

Sharing the Good News with Children: The Church of England's Children's Strategy

1. We commend the attached Children's Strategy, *Sharing the Good News with Children*, to the General Synod and, through Synod, to the whole Church of England.
2. The Children's Strategy has been developed through a similar process to that adopted for the Youth Strategy *Good News for Young People*, which was whole-heartedly endorsed by General Synod in November 2002. The project has been led by staff of the Education Division and the Mission and Public Affairs Division acting together.
3. Like the Youth Strategy, the Children's Strategy has been developed under two of the Archbishops' Council's four themes (Theme 2: *Equipping to evangelise* and Theme 3: *Welcoming and encouraging children and young people*) and in consultation with the Council.
4. The process began in October 2002, during a residential meeting of the Archbishops' Council in Woking. Sarah Kellagher led Year 4 children from Pyrford Aided School in Godly Play and Kathryn Copsey gave a presentation on the work of CURBS (Children in **UR**Ban Situations) principally with inner city children. Members of the Council engaged in discussion with the children and with Kathryn Copsey. The encounters were arranged by Diana Murrie, the National Children's Officer, and Margaret Withers, the Archbishop's Officer for Evangelism among Children.
5. As with *Good News for Young People*, the Strategy implies a considerable shift and fresh focussing of energies on this

aspect of the Church's work. Diocesan Children's Work Advisers and Missioners / Evangelists have been involved in discussion leading to the Children's Strategy. The Bishops of the Church of England also considered the draft and made a number of positive and helpful comments which have influenced the final text.

6. It is often said in response to the old adage that children are the Church of tomorrow, 'No. They are the Church of today.' That is true. They are a vital part of today's Church. But there is another simple truth: without them, there will be no Church of tomorrow. Amongst other things this strategy hopes to enable their insights and perceptions to shape the Church of tomorrow.
7. Above all, if the Strategy is to make the substantial difference for which all those involved in preparing it earnestly pray and to which we are committed, this hugely significant but under-resourced area of the Church's ministry will need the support of a great many people in dioceses, deaneries and parishes.

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Introduction

The Archbishops' Council has developed the Church of England's Children's Strategy in consultation with the Bishops and others in pursuit of two of its four themes for the current quinquennium: theme two, *Equipping to Evangelise*, and theme three, *Welcoming and Encouraging Children and Young People*.

Evangelism is often linked with churches' work among children. Children who have become alive to the Gospel and to the Church are frequently highly effective evangelists not only to their peers but to their parents and to other members of their families. So theme two *Equipping to Evangelise* is linked with theme three.

Theme three *Welcoming and Encouraging Children and Young People* recognises that the Church must learn from children, because, as the Lord said, it is only if we become like little children that we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven¹. So Christians must listen to children listening to God.

However, in the last 50 years, children's lives have changed radically. The great majority do not attend church or related activities as once they did. Churches need to meet children where they are and encourage them to discover the Gospel in a way that is appropriate to their age and culture, rather than to impose current adult practice upon them. Children are in

¹ Matthew 18: 3

school, so the church's relationship with local schools becomes increasingly vital. Imaginative and fruitful work is being done through schools and after-school clubs. This strategy aims to learn from that imaginative work.

There is another important lesson from schools. In recent years, through the development of challenging targets and above all through the heroic work of teachers, sometimes to their own detriment, rising expectations of what children should achieve in school, albeit in too narrow a range, have been matched by equally dramatic improvements in achievement. Children's education suffers through low expectations. If the Church has low expectations of children's potential, children themselves will have low expectations of the Church's potential for them.

There is also a crucial link with the strategy for church schools, as set out in the Dearing report *The Way ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium*, adopted as the official policy of the Church of England by General Synod in November 2001. Church schools are truly part of the Church and worship there is authentically 'what the Church does'. The Eucharist has increasingly become part of the regular pattern in church schools. School worship can provide a true experience of God for all those who participate as well as giving access to worship for children's families and other adults. There are increasing and encouraging examples of church schools offering routes to and celebrations of Christian initiation for pupils.

Those then who effectively implement this strategy in parishes, deaneries and dioceses will find their imagination and understanding of the Church stretched. The parish church is much more than the gathered worshipping community at ten o'clock on Sunday morning. An eight o'clock BCP Holy

Communion is part of a diverse pattern a church authentically offers. So an end-of-week three o'clock school 'Good news assembly' or 3.45 on a Monday in church tailored for children and their parents, or an all-age nurture group ... the list could go on and on ... could all be part of a diverse pattern a church authentically offers. Strength is in diversity and suitability.

Background

The background of this Strategy is a continuing working out of the far-sighted statement from the British Council of Churches in 1976:

Children are a gift to the Church. The Lord of the Church sets them in the midst of the Church today, as in Galilee, not as objects of benevolence, nor even as recipients of instruction, but in the last analysis as patterns of discipleship. The Church that does not accept children unconditionally into its fellowship is depriving those children of what is rightfully theirs, but the deprivation such a Church will suffer is far graver.²

During the past fifteen years, the General Synod has debated several reports of the Boards of Education and Mission with far-reaching implications for children in the Church:

Children in the Way (NS/CHP 1988) explored the pilgrim model of the Church with children as fellow travellers. It sought to re-introduce children to the richness of worship

² The Child in the Church BCC 1976

through an expectation that they would worship with the adult congregation.

All God's Children? (GS 988 1991) stated that only 15% of children under thirteen years were involved in church-related activities. It questioned whether Sunday was the best day on which to reach un-churched children and urged parishes to explore other means through schools and the wider community. *On the Way (GS Misc 444 1995)* discussed Christian Initiation. This was followed by the House of Bishops' *Guidelines on the Admission of Baptised Persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation (GS Misc 1212 1996)* following a General Synod debate in 1996.

Legislation for the care and education of children, beginning with the Children Act 1989, has transformed work with children. The Government's policy of wrap-around childcare has given the Church new opportunities of service and outreach to children in the community. Changes in guidance on RE have presented opportunities for children to visit local churches as part of their studies.

All these changes, coupled with General Synod's endorsement of a youth strategy in November 2002 *Good News for Young People (GS 1481 2002)* have combined to make it clear that the time is right for the Church of England to adopt a Children's Strategy .

There are four key areas in this Children's Strategy :

- Worship and the Nurture of Children
- Children and Evangelism
- Supporting Ministry among Children
- Training for Ministry among Children.

If this Strategy receives the endorsement of General Synod, it should be a vital strand in the Church's ministry in parishes and the communities they serve, deaneries and dioceses, transforming the ways in which the Church learns from children and nurtures them in their Christian journey and in which Christians young and old reach out to others with the Good News of God's love.

Key area 1: Worship and the Nurture of Children

Introduction:

The Church's primary aim for children is their spiritual development: that they should come to worship, know and love God in Word and sacrament and through personal prayer in pilgrimage with other Christians, in ways suitable to their age, culture and stage of faith.

Aims:

To explore ways in which children are engaged in the worship of the Church, including Eucharistic worship, and to identify and disseminate examples of good practice in the creative use of liturgies with children

To form a judgement about the knowledge the Church might expect children to have of the Christian faith through Scripture, being part of the Church and Christian living, according to their ages, cultures and abilities

To know how best to enable children to make moral decisions and develop a lively and searching approach to values and attitudes in their faith and in society

Reasons:

Children in the Way (NS/CHP 1988) charged the Church to include children in worship, by virtue of their baptism, as full

and equal partners on the faith journey. Progress on this has included some children being admitted to Holy Communion before Confirmation. There are many examples of good practice but too many churches fail to offer diverse patterns of worship suitable for children and yet orchestrate their Sunday services as if they were only for adults.

Churches use a wide variety of programmes for the nurture of those children with whom they are in regular contact. Many have no organised pattern of nurture, relying on the goodwill of untrained parents on a rota basis. Standards and expectations are variable across dioceses and parishes. The Church should come to a mind about the aims of a nurture programme: the knowledge children might be expected to acquire and the experiences they should have and then disseminate creative and effective ways of helping them to gain that knowledge and have those experiences.

The enquiring minds and spiritual openness of young children are or should be a constant challenge and encouragement to those whose minds and spirits have become closed through painful experience. But this openness does not seem to last long. Children's attitudes are largely formed by the time they are eight. The Church's key work starts, therefore, with very young children. Their early, positive experiences of worship and good Christian nurture will help them continue to develop spiritually as they move towards and through their experiences as a teenager.

Key Tasks:

To identify, review and publish examples of good practice and resources for worship with children

To use the information gained from the current review of the implementation of the House of Bishops' Guidelines on Children and Holy Communion to identify and disseminate examples of good practice and make recommendations regarding further developments

To review nurture programmes that are currently available in the light of the following criteria, and make recommendations for future materials:

how the Church helps children to have an encounter with the living God

the information that children need for their basic Christian formation

how the Church helps children face the implications of being a Christian in everyday life

how the Church equips children for their faith journey

how children's ministry benefits the Church.

To find means by which children are empowered to belong fully to their faith communities and to make training and resources available to support this. (The training aspect will also be discussed in Key area 4.)

Process:

This will involve the setting up of two working parties to address Key Tasks 1 and 3. (N.B. Plans are already formed for addressing Key Task 2 above.) Consultations and submissions will be taken from the recommendations of the '*On the Way*' initiative, publishers and producers of resources, diocesan liturgical committees and others as appropriate.

Timetable:

Gather working parties for Key Tasks 1 and 3

2003

Initial Reports from these groups and recommendations for further action 2004
Completion of Children and Holy Communion Review for HOB 2004 (July)
Publication of the findings of Key Task 1 Working Party 2005
Children and Holy Communion Review to General Synod 2005 (July)
Circulation of the findings of Key Task 3 Working Party for 2006 (onwards)
comment, piloting and dissemination

Outcome:

To raise standards and expectations
in the spiritual lives of children
in the nurture and worship programmes of the Church.

Key area 2: Children and Evangelism

Introduction:

The word ‘evangelism’ is used here in the widest meaning. It is about witness by presence as much as about teaching and faith-sharing. It is about being Christ in the playground, or local sports’ club or pre-school as much as in church-led activities. It also involves working with the community by being part of local initiatives and organisations. This has implications for worship and nurture as discussed in Key area 1, *Worship and the Nurture of Children*, as well as for the Church’s relations with schools, children’s organisations and activities in the wider community.

The principal objective is to enable children to hear the Christian story and discover the Gospel in a way that is appropriate to their age and culture. It will be sowing seeds in neglected ground and entrusting the results to the Lord of the harvest.

Aims:

To identify and publish ways in which every parish, according to its situation and resources, can reach out to children in the local community

To promote ways in which the church can work in co-operation with secular organisations

To explore and publish information on the mission opportunities of the local church having a creative relationship with church schools and other schools in its parish

To recognise and promote the evangelistic perspective of worship during children's activities, occasional offices and informal services

Reasons:

Although good work has been done to reach children from outside the Church during the last decade, most of it has remained unnoticed and unreported. The majority of parishes still see their children's work as confined to Sunday morning, within the church building. Moreover, there are few resources to support evangelistic work among children. It is important that the Church embraces the mission aspect of all children's work and makes it an integral part of its worship, nurture and evangelistic programmes.

The Government's policy of providing *wrap-around childcare* has presented enormous opportunities for the development of midweek and holiday activities for children, as well as pre-schools and toddler groups. The demand for higher standards

and training for people working with children has led to local authorities and educational institutions providing training in children's work and related subjects for nominal fees. This last is discussed further in Key area 4: *Training for Ministry among Children*.

The report on church schools, *The Way ahead, (GS 1406 2001)* has highlighted the mission opportunities presented by church schools and the importance of a parish maintaining a creative relationship with all its schools. This needs further exploration and promotion through publications and training.

Worship itself can have an important evangelistic dimension. There is a need to discern examples of high quality worship where the majority of children present have no other experience of it and to provide resources to help clergy and leaders. Such worship falls into three categories:

worship as part of holiday, mid-week clubs, and similar programmes

all-age worship, major festivals, occasional offices, and other special services where children are present, e.g. Christingle services

acts of worship in school, parent and toddler clubs and pre-schools.

Key Task:

These aims will be worked out through in-depth consultancy and training in up to six selected dioceses over a period of three years. The following aspects of evangelism among children will be developed as appropriate:

children's ministry as part of parish development programmes

children as an integral part of parishes' evangelism through

holiday and midweek clubs and children's activities in the community

development of work with under 5s and their parents
creative work on the relationships between parishes and local schools
the evangelistic aspect of good quality all-age worship and other services.

Every programme will include the establishment of training in children's evangelism for voluntary and paid children's workers and as part of CME, especially CME 1-4, and Reader training programmes.

Process:

The key personnel in each diocese will be the diocesan Missioner and Children's Adviser (or equivalent staff). They will work with Schools Advisers and with other colleagues and groups, e.g. children's committee, evangelists, liturgists, the Mothers' Union, to identify examples of good practice, needs and issues, then devising action plans in three principal areas of work with supporting training.

The Archbishop's Officer will act as a consultant and, where appropriate a tutor. She will recommend or provide resources and offer ongoing critical evaluation and guidance.

Each diocese will produce a resource at the end of the project. This could be a report, book of case studies, video etc

Timetable:

Identification of dioceses and personnel to form core groups;
initial discussion 2003

Action plans and research
2003

Launch of each project and publication of training programmes
2003/4

First area of project completed

2004

Work on the project included in proposed GS debate on
Evangelism July 04

Second area of project completed

2004/5

Third area of project completed, and review of project

2005

Production of resources by participating dioceses

2006

Possible book containing material from the projects

2007/8

Outcomes:

More children having opportunities to discover the Gospel in ways that are appropriate for their age and culture

Heightening of awareness of evangelistic work among children that leads to modelling in other dioceses and organisations

Establishment of training for children's workers, clergy and

Readers that will encourage effective evangelistic ministries among children

Increase in practical resources on evangelism among children

Key area 3: Supporting Ministry among Children

Introduction:

At present, the interests, perceptions and capabilities of the clergy and congregation govern the ministry among children at parish level. There is no coherent advice from the Church of England on support and training for ministry among children. This affects the availability and standard of children's nurture programmes and support for parents in bringing up their children in the Christian faith. On the other hand, child

protection legislation and its national acceptance in both statutory and voluntary sectors has compelled each PCC to own its legal responsibilities for the children's work done in its name. This has had some impact on standards of care but this is not enough in itself. If this Children's Strategy is to be implemented, it is essential that the Church provides guidance on the type and quality of support that are necessary for effective ministry among children.

Aims:

To create guidelines on the training, employment, conditions of service and support of both voluntary and paid workers with children and young families

To publish the variety of children's activities in which a local church can be involved and the resources available

To develop structures to ensure legal, moral and financial support for diocesan and parochial ministries among children

To identify ways of supporting parents and schools in the Christian nurture of children

Reasons:

Volunteers undertake the vast majority of children's work.

Many of them have no formal training, neither have they undertaken any substantial study of the Christian faith. It is vital that this valuable ministry is supported, not only by training provision (this is addressed in Key area 4: *Training for Ministry among Children*), but also by realistic funding and encouragement from clergy and PCCs, of the leaders' own spiritual growth e.g. through opportunities for worship, Bible study, spiritual direction and away-days .

At least thirty dioceses have parishes that employ children's and young families' workers, and this number is increasing.

Standards of employment and conditions of service provided by PCCs vary widely. Paid workers need to benefit from the same support as voluntary workers (see above).

Owing to social and educational changes, the dynamic of a church's children's work is constantly evolving. The parish church needs to review regularly the suitability of its nurture and social programmes and its deployment of resources so that it can grasp the opportunities presented by such diverse initiatives as local government projects, changing social needs in a particular area, and innovative resources from Christian publishers and other denominations and agencies.

The Christian nurture of children is a partnership between Church, family and school. This is being increasingly recognised, e.g. through work with young parents and closer relationships with local schools. A key recommendation of the Church Schools' Review Group Report, *The Way ahead*, was the development of the links between the church and local schools and greater lay involvement in this process. But these ministries are too often taken for granted or seen as 'out there'. They need to be linked into the PCC reporting and parish support structures.

Key Tasks:

To propose means of providing appropriate support, including funding, for children's work across the dioceses, deaneries and parishes

In co-operation with the Youth Strategy team, to produce and disseminate basic guidelines for the qualifications, employment and conditions of service of paid workers with children and young families

To review, evaluate and publicise the wide variety of children's activities in which churches can be involved, and to liaise with

publishers and other agencies in ensuring production of appropriate resources

To identify and collate examples of best practice provided by the dioceses and other agencies, e.g. Mothers' Union, on resourcing parents, grandparents and sponsors of young families.

Process:

A crucial part of this process will be collaborative links with the work and results being achieved by

the Youth Strategy team

those involved in Key area 1: *Worship and the Nurture of Children*

those involved in Key area 2: *Training for Ministry among Children*

The accomplishment of this task will be shaped by their findings.

Timescale:

Sharing information with the other Key Task groups and the

Ongoing

Youth Strategy group

To collect best practice data on:

2003

employment of children's workers, as listed in Outcome 1

worship and activity resources and practice - Outcome 2

parental support and school links as in Outcome 3

Circulation of initial results for comment/further action

2004

Final drafts for piloting

2005

Publishing/circulation

2006/7

Outcomes:

A handbook / manual of best practice for the employment of children's workers, both paid and volunteer, encompassing funding, a programme of training and vocational support, for use in every diocese, deanery and parish

A handbook / manual / anthology of creative, flexible and canonical ways of worship and other activities with ample resources appendix

A handbook / manual of best practice of creative ways to resource and support families, working collaboratively with schools in nurturing their children in the faith

Key area 4: Training for Ministry among Children*Introduction:*

Children are fully members of the Church. They are also vulnerable, so their care and nurture should have the highest priority. However, training for this ministry is, at present, optional. Many adults working with children have no substantial training in the Christian faith or in the ways that children develop and learn. Training for ministry among children does not often form an explicit part of formation for ordained ministry, or the training of Readers or that of other authorised ministers.

Aims:

To identify and establish the key skills and learning outcomes that should be part of training for adults working with children in the Church

To make it possible for every children's worker to have access to appropriate training and for such training to count towards a recognised result, including formal accreditation

To make training for ministry among children part of clergy and authorised ministerial training through CME and Reader programmes

To encourage the development and use of accredited training provided by local authorities and Higher and Further Education Institutions for both paid and voluntary children's workers

Reasons:

It is highly desirable that those responsible for nurturing children in the Christian faith should have appropriate skills, values and knowledge for this important ministry. At present, training is optional and is not necessarily available.

The training of clergy, authorised ministers and children's workers is patchy in quality, content and availability, e.g.: twenty-seven dioceses provide some training through CME programmes

every diocese holds day courses connected with children's ministry

thirty-one dioceses provide extended courses for children's workers.

The most common subject is child protection; the least common are evangelism and using the Bible.

An increasing number of parishes and deaneries are employing staff to work with children and young families. The vast majority of these are untrained or trained for youth work, which requires different knowledge and skills. There is a demand for recognised training for such people. At present, only four dioceses offer in-service training for such workers

and there are only two validated courses in Christian children's work.

The Government's Early Years' Development and Childcare policy has led to higher expectations, including training, being required of people working with children. The Church needs to offer similar standards in its children's activities if its outreach in the community is to be effective.

Key Tasks:

To identify the key skills and values required by those working with children

To devise a basic core curriculum of knowledge and skills which every diocese should adopt, implement and resource, in co-operation with Christian education and evangelistic agencies

To make known the many National Vocational Qualifications and other similar courses which Local Education Authorities provide for those who work with children

To encourage Church colleges and universities and other institutions to respond to the increasing demand for accredited training in children's ministry by providing courses up to and including degree level through courses and distance learning

Process:

Report and make recommendations on the completed survey (May 2002) on provision of diocesan training in children's work

Research and make known the large amount of appropriate training that is provided by local authorities and similar bodies

Establish the key skills and values needed in order to nurture children to the criteria identified by work on Key Area 1, *Worship and the Nurture of Children*

Set up a working group, consisting of experts in child development, spirituality, curriculum planning, Christian nurture and adult education to identify the core skills and knowledge that all children's workers require and then make these known to those involved in the delivery of training and production of resources

Work with Church colleges and universities in establishing full and part-time and distance learning courses at all levels in children's ministry

Timetable:

Complete the report on the survey in children's work
2003

Research and collate the training that is provided by LEAs and similar bodies

Support the development of an HE level Certificate in Children's Ministry
2004

Respond to the work in Key area 1, by producing a paper on key skills and values

Establish and publish a core curriculum for training
2006

Dioceses to adopt, implement and resource the recommended criteria
2006

Work with Church Colleges to establish diploma and degree courses
2007

First Diploma in Children's Ministry awarded
at latest by 2008

First Degree in Children's Ministry awarded
at latest by 2009

Outcomes:

The provision of coherent and accessible training programmes in each diocese will raise the profile of the ministry and improve the standard of children's nurture in parishes.

Leaders of children's evangelistic activities will be encouraged to gain basic nationally recognised qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications. This will enable these programmes to be registered with local authorities and attract publicity, advice and funding.

The provision of accredited training in children's ministry will go some way towards ensuring that those who are employed by dioceses and parishes in children's work have appropriate qualifications and experience.

It will be possible for Christians who respond to a vocation to work with children in a Church context to make this a career with professional status.