

~~...if the answer is “yes” then it could mean~~ **The implications are:**

1 ...our understanding of what the church is for must change

The church can no longer be a place which provides that which suits me, but it must become a place which is driven by its commitment to those who are not yet in church. It will not matter that I may not be comfortable with the style so long as it is a style through which Jesus can reach a new generation. **This will require a commitment from each congregation to be prepared to change**

2 ...the activities of the church for children, young people and young families must change

We need to start from what is already working (e.g. Messy Church, Christenings, Advent) and develop congregations/events/activities which will enable these groups to become part of our faith community. **We need a crèche, better sound suppression in the south transept, child-friendly worship every Sunday. There will need to be a team (poss. CYP&YF) to provide joined up thinking and planning**

3 The services must change

Currently children are generally disinterested in what happens in church, young people and young adults are bored with the style. We have to inject energy, enthusiasm, passion and excitement, and the worship has to come **alive. and**

4 The times, days and locations of services may need to change

We need to re-think the structure of our weekly work and of Sundays, especially in the light of what is and what is not working. It would be good to start again with a time, place and day which will be relevant for the new generation of children, young people and young families, perhaps linking to Messy Church and Christenings **This must be considered by the “Worship Review” which was proposed within the ‘Creating Connections’ strategy**

5 We must invest in reaching the new generations

To make the changes we need to bring in people, perhaps to employ either a worker or student who can be part of our plans to reach the new generation of children and young families who are seeking God and seeking a church. **Plan to employ a Children’s & Families Worker as soon as possible**

6 The way we communicate must change

We need to move into the 21st Century and communicate well, in a professional way and step up the quality of our communications and presentation. **Set up ‘21C’ a communications team for the 21st century – committed to both quality and reach**

7 Our commitment to parents must change

We need to invest in and support the most important people involved in enabling children and young people to come to faith and grow in Christ: their parents. Research both in the USA (Sticky Faith) and in the UK (Prof Leslie Francis and *Rooted in the Faith*) indicates that they are among the most significant people involved in this work.

Establish various ways in which we train and enable parents to share their faith in their home and with their children

David Howell (version 19Mar17 revised 24Jul17)



Parochial Church Council ~ Monday 28th November 2016

& amendments for Monday 24th July 2017 (in green)

If the church wishes to see a new generation of children, young people and young families within Christ Church, then we need a *paradigm shift* in our approach to this work.

Background

In October & November 2014 I presented to the Old Town Partnership Council (OTP) and the Christ Church with St Mary’s Parochial Church Council (PCC) the results of an informal research project. This sought to understand the discipleship needs of older young people (school years 10 to 13) within the Old Town Partnership of Churches and recommend ways in which these needs can be met, with the aim of seeing this group of young people grow in their faith as they move into adulthood.

As the research proceeded, it became obvious that, due to the lack of any cross church/coordinated work with any age group of young people and the rapidly reducing numbers of young people in the three churches, the research needed to look at a wider age range and broader concerns.

Executive Summary of the initial research

- ❖ The number of young people and young adults attending the LEP churches is declining. This is due in part to young people voting with their feet as regards church attendance, and to the fact that families are not coming to church as they did fifty years ago.
- ❖ The Old Town LEP churches do not undertake any activity together to enable discipleship and growth of young people in the Christian faith
- ❖ Any growth in faith which is taking place is due to :
 - strong personal commitment
 - parents who are Christians
 - friends who are Christians
 - personal involvement in wider events, often with the encouragement of parents or church youth workers/church leaders
 - active involvement in a small group committed to discipleship and growth

- ❖ There are some town-wide events, such as YfC's *Impact*, SU's *X-Site* and the *Growing Leaders (Youth Edition)* run by YFC and SU together, which seek to grow young disciples [Note – since the summary was written, there has been no further Growing Young Leaders course and Impact is not happening at the moment]
- ❖ The biggest put-off which the young people identified is a dissatisfaction with the worship life of the church. In Bath Road there is slightly more enthusiasm for Sunday worship but young people have voted with their feet at Immanuel and Christ Church
- ❖ If the Old Town LEP churches wish to seriously engage with and enable growth in the faith commitment of young people then there needs to be a commitment to create new structures (a new paradigm) which will be relevant to young people
- ❖ If the churches individually wish to reach out to, or at least keep the young people they have contact with, then there needs to be a willingness to recognise that a significant paradigm shift is required by all those who currently attend¹, especially regarding how you “do church” in the 21st century

PCC and C&YP Group

During 2015 it was decided that there should be a group made up of the Children & Young People's Working Group (C&YP) and some representatives from the PCC, to look at the issues and come up with some proposals.

A proposed development plan was presented to the PCC in September 2015² This recommended, among other things, that we need to think broader and include our work with children, young people and young families and that there should be an opportunity for the church³ to think through and prepare a strategy to address the issues.

Information events (under the title *Paradigm Shift*)

To understand these major cultural changes and to pray about how we as a church reach out to children, young people and families, David Howell and others hosted sessions in the Community Centre once a month between April and September 2016. There were opportunities to begin to understand the changes that have come about, time to pray together and reflect on the new paradigms in how we need to change our way of working in order to see more children, young people and families becoming part of the community of Christ here in Christ Church.

10th April Introduction and results of research with church young people

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| 22nd May | Sundays for non-church families |
| 19th June | Results from the CofE research The Christenings Project with Dr Sandra Millar, Head of Projects and Developments (Archbishops' Council) |
| 10th July | The views of young people – with feedback from some of those those who attend Revelations, the mid-week group for young people from Old Town |
| 11th September | An additional event to pray and make plans for the future! |

As a result...

As a result of the research and the information events, we are now in a position where we recognise that we have lost a generation of children, young people, young adults and young families from Christ Church. This has been due to changes in the way Sunday is used by families, changes in society and the place of the church, changes in the style of worship and gathering which appeals to young people and failure to significantly build on what is working.

There are three parts of our work that are effective in reaching out to and beginning to re-engage with children, young people and young families:

1 Congregations for Children: **Messy Church** is working in that there are a significant number of families who attend. We need to build on this, develop intermediate events which enable this group to continue and meetings [services] which enable the next generation to be part of the life of this congregation. **All-Age Worship** does provide a less formal event for families, but several choose not come, and some adults choose not to come.

2 Christenings are working – we have a large number of people who want to have their child(ren) baptised. We are working to seek a continuing engagement with them. We now need to work on a group/congregational model [eg pram club services etc] which will enable these people to become part of the life of the church, through to when the children can link into Sunday Club [and we need to think of when and where this should be held to be most effective]

3 Christmas services, especially the 10am Advent Services, are bringing into the church a significant number of children, young people and young families. But people are not moving from occasional attendance to being part of the church because there are no relationships built. This is an important process which we need to invest in.

The BIG question PROPOSAL is

Christ Church wishes to re-engage with, and see a new generation of children, young people, young adults and young families as regular, vibrant and essential elements of the life of our Church

¹ Paradigm (noun) a cognitive framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology that are commonly accepted by members of a [church] community (based on dictionary.com's definition <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paradigm> accessed 18Oct14)

² Christ Church with St Mary's Proposal to the PCC concerning the life and growth of the work with CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE and FAMILIES DRAFT 1 ~ Sunday 30th August 2015

³ 'Church' is used from this point forward to refer to all those who attend and see themselves as part of the life and witness of Christ Church with St Mary's Parish Church, Swindon.