generationally consequential to them, specifically, climate change, justice and inclusion' (Bright, 2023, p. 24).

Thinking strategically/acting deliberately

Looking across the body of work that has begun to develop in the last several years, either in the space of church-school, or church and school, or church, school and household, a common thread emerges which can be broadly categorised under thinking strategically, acting deliberately. It is apparent in the work of Casson and the NICER research, when writing of Church schools, 'thinking strategically and acting deliberately: A major implication of this research study was that developing a Christian ethos cannot be left to chance. It must be prioritised at all levels.' (Casson, 2017, p. 89) (NICER, n.d., p. 8). Holmes picks up the baton, one of the key recommendations of her 2022 report is that stakeholders working with children and young people need to be taught to develop strategy (Holmes, 2022). Swanner and Wolfe's thinking around purpose, as one of the domains underpinning flourishing together in education, supports this thinking 'flourishing together begins with defining purpose – the 'why' and not merely the 'what, how, when and who' (Swaner, 2021, p. 26), 'as purpose underpins vision it becomes our orientation, passion, energy, compass, scales, light, reason, driver, safety, comfort and wisdom'. They are clear that purpose is not about a mission statement but enables action, drawing a community together in the up and downs, joys and pains of abundant life (Swaner, 2021, p. 26).

It connects this field directly into wider leadership thinking, including the work of Sinek, who focuses on the impact of your why, defining your why and sharing your why. From there he builds a scaffold of how action can be inspired by the shared why (Sinek, 2009). Wolfe and Swanner's work continues to connect to this, exploring the significance of building personal relationships which foster trust as key to achieving a shared vision (Swaner, 2021, p. 63) and therefore part of the how. This connects us back to the key role played by relationship building at all levels and in all aspects of this work. There is indeed an entire field of leadership thinking to be connected to here around sharing vision and purpose and the role of trust.

Recruitment/induction/professional learning and development

This aspect of work in the growing faith field receives limited focus in the materials studied, possibly because it is such a large field in its own right. However, if we propose that the quality of leadership in school and church teams is pivotal to this work, then the recruitment/discernment, induction and early support and their ongoing professional learning and developing opportunities are key.

Ward tackles this in the context of youth ministry, reflecting that for all the signs of hope and capacity to train leaders during the 80's and 90's this has not come to the fruition hoped for. This he connects to a web of factors, including those such as pay and status and the shape and nature of the programmes themselves, which meant that individuals did not necessarily get the most effective training for more missional and contextual ministry (Ward, 2024, p. 9). There are similar insights into the church school education sector, for example in the Diocesan Education Leaders Programme research into school leaders preparedness for spiritual leadership where 58% of school leaders felt unprepared to be spiritual leaders of their school communities (Christopher, 2020).

Methodology

This research needs to identify and understand the most effective strategic developments and characteristics of models that realise the potential of unique opportunity that sits at the interface between church, school, and household. This will guide and frame our learning, thinking and decision making. We know the principles: how do we most effectively capitalise on them?

This research aims to understand:

How can a diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith model 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?

Building on the professional learning over the last 10 years from the children and young people's team and the school advisory team the research will work from a hypothesis that:

'Effective, high impact mission and ministry with children and young people is achieved when creative, aspirational and innovative leadership from schools and churches and children and young people works collaboratively across church, school and home, strategically establishing practice which is characterized by its intent to transform culture.'

This hypothesis looks to test and refine a number of anecdotally apparent theories: that what is needed is something creative and innovative, i.e. different from the last forty years, that the nature of leadership is key and that it should come from churches and schools and young people themselves, that it needs to be collaborative across the three spheres, that it needs to be strategic in its intent and working and that ultimately its underpinning character is about changing culture.

A literature review was undertaken across the breadth of the themes within the research question, including children and young people's faith formation and spirituality, Christian youth work, church school flourishing, church, school, home partnership, organisational leadership and culture change. The hypothesis was used to narrow the reading field, but it is

recognised that the breadth of subject areas needing to be reviewed meant that the review is by no means exhaustive. It did however provide significant steer to the shape of the structured interview questions.

Given the character of the work, ie existing at a local or Diocesan level across the country, in both contexts mainly as ‘projects’ or discrete threads of work a mainly qualitative approach seemed the most suited research method. In order to answer the research question a broad overview across practice was needed rather than indepth case studies, so a structured interview process was decided upon. Two sets of broadly similar questions were used, adjusted appropriately for a local and national approach.

The research base group was broadly split equally to be 50% local (within the Diocese of Salisbury) recognising the need to understand and value what we already achieve in our own context and 50% national with the intention of learning from across the country. The local group were primarily drawn from areas of existing and developing strong leadership practice in the Growing Faith space who are linked to the development of the Diocesan strategy focus on creative missional partnerships. This included the nationally identified Growing Faith learning hub within the Diocese. The group was intentionally split between church and school leaders, recognising the need to hear both voices from the Growing Faith spheres. It is noted that this did not include ‘household’ leaders. The local group were identified by the Diocesan children and young people’s advisory team based on prior knowledge and intelligence. The Growing Faith Foundation team and the Vision and Strategy team worked with the researchers to identify locations of strong Growing Faith practice including in the Growing Faith Hubs and the Growing Faith Research Projects. This helped ensure a broad range of types of projects, some Diocesan led, some led by lead local practitioners across 21 Diocese, of whom 19 engaged.

The interviewees were invited to online group interviews of up to 4 people, grouped by whether they were national practitioners or from within Salisbury Diocese. In practice the complexity of diaries meant that a number of interviews were either individual or in pairs. All interviews were recorded and contemporaneous notes taken. High level analysis of the interview data then drew out key themes and thinking.

A draft outline report on initial findings was then viewed alongside the key debates growing from the literature review and helpfully reflected on with the Head of Growing Faith and the

Diocesan Adviser from the national Vision and Strategy team. This enabling the refining and emerging of lines of enquiry where further information or evidence was needed. These included:

- What is the impact of the balance between church centric and school-centric leadership in local working?
- How do we build onwards and outwards from Church school flourishing?
- How critical to success is a centrally employed locally deployed model of working for a team in this field?
- What is the role of the relationship between DBE and DBF in success?
- How do we address the most common barrier?
- How do we hold effectively the tension between local autonomy and ‘central’ direction and support?

Four focus groups were convened to respond to these: they included two groups of young people, one of local leaders and one of leaders from other Diocese. The latter two groups were drawn from individuals who had been in the first cohort of interviewees and had relevant expertise. At this point three theological education institutions and three parachurch organisations were also approached for interview, of which four responded and three interviews were undertaken.

The final analysis was then undertaken, with systems mapping being a primary tool. A system is a set of ‘things’ working together as part of a complex whole. Systems thinking is a way of approaching large complex strategic problems with no clear answer that need a multiagency response and so is ideal for Growing Faith. It is based in the understanding that everything that happens in society is an interconnected set of relationships running in circles and loops. A systems map helps us understand the entities of a system and how they relate to each other; from this we can identify the key points of energy and leverage and innovation and change the system in a positive way. The systems map was also triangulated with analysis of the frequency of key concepts/ideas from across the interviews.

The analysis was used to form conclusions and as an evidence base for recommendations. Recommendations were created in two formats: one for use by Salisbury Diocese with the potential creative and strategic options for Salisbury to ‘Make Jesus Known’ to younger

generations and one for use when sharing the research outcomes with a wider audience because the needs and context are different.

Findings

Themes emerged from the data in three apparent layers:

- Learning articulated by interviewees about the factors underpinning success relating to direct work with young people.
- The metanarrative of success identified by the interviewees themselves.
- The additional underpinning patterns in the metanarrative across the data group identified by the researchers.

Alongside these a number of common barriers were identified.

The use of systems mapping in analysing the findings enables us to see the interplay and interrelationship between a number of factors surrounding effective practice and where the points of greatest leverage and energy are likely to be (appendix 1). The frequency of key concepts and factors across the data group was also analysed. It is noted that almost all the points of energy on the systems map are matched by the high frequency analysis demonstrated in the word clouds (appendix 2).

Learning articulated by interviewees about the factors underpinning effective practice and success in the context of collaboration between church, school and household.

The most significant factor identified by interviewees in creating effective Growing Faith practice was the building of relationships. This applied in all the layers of the work, i.e. local leaders with young people and families, local leaders with each other, Diocesan advisers with local leaders.

‘relationships are our most precious resource. Investment in relationships, especially at the beginning was key’.

It was noted alongside this, that therefore this was work that took time ‘you have to be in it for the long haul’ and that the ‘quality of time’ given whether to a young person by a local leader or a local leader by a Diocesan adviser was equally important. In a number of Growing

Faith locations, the relationship between the school leader and church leader has been identified as particularly pivotal with learning and development being designed for them as a joint audience to build their relationship. As one church leader articulated, ‘we are guests in each others church/school, we need to find ways to become housemates’, if Growing Faith is to work.

The next most significant element of effective practice identified was the need for strategic thinking, as one person articulated ‘we need a symphony as opposed to phrases in a song’. In a notable number of Diocese this has included consideration of deployment patterns which led to restructuring and the ‘development of ministry teams and over traditional boundaries which changes culture’. One of the other outcomes of the strategic thinking is often a plan or mission design at Diocesan level and local level. This is exemplified by the diocese whose Growing Faith practice is developed around a child’s discipleship journey 0-18, focusing specifically on educational transition points. It is equally seen in the example of Trust chaplaincy, which in itself is a strategic approach to enabling the effective purpose, consistency and impact of chaplaincy for Growing Faith.

Systems mapping of the interview responses demonstrates that strategic intent alongside shared vision development, are core factors in the effectiveness of Growing Faith. The interviewees reflected that this strategic thinking is characterised by intentionality and shared vision, whether that is at Diocesan level or at local level between church and school, ‘shared vision is based in understanding the community and developing vision together (church, school and community) in a shared way’

Another further reflected that many of the barriers to this work are caused by fear of change, ‘but it is the role of vision to mitigate this’. The intentionality is pivotal because it relates to the Christian purpose of the vision and the Growing Faith activity. Interviewees, for example, in considering the projects that were part of a child’s discipleship journey, highlighted being clear about the Growing Faith intent as significant to success.

Equally significant in its frequency was the recognition by the interviewees of the importance of developing Growing Faith practice out from church school’s based in their development of church school flourishing. This was most evident in practice where the Growing Faith model had a least a chaplaincy element, who from their role within school understood the depth of church school flourishing. For many interviewees it was based in the recognition that school was a safe space for young people and had ‘basics which could be built on’. It was notable

that whilst most pieces of Growing Faith work were intentionally in the overlap between school and church and sometimes household, many appeared to be unintentionally church centric in their working. This may relate to the apparent imbalance in the professional background of those leading the work, i.e. do the majority appear to come from outside the education sphere?

The role of volunteers was the next most significant factor explored and whilst a lack of volunteers was touched on as a barrier, the outcomes were more focused on the engagement of volunteers. One Diocese unpacked its Growing Faith strategy, which is focused on intergenerational church and therefore the importance of giving agency to and casting vision with those who volunteer. In another Growing Faith Learning Hub there is clear evidence that young people's voice and leadership acts as convenor drawing in volunteers not just from the church but from the wider community. Interviewees reflected that therefore volunteer development, sustainability and succession planning was becoming increasingly significant. One leader in a Growing Faith Learning Hub reflected,

'how do we help pioneering spirits build teams? Who are the "early majority" of volunteers and how do we focus on managing them well?'

Recruitment and induction were a key feature enabling effective Growing Faith practice in both the church and education sectors, but the church sector received more attention from interviewees. Respondents at a local and Diocesan level spoke of the need for church leaders to have a 'God inspired heart for children and young people' for Growing Faith to be effective. Interviewees were divided on whether the faith perspective of a head teacher impacted on the effectiveness of Growing Faith work. Some reflected that school leaders of faith 'brought a completely different experience and are confident and comfortable' in the Growing Faith space, others felt it was not a barrier and what was more significant was the building of a local relationship of trust between church and school leaders. What was identified was that when recruitment of school and church leaders occurred around a shared vision for Growing Faith with thoroughness and depth the impact was significant, for example the pioneer minister and head teacher recruited simultaneously to a new school and housing estate. Comprehensive induction of new clergy, church leaders and school staff and leaders was also identified as a contributing factor, where it enabled new team members to understand the depth of church school flourishing and the possibilities of the church and faith community.

Alongside the responses around recruitment, discernment and induction, work within vocations was identified by some interviewees as a factor underpinning effective impact and is clearly a point of energy on the systems map. Respondees picked up a thread around how people's gifts are used in both sectors, lay and ordained, recognising that the overlaps in the church, school, household spheres open new opportunities and possibilities for individuals. Vocations alongside curacy revealed itself as a key point of leverage in the systems map.

There is a continued debate about the impact of the faith perspective of school leaders, what was evident was that whilst being a practising Christian often brings confidence in the relationship, having a living faith and Christological motivation was more significant in order to maximise the potential of growing Faith. Equally many practitioners felt that the strength of church school flourishing expectations were such that deep commitment to these was almost equally as helpful. The bigger barrier appears to be school leaders lack of preparedness for spiritual and church school leadership, 'schools and trusts need leaders who understand the Church and faith'.

Professional learning for both sectors was a further key factor, particularly noted was the power of joint training, for example in one Diocese where the Growing Faith research is focused on joint learning around a shared leadership focus, there's a recognition 'that it helps leaders move beyond their own parish or school space, to think with a different mindset, not just about more activity'. Professional learning whether Continued Professional Development or Continued Ministerial Development, was recognised as having the power when focused on Growing Faith to reframe leaders thinking, feeling and communication, to inspire confidence and raise expectations. A number of Dioceses have focused especially on curacy in their Growing Faith work, for example one Diocese expects all curates to undertake a Growing Faith or schools placement and have found that at least half of those are then committed to a Growing Faith approach then plant the seeds both in their place of curacy but also in their subsequent next post.

Communications and engagement has a high profile as a factor underpinning effective Growing Faith strategy and practice, not only because it enables work to be seen and visible to internal and external audiences but because it builds a sense of belonging and community. It was also identified as part of the capacity solution, for example in one Growing Faith ecumenical partnership working in a rural area of 35 churches across 7 denominations,

communications was key for effective strategy and practice. Digital engagement is especially significant in this work and was credited as contributory to building a sense of belonging, whether in the context of Trust chaplaincy or across an ecumenical community of work with young people.

Unsurprisingly the prioritisation of Growing Faith by senior leadership, both lay and ordained, within a Diocese was deemed to be a significant factor in the effective impact of the work. It was notable that whilst valuable and significant Growing Faith work is being achieved at a local level, in the places it is being upscaled there is a strong correlation with support from senior leaders, which therefore has ensured not just the prioritisation of the work, but also its practicalities such as sufficient human resourcing. In another Diocese there is clear strategic intention to enable senior leadership understanding and support going forward through providing access to the Growing Faith Strategic Leaders Programme.

There are a range of models of practice being deployed, among the most significant work is that of chaplaincy. In some Growing Faith locations this is identified as enabling the creation of shared focus or vision around spiritual development across church and school creating a centre for all future work, in another location it is based in the creation of a systematic Trust chaplaincy model which is raising the bar of practice and spiritual and faith encounter for children across a trust. For many locations chaplaincy is at least part of their model because it supports the 'slow-burning culture change' that they identify as needed for spiritual development and faith generation and enables practice to build out from the strong basis provided by church school flourishing.

The vast majority of Growing Faith work is learning centred, i.e. learning from their practice using it to shape local practice and sharing it with a wider learning community, however only a few are yet valuing systematic evaluation as a driver of ongoing change in their wider location or Diocese. This is relevant when we understand that **evaluation and** learning are pivotal in the engine of change management and leadership. In Diocese, within the research, where such evaluation was in place, it was identified as an effective driver for change. This is possibly in part a cultural issue especially for the church and one which the Growing Faith Foundation through its strong learning focus in all it does is clearly working to address.

The systems mapping of the conditions underpinning effective Growing faith practice identified by interviewees revealed a number of key points of energy and leverage, beyond

those explicitly highlighted by the majority of interviewees. They formed the second part of the metanarrative.

The most notable of these was the role of young people's voice and leadership in successful Growing Faith practice. Young people's voice was clearly being enabled at local level in much of the practice shared, but there was limited evidence of the intentional and systematic development of young people's leadership. However, there was strong recognition that it was important and was the next steps for development in many hubs, research projects and Diocese. The limitations in addressing this area, may relate to lack of confidence, one interviewee commented, 'it (participation and leadership) is very important but models of it are very limited'. In the notable contexts where young people's leadership is central to the work, practitioners identify that 'young people are the catalysts, convenors and architects'. For example, in one Growing Faith Learning Hub they have formed a fully empowered youth town council facilitated by church and school who are taking action on social justice issues. The young people interviewed were clear that in the context of Growing Faith they want to have an impact and say in decisions that affect them and other young people but also in decisions that are not just related to them and their needs but that impact the wider community and the world. They want to be able to speak directly to decision makers in the community, in school and in the church and co-create provision and action with them and to be enabled to take on leadership themselves. They want the opportunity to share their ideas and put them into action to address issues locally and beyond, that affect them and the world, e.g. tackling environmental concerns.

There was considerable evidence from within the interviews of the importance of local context both from local practitioners and Diocesan teams,

'local context is key, work should come alongside the local, holding direction and support in balance with autonomy'

There was less explicit articulation of how this tension was being successfully tackled but the evidence is there, when looking across practice. There is evidence in Growing Faith research and hub locations, that in rural areas especially, an ecumenical approach 'brings capacity and creativity'. Equally evident was the impact of the model of working or deployment which most effectively held this tension and enabled impact, which was one of central employment and local deployment. For example, in one Diocese where a team of children and young people's workers were deployed at local level, but carefully recruited, mentored, and led from

the centre, building a strong sense of identity and consistency as a team, impacting at a local level in a way that wouldn't have been possible if they had been locally employed. They commonly have 'specialisms' which also enable them to support networks, for example, across a wider geographic area. They in turn were led by one individual for whom Growing Faith was their key role. The need for strategic leadership being held by one person for whom it was 'their thing' was common to many respondents. This model was evidenced as equally valuable in enabling impact at local level, for example where a Trust employs a Trust chaplain who line manages a team of children's workers and assistant chaplains in individual schools.

There were a number of observable patterns across the interviews, one of these was the relationship between DBE and DBF in a Diocese, whether incorporated or unincorporated. Implicit and explicit in many interviews was the importance of the shared nature of the work at Diocesan level, i.e. the project was jointly planned by individuals in both team or who move across both teams. What was also noted was that in most cases this joint working was reliant on the relationships built between individual post holders in the respective organisations, sometimes despite a fracture at an organisational level.

A further pattern was the sense of the role of the Diocese in giving permission and creating a safe space for church and school teams to experiment. One pioneer minister was very clear 'I'm a pioneer so I'm told I can fail, unlike a traditional priest'. Another interviewee articulated that it is the role of the Diocese to 'clear the space and make the way', especially in contexts where clergy and church teams were working at capacity, creating a bottleneck which prevented new activity and learning. A school leader shared how important the Vision of the Education Office and the work of their Diocese was in giving them permission to work in spaces of social justice and Growing Faith.

Another pattern was, that as well as much of the work feeling church-centric, it appeared it was often clergy focused rather than church team and lay focused. This is significant when we understand from the interviews that capacity is one barrier to effective Growing Faith work. As one interviewee articulated 'the inherited culture is that everything relies on the vicar, the culture needs to shift through reshaping and deployment to enable all to see they have gifts', connecting the conversation back to models of deployment and vocations.

It is clear across the interviews that the jump into household is the most challenging sphere as it has only been tackled yet by a few of those interviewed and usually on a small scale. Where

approaches are being ‘trialled’ they build on established relationships and familiar activity which promotes accessibility, for example through a reading project based out of the school. There is a recognition that ‘school bridges the gap for parents’ and builds very clearly on the sense of belonging that many interviewees shared as the basis for successful work with children and young people and the beginning of their potential faith journey. Interviewees talked explicitly about the barriers of engaging parents, though this was not by any means a consistent picture, finding negative parental attitudes to faith the stumbling block to getting started. However, others took a different approach which they recognised reflected the shift in culture, so in one Diocese whose work is focused on transition points, it recognised for parents ‘they are not interested, we are not on their radar, we are so far removed from their experience, we have to go back to basics and build relationships’.

Metanarrative identified by research so far:

Learning articulated by interviewees about the factors underpinning success relating to direct work with young people in the context of collaboration between church, school and household.

It was notable in exploring the characteristics and principles of effective practice that enables true collaboration between church, school and household at a local level, most interviewees focused on organisational, leadership and cultural factors. In reflecting on the data set it is recognised that those interviewed in the vast majority were very experienced in their field and felt that much of the thinking about effective practice with young people themselves was shared and understood. This was reinforced by individuals who shared,

‘we’ve known this thinking for the last twenty-five years, but we haven’t acted on it consistently’.

Where the nature of direct practice was explored, creating a sense of belonging for young people and families was a common thread. They identified building belonging as the beginning of a long process in potential faith development, moving through to exploration and behaviour. Interviewees who have begun work with households, identified the importance of enabling parents to belong. One school leader identified the success of an after-school family worship session as rooted in the pioneer minister’s ability to ‘connect with people as people.’ Another reflected how,

‘Parents need to feel comfortable and confident to belong, we used the school relationship to build this’.

A number of practitioners identified the possibility of creating belonging to one group and then intentionally extending it to another, for example enabling belonging to a toddler group and then extending it to church events. This was an area where examples also tended to be church centric, there was less evidence of examples that built belonging across the spheres.

The role of digital engagement was exemplified in building a sense of belonging, whether in the context of Trust chaplaincy or across an ecumenical community of work with young people. Many identified that a sense of belonging was initially created by establishing work which was invitational and abundant.

The creation of safe spaces was equally important, in which all feel valued and equal. This was exemplified in one Growing Faith Learning Hub who are using a Forest Church approach to create a shared intergenerational space, familiar to children through forest school but welcoming to all. This too was a space of familiarity where children and families easily feel they belong. Another Growing Faith learning hub was centred on providing an ecumenical network of provision into schools with youth groups and holiday clubs one of their foci is the creation of safe, non-judgemental spaces to ask questions around the issues relating to young people. Young people interviewed share that they need a space that is welcoming and inclusive and provides choice about how to reflect and worship. Equally they value spaces that are just for young people to explore their questions but also a chance to meet with people of different ages.

Interviewees are clear all of this work is being created in the context of community, whether that be a rural ecumenical community, or a multi academy trust community or the new community of a housing estate. Not only are they responding and being driven by the needs of the context, effective Growing Faith is intentionally drawing the community in. This is exemplified in one Learning Hub which has drawn in a range of community partners to offer weeks during the holidays for young people working on issues that matter to them, for example climate justice.

The recognition that faith into action is the space that engages young people was almost unanimous, but like young people’s leadership it appears to be the space not yet fully stepped

into. One interviewee, in the context of chaplaincy work in school around issues of courageous advocacy, said,

‘it allows students in school to bear witness, record and share at home, it allows others to encounter’.

A school leader spoke of young people ‘engaging with it (faith) when they see it making a difference in the world’. Young people interviewed tell us that their key concerns about the world are mental health and wellbeing, the environment, poverty, discrimination (particularly related to LGBTQ+, gender and women), refugees, homelessness, crime and feeling safe. They expected those with a Christian faith to be active in addressing these issues and also want support to do this themselves too. The work in the one learning hub was highlighted as demonstrating the power of providing a platform and resource for young people to make a difference in their communities. Seeing faith in action makes it interesting and attractive to young people, alongside being able to talk to people with faith and ask questions about how it affects their choices and actions, and hearing stories of the difference faith has made to people that they know. Young people shared that they want to work with adults and experience leaders who visibly live out their faith as demonstrated by their actions that engage with community, address inequality and challenge injustice.

Metanarrative identified by Diocesan or local practitioners:

Barriers

A number of barriers were identified by the interviewees: by far the most significant in frequency was the impact of the divide they experienced between what can be broadly categorised as an ecclesiological approach to faith and a Christological one. The frequency of this was fifty percent higher than capacity as an issue.

This tension between two approaches had been met by respondents in a number of guises, one focuses around spiritual development and barriers created by some church leaders who perceive this to be the wrong focus, which should all be in faith formation. One interviewee recounted the experience of talking with church leaders, who queried ‘why should churches care about spiritual development, shouldn’t it be faith development.’ Whilst others understand spiritual development is both valid in its own right and the precursor to faith development. Another interviewee articulated this around practice which is still Sunday–centric, where

work with young people and families is ultimately aimed at Church attendance rather than faith development. One school leader articulated for growing faith ‘to be effective we have to understand church is not a building but a community and therefore it’s not about outreach’. Other interviewees had had similar experiences around Growing Faith practice based in social action, where some church team members struggled to grasp and support how such work could be an effective part of discipleship and faith formation.

The next most frequent barrier was capacity at a local level, this was most commonly articulated as the traditional work of clergy draining energy and time. Notably whilst school leaders saw the same challenges to capacity, they appeared to have a slightly different attitude, recognising the need to choose priorities. This was also a space in which the ‘way clearing and permission giving role’ of a diocese was deemed to have significant mitigating effect. Equally in the learning hub where young people’s leadership is drawing in increased volunteers, this too has a mitigating effect on capacity.

A small number of interviewees identified children and young people worker salaries and training as a particular barrier to the work, making it difficult to recruit and retain high quality individuals. This was connected also to the limited professional development and learning opportunities around Growing Faith and work with children and young people that clergy in particular had access to. It was notable that most interviewees did not make parallel comment about the Growing Faith training and understanding of work with church that school staff and leaders or lay teams have access to.

Several interviewees saw the scale of the cultural change needed as a barrier, especially if there was a lack of senior leader engagement needed to prioritise the cultural change. They recognised that what they created in a range of Growing Faith practices could not be about church on a Sunday because society has changed, it may not be about Church on a Wednesday either. They reflected,

‘Growing Faith is being driven (rightly) by a cultural shift, parents are working, grandparents are increasingly involved in children’s lives and Sunday is full of choices’.

The changes this cultural shift suggests were then seen by interviewees as contributing to the tension between Christological and ecclesiological approaches to work with children, young people and families. Some shared concern that the apparent division in approach across the parts of the body of the church of England, over effective ministry and mission with children and young people, where some seemed to recognise the need for culture change and others

did not, was creating barriers. Others however also saw it as an exciting opportunity ‘God is already doing something, but we have to change our perspective, we have to imagine something new’, ‘we need a culture change and that’s the liberating part of Growing Faith.’

When viewed on a systems map the number of barriers are hugely outweighed by the number of factors to enable success or opportunities, recognising though that it is possible that some of these in the negative can become barriers. The points of energy and leverage most apparent on the systems map are shared vision and a strategic intent and structure, including a mission design, building of relationships at all levels, including the importance of the shared partnership between school and church leader, growing work outwards from church school flourishing, the catalytic power of young people’s leadership, enabling vocation and shared professional learning, building a centrally employed-locally deployed team of specialists, especially in chaplaincy and pioneering, volunteer capacity and management.

Analysis and discussion

This analysis is structured under the overarching headings provided by the hypothesis and the points under each heading are prioritised by their prominence on the systems map and frequency in interviews. It became evident during the research process that there are two strands of thinking tied inside our original question,

‘How can Salisbury Diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith model to best realise our 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?’

These are:

- How do we engage CYP with spiritual development and faith generation?
- How do we creatively and strategically realise the vision?

This analysis is intentionally tilted to the latter strategic element but also draws in the research outcomes from this research and that of others about the former in order to effectively answer the question. Reflecting the perception of respondents and some writers ‘we’ve known what to do (in terms of what works most effectively for young people) for decades and yet we haven’t acted on it’, therefore it is the strategic how which becomes most significant.

Or as articulated in the project brief, based in the understanding of the principles of Growing Faith, this research aims to understand:

- The characteristics and principles of effective practice that enables true collaboration between church, school and household at a local level.

- How these principles can be applied to understand and challenge good practice that already exists to flourish further.
- How can we best enable the dual development of work with children and young people and the formation of creative local mission.

It is also noted that in discussing many of these themes we are only moving across the surface to get a strategic overview, many of the individual themes below form research pieces in their own right.

Collaboratively across church, school and home

The literature review identified six key underpinning factors at play where Growing Faith work with children and young people is having impact and the same are clearly identified by a range of practitioners at local, Diocesan and national level. They are reflected individually or in a range of combinations in the work of recent research and writers, including NICER (NICER, n.d.), Catherine Simpson in Durham (Bright, 2023), Growing Faith Foundation (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023), and some go further back for example, to the work of Root (Root, n.d.). Notably all the factors are enablers of collaboration and three: relationships, belonging and, safe spaces sit directly in working ‘collaboratively across church, school and home’. They also connect directly to work beyond Growing Faith to more traditional models of youth ministry.

Relationships

Building relationships, whether with young people, with parents/families, with and between local teams in church and schools, with wider community partners, between DBE and DBF, was the most common factor identified underpinning effective practice bringing true collaboration. This is reinforced looking across the academic research field, where models have been created for work with young people and relationship building is the only factor that appears in all of them. What was also demonstrated both by this research and the wider academic findings is that relationship building whether between individuals or organisations takes time and we have to be in it for the long haul.

Relationship building was described in this research as ‘creating the good soil’, which needs to be based in mutual respect and understanding. The pivotal question is how do we enable this effectively between church and school, what is our leverage? The research suggests the answer lies in the other conditions which enable Growing Faith, for example strategic intent,

capacity and shared vision at Diocesan level, intentional deployment strategies including chaplaincy and pioneers, recruitment and professional learning in both education and church. We also note the number of successful locations who have strongly ecumenical practice, e.g. Alnwick, which has been built from the strength of relationships. The role of the ecumenical approach in successful Growing Faith work needs further research but is logical especially in the context of capacity.

To be successful the relationship across church, school and home has multiple connections, not just through a vicar (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023), this further enables young people to build cross generational relationships that build community. The pivotal role of relationships building community is picked up both by NICER (NICER, n.d.) and the Education Office (The Church of England Education Office, 2023). They identify that in the context of church schools this building of community around shared outcomes leads to a sense of belonging where all, both children and adults mutually flourish (The Church of England Education Office, 2023). Surely the same logic can be applied to a Growing Faith community of church-school-home characterised by relationships which build belonging and therefore community, around shared vision.

In the same way we understand that church school relationship with its community is collaborative in a transcendental way rather than a transactional approach. This is created by the building of positive relationships by breaking down silos to invite others in a way that actively removes barriers to community engagement and enables diversity by developing proximity to those not usually engaged with (Swaner, 2021, p. 66). The church-school can be the springboard for this into the community, but it can also be the way in which we build the relationship between church-school and household. This is an important consideration as we shape professional development for school and trust leaders, **how do programmes like Salisbury's Programme for Church School Flourishing empower school and trust leaders to intentionally break down barriers, how do national programmes develop this element of strategy in school and trust leaders?**

Belonging

Building belonging is therefore also fundamental to success: the importance of a sense of belonging to a community whether as a young person or a household member is evidenced in this research by practitioners and by young people directly. Its echoes are seen in works of

Worsley (Worsley, 2020), Casson (Casson, 2020), Wolfe and Swanner (Swaner, 2021) and is the basis of Shepherd's sense of identity (Shepherd, 2016).

This research and wider research, has found the concept of belonging is one route to consider the complexities of drawing in the household sphere; this research and the work of NICER (Casson, 2020, p. 5) highlights that through relationship with the church-school, parents are more likely to feel they belong to church. If the church and school have broken down their barriers and built collaborative transcendental relationship and parents are then invited into this via the school the three spheres meet.

In enabling belonging, whether church to school, or church and school to child or family, invitation is pivotal, there is a very clear pattern in the Growing Faith work to 'make the gate as wide as possible, not pretending what behind the gate is different.' This is echoed in Casson, invitation and therefore choice is key to engagement (Casson, 2020). It is part of how we move from the transactional to the transcendental in a collaborative relationship. This is reinforced by feedback from young people and by Worsley's focus on establishing a 'culture of love and welcome' (Worsley, 2022). This equally applies at strategic level between church and school/trust or between Diocese and local, enabling engagement by church, school and community via abundant and generous invite. This research demonstrates that this helps successfully hold the liminality between support and autonomy.

The creation of safe spaces

The significance of safe spaces created by projects across this research was common. This is reinforced by a range of writers as a requirement for spiritual growth, whether in Csinos spiritual styles (Csinos, n.d.), or in SIAMS spiritual flourishing (The Church of England Education Office, 2023). In Casson (Casson, 2020), schools are these safe places. This research also demonstrates that young people themselves identify this as a significant factor and this is supported by Nye in her direct work with young people, these spaces work best when young people's opinions about them are listened to and acted on (Nye, 2017). However, can we take this thinking one step further? Taking into account the impact of the expectations of church school flourishing on church schools, the Growing Faith evidence indicates they can move beyond being safe spaces to being Shepherd's 'shelters of plausibility' (Shepherd, 2016). The thought then arises if they can be shelters of plausibility for young people as they also draw in families to this sense of belonging and community, can church-schools also

become shelters of plausibility for adults? The early evidence across Growing Faith work would suggest yes.

The research illuminates that for effective Growing Faith practice the need for safe space equally applies at the strategic Diocesan level. The role of the Diocese in creating places of safe risk and clearing the way is articulated by the research, whether this be, for example, through deployment patterns or working across traditional boundaries. The research is clear on this aspect of the how; it will require a shift in culture that accepts reasonable risk if we want to learn, if ‘we stay comfortably where we are, we will get what we always got’.

Communications

The research is clear, how a Growing Faith approach is ensured effectively includes the deployment of effective communications, particularly digitally. It has a key role in setting and managing expectations, enabling sharing of vision and engagement and helping break down barriers and build belonging and knitting communities. The research reflects that communication is significant for creating belonging and community with young people but equally strategically across local teams, or across wider teams within a Diocese. It is notably absent in the wider writing and thinking, maybe because communications is not a subject specific theme, though we can connect it to the thinking of Root (Root, n.d.) and Worsley (Worsley, 2022) who highlight the need for young people and other generations to hear different stories of faith in action to support their engagement.

Home and parents

The nexus at the centre of Growing Faith, connecting to household and families appears to be where least activity is currently focused in Growing Faith practice. It was generally reflected that this is the most challenging sphere and the Growing Faith Foundation recognise this and it is reflected in the limited tackling currently across Diocesan practice, the Growing Faith hubs and research projects. What is evidenced is that parents need to feel comfortable and confident, to belong, and the school relationship can be used to build this, as beginning to be reflected in practice in Winchester and Salisbury. A pattern was also emerging of parents who once they belonged, wanted to change the shape of that belonging, i.e. to belong in their own right not as parent of child X, or even as family member of. This means that discipleship pathways for Growing Faith need to include one for adults as individuals themselves.

Interviewees highlighted a particular challenge caused by parental negative or uninterested attitudes to church. Is light shed on this by the juxtaposition made in the literature review of Mayo's research into generation Y and our current knowledge of generation Z? (Mayo, 2006) The parents are likely to be generation Y, i.e. as are the children in Mayo's research who didn't see the need for faith or for the world to change. Whereas their children, generation Z, are those who in this research and more widely, are clear about their curiosity about spiritual development and faith, understand the world needs to change and believe they have a role in that. This connects us across the net of Growing Faith factors or conditions to the significance of young people's voice and leadership in effective Growing Faith strategy and practice.

In the context of parents and families the evidence from this research, for example in Durham and Guildford, also demonstrates the possibilities of empowering children so they take the next steps in their faith journey and lead their families as a core route into engagement with this third sphere.

Creative, aspirational, innovative leadership

Shared leadership church and school

The majority of the Growing Faith models being developed appear to be church centric in working if not in intention. In this context therefore a very significant opportunity is potentially being missed. The opportunity is created by the development and huge raising of expectation of what Church schools are and is expected of them, in terms of their impact as deeply Christian organisations serving the common good. The strongest practice seems to be where school and church created shared vision together and capacity and leadership were truly joint. This was reflected by a range of practitioners, particularly noting the importance of relationship between a key school/trust leader and a key church leader, often the head teacher and member of clergy as a catalytic force. Where this does happen, the focus is Christological not ecclesiological and the leaders are aligned around this.

What is especially noticeable in current Growing Faith practice, with one or two exceptions is the absence of capitalising on the opportunities in the school Trust model and engagement with Trusts who have responsibility and accountability for church schools, for example in the Diocese of Salisbury 116 church schools (61%) are currently academised. **If we understand academy trusts as civic structures with the capacity to advance education for the common good, with a responsibility to act on the wider system for collective benefit and with structures and capacity centred on relationships (Bauckham, 2021), they have natural affinity**

for Church school flourishing and for work across the four spheres of school, church, household and community.

Young People's voice and leadership

Across this research young people's voice is frequently implicit in local level practice, though there is limited evidence of intentional development of young people's leadership. There is a consistent recognition that it is important and the next step for development. There are a number of significant exceptions, including Durham, Salisbury, and the work of the Missional Youth Church Network. What is beginning to be evidenced from them, is the power of young people's leadership as convenors, catalysts and the potential of this for development into intergenerational discipleship, exemplified in wild church and new planting Growing Faith examples.

These findings are supported by Casson's work where young people are initiators of dialogue, leaders of faith and spirituality, which notably they build out of confidence gained in a church school flourishing context (NICER, n.d.). This reinforces the notion of understanding Shepherd's concept of shelters of plausibility in the context of church schools (Shepherd, 2016). In this context, as Growing Faith Foundation research shows, young become active agents not passive recipients (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023, p. 7) and engage as Shepherd highlights in actively shaping their faith identity which is one of his cornerstones of faith generation (Shepherd, 2016, p. 150). He shares Casson's belief that 'young people's disruptive presence can be provocation for godly growth' (Shepherd, 2016, p. 152).

Recruitment, induction, training

In a research question that involves culture change and a hypothesis about leadership, this factor should be no surprise, but with the exception of Ward (Ward, 2024), it was notable in its absence as a major theme from the literature review, but it is however a clear thread in the research evidence. Within this theme key points emerged from the research:

- Both sectors (education and church) need to recruit individuals to a shared vision of Growing Faith
- Both sectors need to be led by individuals with a deep understanding and affinity for the other sector, at church, school and Trust level. The place of school leaders faith perspective continues to need further research.

- Curacy is a key point to enable and ensure ordained ministers feel confident and comfortable creating Growing Faith communities.
- Both sectors benefit from the systematic induction of new staff from the beginning of their careers onwards

Looking across the research it is possible to see how action and impact in these practices enable the establishment of the conditions to build partnership and collaboration for Growing Faith. This is then enhanced through professional learning in both sectors. The impact of shared training for leaders is evidenced in the Diocese of Canterbury and connects to the building of key partnerships, shared knowledge and understanding. How people are equipped is also significant, i.e. not just given training but empowered by a model of learning which comes alongside them. However, there is also a risk of seeing recruitment and training as the ‘golden bullet’ rather than as the research demonstrates it to be, part of a wider net each dependent on the other.

Vocation

This is also not a thread which appeared in the literature review. Yet the research evidenced a direct connection between the perception and shape of vocations work and the impact on Growing Faith, both a vocation to work with young people and the vocation of young people. Here again we see evidence of the impact of young people’s influence on wider intergenerational faith generation, as this is not just young people moving into vocational space but work with them offering opportunity and enabling adults to discern a vocation.

Prioritisation by leaders

If Growing Faith is genuinely prioritised by leaders at Diocesan and local levels then it has a much greater chance of succeeding, if not this becomes a barrier. This key factor for success can be seen across the majority of change management literature. It is the enabling factor which ensures other pieces of the net of success come online, e.g. development of recruitment, induction, training, or the creation of safe spaces to take risks. The research also identified the need for people for whom this is THE priority in their role, whether at Diocesan or local level, which linked both to the provision of capacity but also of strategic vision.

Capacity

The findings are clear that this is a barrier, but it is also clear that the net of factors in play around Growing Faith work also contain potential mitigators and contributors to solutions. Most notably conservation around convening power of young people's leadership and its impact on volunteers and vocations. It is also connected to the ecclesiological and Christological debate and in that context how far we are prepared to take risks and make significant changes to our approaches to change culture. This connects it back to prioritisation by senior leaders who can 'clear the way', give permission or options to move away from some of that which drains time and energy. Equally if the Growing Faith working is as clergy focused as the research indicates, rather than drawing on the wider lay community, that too impacts on capacity and potentially creates a bottleneck for this work. Is that focus because of our traditional expectation of clergy to be at centre of everything or is it about capacity in lay teams?

Strategically establishing practice

Grow from the church-school

The significance of the development of church school flourishing to this work, in the depth and breadth of what is expected of them as deeply Christian, theologically underpinned organisations serving the common good, cannot be overestimated. The research identified key success factor in building on the school 'leg of this table' where church school flourishing is strong, the greater success with families in this context was also identified. Church schools are intended to be the builders of community 'that enable disparate communities to live well together rooted in dialogue, empathy and love' (Ford, 2020). They are in this Diocese our most diverse communities and are naturally positioned to support all that is 'younger and more diverse'. Church schools are expected, amongst other elements to embed spiritual formation, ethical thinking and character development, offering opportunity for the transformative.

In deployment terms the research evidences that pioneer and innovative chaplaincy models, such as Trust chaplaincy are particularly effective in enabling Growing Faith. The evidence suggests through building relationships they enable belonging. They are successful because their role, discharged in an effective model, enables them to facilitate plausibility, identity and reliability (Shepherd, 2016). These models are significant because they personify the cross over or nexus between church, school/trust, household and community in a way which

is creative and innovative, they are based in the school or Trust and so grow out of it but they are not of it.

In a flourishing church school, we can evidence an environment that can create the conditions for faith generation for young people and adults. Where it is possible, with the opportunities for their own leadership and voice, spiritual development, social justice and community partnership, they can make the implausible choice, make coherent sense and make reliable use of faith (Shepherd, 2016).

This connects in the net of factors enabling Growing Faith to points already raised around parental sense of belonging and the pivotal partnership between church and school leaders.

Building team

Analysis of the research reflected that factors enabling effective practice were most effectively delivered through the building of a team of ‘specialists’ who are centrally employed, supported and challenged and locally deployed, whether the ‘central’ is the Diocese and the ‘local’ are smaller geographical areas such as a town, or whether the ‘central’ is a school Trust and the ‘local’ is individual schools/churches. Impact was enabled by a central team for whom there was a shared clear focus, coming alongside local, neither middle up nor top down, gifting and giving options, enabling agency, facilitating and connecting. The strength of this type of approach sits in the consistency of the team, the use of appraisal and evaluation to enable their development, to hold them to account and the potential for them to lead in their area of specialism, e.g. young people’s voice across a wider area. It also enables the centre to systematically develop practice, for example, introducing strategies around young people’s leadership to all locations being worked with. It provides a balance between local ownership and central intent.

Faith into action

If we accept that old models of faith development have been outgrown by our vastly increased understanding of both child development, neuroscience and children’s spiritual development (Edwards, 2021) and we recognise that in an secular yet apostolic age, faith generation for young people must engage with making the plausible choice, making coherent sense and making reliable use of faith (Shepherd, 2016), then attending to the issues and questions young people have is a logical way forward. The research reinforces this with young people speaking directly about their desire to experience faith as a way of making

change in the world in the things they care about, injustice or the environment. This need for purpose and action is reflected in the Growing Faith Foundation research (Education Office of the Church of England, 2018), in Csinos spiritual styles (Csinos, n.d.) and in Swanner and Wolfe (Swaner, 2021). In the latter community engagement links directly with flourishing outcomes, including spiritual formation. In this faith into action, community is built, as evidenced in the research, most effectively when led by young people, creating through invitation a sense of belonging and identity which is centred around social justice and equity. This connects across our net to a number of factors including that around Christology and ecclesiology.

Volunteer capacity

There is early evidence that Growing Faith approaches, especially those involving the voice and leadership of young people draws in significantly increased numbers of volunteers both as individuals and as partner organisations, supported by the effective casting of vision. Sustainability then becomes key- how good is the Church of England at ensuring volunteer organisation and management, training and development? These volunteers will help to address the capacity issue but only if they are well managed, supported and led.

Small scale

It is recognised that most Growing Faith practice is currently small scale as it is in the early years of its existence, but it will need strategies to upscale in order to reach its potential. This is the challenge faced by traditional youth ministry over the last forty years, it has been very successful in specific locations but did not manage to effectively flourish to its full potential and is now in significant decline (Ward, 2024), but this is a hurdle Growing Faith is going to have to jump. The research showed early examples of transference of approaches and models, the sharing of learning for example in Manchester and Durham, Systematic learning focused on how we upscale Growing Faith is needed alongside these pieces of work.

Intent to transform culture

Ecclesiology and Christology

The debate between ecclesiology and Christology forms the most common barrier, being fifty percent more noted than church and school leader capacity, whether that is articulated in what we understand church to be, whether that is about a focus on church attendance or on meeting people where they are, or about working within parish boundaries or across parish boundary

working. Many interviewees see a clear cultural shift in the western world. Sundays are not available, there are many choices what to do with your time on any day of week, it is no longer a time of the Christendom, but an apostolic age and therefore a purely ecclesiological model is not helpful.

This tension finds further articulation in the debate of spiritual development versus faith generation: education has moved to a place of deep understanding of its role in spiritual development/flourishing (The Church of England Education Office, 2023). The evidence from the research, that it is one or the other, tends to mirror a fracture between traditional church and Growing Faith and ecclesiology and Christology. Earlier models of faith development are not necessarily helpful, in part because our understanding of child development and neuroscience has been transformed (Edwards, 2021) so we need to use something different. We also know engagement of young people both with curiosity about spiritual development and faith and their role in the world has changed in the last 20 years, interviewees are clear, young people are open to these ideas and conversations.

Wider research echoes this experience, including its impact within the church-school partnership. Ward speaks of the exciting connection between churches and schools ‘here though ecclesiocentrism remains an issue’, ‘my own experience has been that many young people are open to experiencing faith and exploring spirituality but what they are less willing to do is join a church. (Ward, 2024, p. 9)’

If we use Mayo’s model of formative and transformative spirituality (Mayo, 2006) we see how work in church schools and Growing Faith space with churches and homes could and can enable the move from formative to transformative spirituality- ‘touching the transcendent’. If we place that journey inside Shepherd’s model of faith generation (plausibility, identity, reliability) (Shepherd, 2016) do we create a model of how Growing Faith is working, i.e. via young people led work in areas like social justice, but also in their engagement and creation of worshipping communities? In moving across the literature review it is evident we don’t need to be one or the other, Christological or ecclesiological but better understand that the Christological approach maybe what enables the ecclesiological one to flourish and that it is in perceiving that one is a threat to the other, that the barrier lies.

Vision and intent/purpose

Sharing your ‘why’ at all levels, casting your vision is clearly pivotal, identified explicitly and implicitly by interviewees as a priority. Its key place in the systems map reflects current

wider leadership thinkers, such as Sinek. He is clear that we then need to know the ‘how’ (Sinek, 2009); this trend is apparent in the research where the most successful work even when on a very local footprint is underpinned by strategic thinking articulated in a strategy or mission plan for Growing Faith, for example ‘journey of a child in xxxxx’ Together these two form a key point of energy in the systems map.

Vision connects directly to articulating intent and purpose and was a key theme from the research, the intentionality of Diocesan teams in coming alongside the local, the intentionality of locally deployed workers, the intentionality of local teams and the need for shared vision. Casson is clear in ‘thinking Strategically, acting deliberately’, speaking of Church schools developing a Christian ethos cannot be left to chance. It must be prioritised at all levels (Casson, 2020), Holmes reinforces this when talking of those working with children and young people (Holmes, 2022). Swanner and Wolfe (Swaner, 2021) and the Growing Faith Foundation (Growing Faith Foundation, 2023) are clear about the importance of having and understanding shared purpose. The challenge in the research contexts around Christological approaches, for example, when working in the social justice or mental health and well being fields, is addressed by being transparent about the Growing Faith intent and purpose.

There is an entire field of leadership thinking connected to Growing Faith here, centred on the building of vision, the sharing of ‘why’ and then ‘how’, the connection to relationship building and the role of trust. Vision and purpose in their ability to help us navigate the ups and downs, the ‘how’ as well as the ‘why’, can help us address issues related to capacity.

Evaluation

There is a considerable emphasis on capturing and sharing learning enabled by the Growing Faith Foundation and clear evidence of this in the research projects. There is more limited evidence of the thinking about evaluation from the research. This is potentially because of the debate around what we measure, what it is possible to measure and the concerns around the connection between measuring and targets. Can you evaluate spiritual formation or faith generation? Is it possible to be wisely quantitative or purely qualitative? How do you evaluate the impact of Growing Faith? These are all debates on which those within the sectors have strong views. The debate about evaluation feeds barriers, for example if those within Growing Faith don’t evaluate then the only measures used, such as mission stats, will continue to feed an ecclesiocentric culture, which limits the flourishing, creativity and

innovation of work in the nexus. Those working within Growing Faith need to lead on approaches to evaluating its impact alongside the learning.

Conditions to transform culture

Quite simply all of these factors discussed create a net on which Growing Faith strategy and practice sits, the factors are the knots that join and create the net, tighten a particular knot and the tension in the rope increases holding Growing Faith up more securely. Some knots are more important than others, carrying a greater proportion of the load. This net creates the conditions to transform culture.

Conclusion

How can Salisbury Diocese creatively and strategically use the Growing Faith model to best realise our 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?

This research has enabled us to identify the factors underpinning effective practice and how they can be deployed for successful impact. The recommendations as to how this is achieved are detailed below in a shape that is intended to be of use to this Diocese but also to other Diocese and nationally.

It is clear that we know and have known for over 20 years what makes effective direct practice with young people, building relationship, creating safe space, engaging with the issues and concerns that matter to them, empowering their voice and leadership but we have not fully moved to this space because the evidence says the other half of the ‘how’ lies in the bigger spaces of culture change, the creative and strategic places.

There is a net of factors on which Growing Faith strategy and practice sits, the factors are the knots that join and create the net, tighten a particular knot and the tension in the rope increases holding Growing Faith up more securely. Some knots are more important than others, carrying a greater proportion of the load. These include young people’s voice and leadership, shared vision and strategic intent, growing out from church school flourishing, creating centrally employed-locally deployed teams, the shape of leadership including chaplaincy and pioneering, recruitment and joint professional learning, vocations and curacy and volunteer management. This net creates the conditions to transform communities to a Growing Faith culture, but the nature of a net is such that all those factors are interconnected and interdependent and the majority need to be in good condition for the net to function effectively. There is not one factor or even two that can provide the ‘how’ on its own.

The Growing Faith net, like all nets holds more than its intended load: Growing Faith has a critical role in the engagement with spiritual flourishing and faith generation, not just of children, but intergenerationally across adults connected to them and beyond, creating Growing Faith communities. Its approaches and the learning from it can helpfully and effectively shape all of our mission and ministry.

There appears, from evidence across the country, to be three key factors in the net where additional attention would be significantly beneficial:

- Empowering young people's voice and leadership
- Empowering academy trusts in the Growing Faith community
- Building Growing faith practice outwards from church school flourishing

Without doubt the opportunities and factors to enable success heavily outweigh the number of barriers, but those that do exist are significant. In particular two:

- Perception of capacity in both the church and education sectors. However, if we look across the Growing faith net of factors there are potential answers and solutions.
- The tension between ecclesiological thinking and Christological thinking and the range of barriers it creates. We need to recognise western culture has changed, our knowledge of how spiritual development and faith flourish has grown, we live in an apostolic age where evidence suggests a Christological approach is more relevant but not with the exclusion of the ecclesiological approach.

The next challenge for Growing Faith is that of upscaling both within Diocese and nationally: how do we take the learning, secure the evaluation and shape further strategy to extend Growing Faith practice and impact consistently across Diocese and country as it secures both practice, learning and shapes further strategy

So we return to our hypothesis but we have made changes

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 young people**, schools and churches works jointly and collaboratively **with shared vision and intent** across church, school and home, **when it builds on the achievements of church school/trust flourishing** strategically establishing practice which is characterised by its intent to transform culture.

Recommendations

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.**
- Support the development of a Flourish network sitting at **the interface** within church, school, and household, which working with churches, schools/trusts enable the **spiritual development** of children, young people, and their families within an **intergenerational community**.

At Diocesan level

- Establish a **Growing Faith approach to mission and ministry**, through the **creation of a multi-disciplinary Growing Faith team**, led by the Head of Growing Faith, working across the DBF & DBE, drawing on the expertise of Office Holders and centrally employed, locally deployed practitioners to maximise the missional impact of our work in the following areas:-
Young people's voice and leadership, church school flourishing, social/climate justice, Flourish, volunteer organisation and 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.

- In partnership with other agencies develop and run a **high-quality formation pathway for emerging children's and youth workers**.
- 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 **demonstrable experience of cohesion** in approach to young people's spiritual development and faith formation between the Vision and Strategy team, the Growing Faith Foundation and the Education Office.
- Build on the learning focus of Growing Faith Foundation to establish appropriate and effective **methods of evaluation of impact**.
- Establish the mechanisms and approaches at national level to enable the catalytic, convening and architectural **power of young people's voice and leadership**.
- Establish systematic learning and dissemination focused on the **upscaling of Growing Faith** practice.
- Enable a Growing Faith approach to the **discernment, vocations and formation** work and processes.

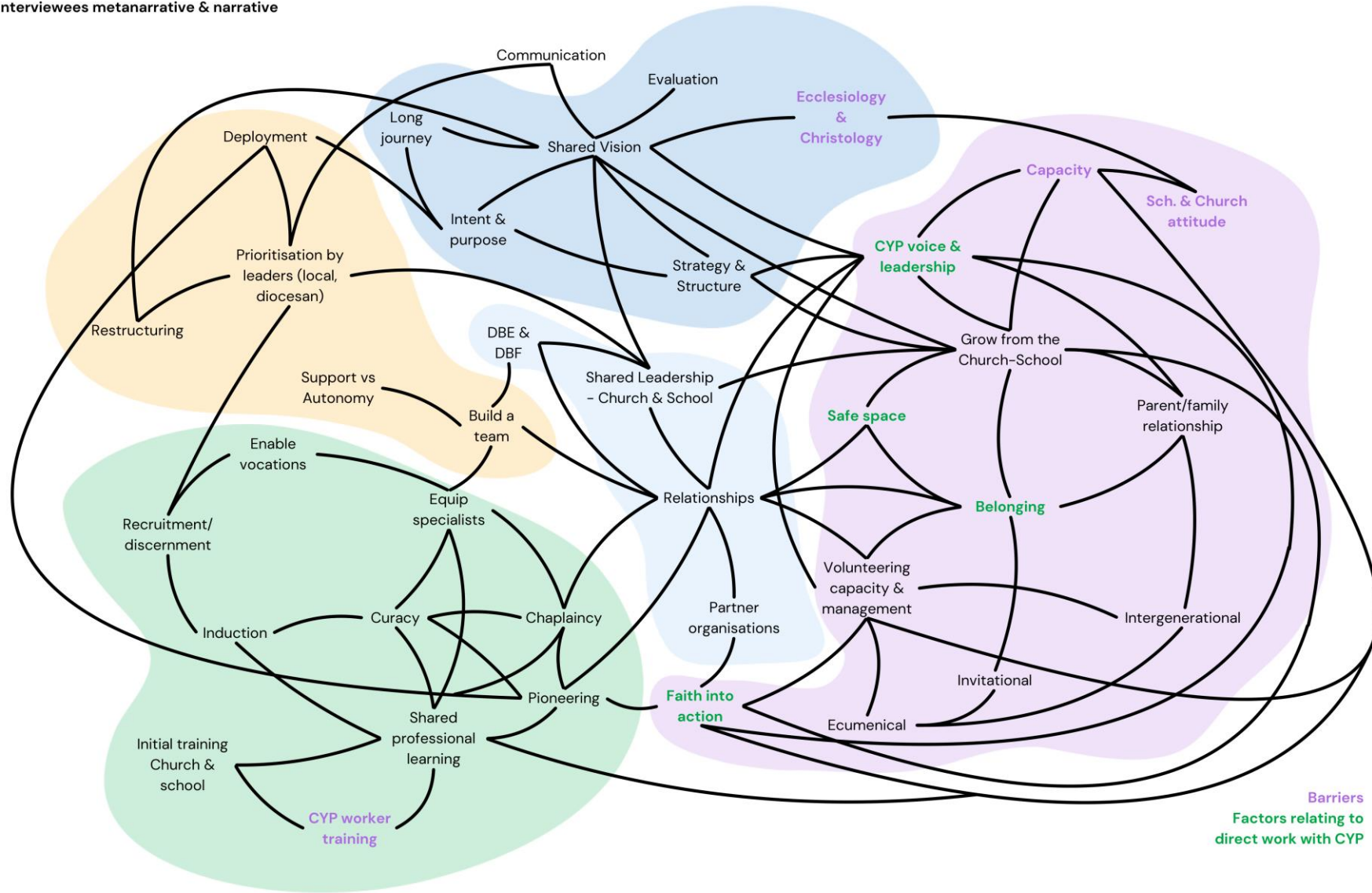
Questions for further research

- What is the impact on Growing Faith leadership, opportunity and practice, of the faith perspective of school and Trust leaders?
- How do you build effective impact in the household, particularly focusing on young people's leadership and the generational disparity that the literature review of this research highlighted?
- How does local change enable wider structural change, how do we move from small scale to transferrable larger scale Growing Faith?
- How do we effectively capture learning and evaluation which shapes and forms the next level of decision making?
- What is the impact on Growing Faith strategy and practice of ecumenical working at a local or wider level?

- How do we most effectively enable shared leadership in the nexus at national, diocesan and local level? What is the impact on vision, purpose and delivery of the professional context of those leading?

Appendix 1

Interviewees metanarrative & narrative

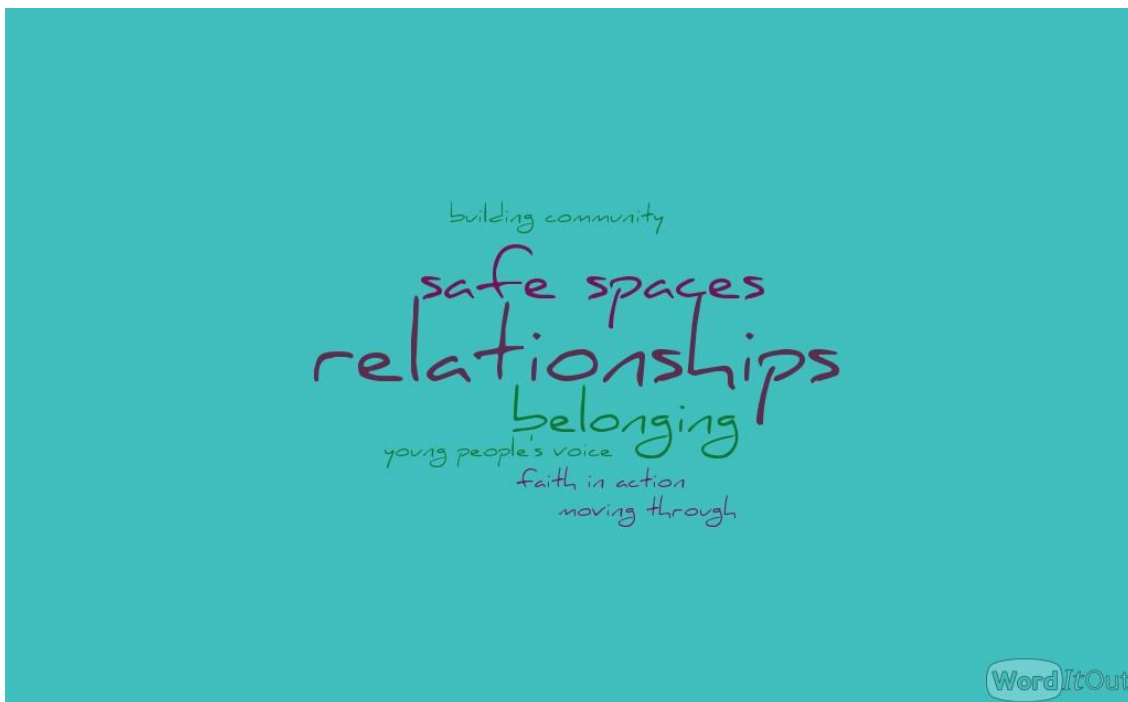


Appendix 2

The Frequency of Metanarrative Factors Identified by Interviewees



Frequency of factors identified by interviewees related to direct practice with children and young people



Perceived Barriers to Growing Faith Impact



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