



Growing Younger is the Diocese of Birmingham’s initiative to support parishes in their shared commitment to develop a spiritually-enriching children’s and youth ministry in every parish and church school. Growing Younger was initially funded by a three-year Strategic Development Fund grant and remains a core commitment under the Transforming Church vision. Liz Dumain, Director of Parish Mission Support, shares what has worked well.

Liz Dumain is Director of Parish Mission Support in the Diocese of Birmingham. For the past five years she has been working on Growing Younger, the Diocese's initiative to develop a spiritually-enriching children's and youth ministry in every parish and church school.

In 2015 the Diocese received a Strategic Development Funding (SDF) grant which enabled them to support 46 parishes in developing their work with children and young people. As part of the Growing Younger programme, Children and Families Missioners were placed in sixteen of these parishes after much consultation.



'The purpose of the Children and Families Missioner is to make new contacts,' explains Liz. 'There is an awful lot of connecting with the community, developing volunteers, being present in the community and building connections at the fringe level.'

It wasn't, she adds, workers to fill a Sunday school rota. 'This is new mission work,' she says. 'One person used to face paint in the local market. Others joined in and set up new Bumps and Babies groups.'

The Missioners make parish connections and build community, and then work with the parish to develop a discipleship framework to help people build their faith in small steps. 'It's all about the human connection of folks who were on the fringes of faith, who are starting a journey and moving towards a deeper engagement with Jesus.'

But what does that look like?

'What is the next invitation?' asks Liz. 'For those of us who have been around faith for a long time, what we think is a small step quite often is gigantic.'

Just coming on a Sunday can be challenging for many. 'Too often we try to leap people from a social to an invitation to come on a Sunday,' she says. 'In between there are hundreds of small steps. Always knowing what the next invitation will be is important – so as you're saying goodbye to

someone, you're opening a hello into something else.

'We are good at welcoming people into things, but at the end we realise that everyone has gone while we're rushing around putting things away. One of the big things is a really strong goodbye – and I don't mean, 'Goodbye, don't come back.'" She laughs. 'It's goodbye, see you again at the next event.'

Although the SDF funding has come to an end, the commitment to Growing Younger remains with a team now embedded in Parish Mission Support. Covid has undoubtedly had an impact on the work that the Growing Younger team has been doing. Much of the work within the community has had to stop face to face, but churches have become outstandingly creative. A recent online holiday club was attended by more than 300 children, and the team produced a crystal maze style Zoom based escape room for Epiphany called Epiphany Explorers.

And there have been other exciting things as well.

'I've seen a growth in our parishes. I've seen young people lead prayer vigils around racial justice. We have a thriving Bishop's Youth Synod who led our online holiday club, and are planning and leading a new expression of youth led youth work across the diocese.

'We all watch the statistics go by, and the reporting, but each number that crosses my desk represents a person that has taken a step forward in their journey of faith. That is the thing that thrills me. Every number represents faith investing in the future.

'If I'm truly honest, I believe that the greatest highlights are yet to come.'

Watch the full interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SVc5irvH7M>

Sign up for the next webinars:

April 29, 12:30 - Reaching young adults in Yorkshire: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IRR48kjmQC6dHBTonOYKBQ

May 6, 12:30 - Social action in a resource church: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KoPnoGBmSpaodmPxBVsmOW



Find out more about Strategic Development Funding as part of Renewal and Reform, aimed at creating a growing Church for all people and in all places.

