



Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households

Themes Emerging from the Call for Evidence: Briefing Nine *Children and Young People: caring for vulnerable children, enabling children and young people to thrive, and the teaching of faith*

The Call for Evidence

The Commission launched its Call for Evidence in October 2021 as the first major step in our inquiries. It provided an opportunity to engage with a wide range of people aged 18 and over, faith communities, and organisations working with children and families in England in thinking about some of the key issues relevant to the Commission's work. These are described in our first Briefing paper.¹

We are analysing the responses thematically and sharing the emerging themes through a number of discrete briefing papers. In reporting the emerging themes the Commission is not commenting on them at this stage, but simply sharing them with a wider audience while using them to inform our thinking and to guide the various Commission activities that are taking place to dive more deeply into the evidence.² The briefings we share may well spark additional conversations, which we would welcome.

About this Briefing

The Commission is examining the factors that promote strong relationships, stability, safety and sustainability within families and households and the conditions in which children can thrive and reach their full potential. The Commission explored a number of questions in the Call for Evidence to help us understand these factors. In Briefings Six, Seven and Eight we reported on the responses to questions about the factors in family life that either help or inhibit children and young people to flourish, looking specifically at mental health issues, protection from harm, parental neglect and youth violence. In this briefing we turn our attention to responses to questions about children who cannot always be looked after by their birth parents; the ways in which families can be supported to enable children and young parents to thrive; and how the Church of England and other faith groups can support the development and teaching of faith.

We invited respondents to provide examples of initiatives and programmes locally and nationally that are known to support families. We received information about a range of initiatives and programmes which the Commission is reviewing carefully as it undertakes further evidence-gathering activities. We are very grateful for all the responses we have received.

¹ *Themes Emerging from the Call for Evidence: Briefing One - The meaning of family*, March 2022

² *ibid*



Thinking about vulnerable children and young people who are not able to live with their birth parents and may be looked-after formally or informally, in your personal or professional experience, how can we ensure that appropriate kinship care or alternative family provision is in place and well-supported?

Context

Out of the 12 million children living in England, just under 400,000 (3%) are in the social care system at any one time. More than 80,000 of these children are children in care.³ The social care system exists to ensure that children who are not able to grow up in safe, stable and loving homes with their birth parent(s) are provided with alternative arrangements that can support them to flourish. It is recognised that a number of factors create major challenges for parents. These include: poverty and inequality; domestic abuse; mental health; substance misuse; and immigration and asylum. Other family events, such as serious ill-health, death of a parent, and relationship breakdown can also de-stabilise families.

Deprivation is known to be a contributory causal factor in child abuse and neglect and poverty is closely interconnected with wider factors associated with child abuse and neglect, such as poor parental mental health and domestic abuse.⁴ Violence between parents remains the most common factor identified at the end of assessment for children in need.⁵ The evidence suggests that substance misuse is also strongly linked to deprivation, with 56 per cent of people in treatment for crack and/or opiates living in areas ranked in the 30 per cent most deprived areas in England.⁶

Coram has reported that of the 80,000+ children in care in England, on 31 March 2021,

- 71% (57,330) were living with foster carers (16% in a foster placement with a relative or a friend, 56% with a foster carer who is not a relative or a friend)
- 14% (11,550) were living in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living
- 7% (5,910) were placed with their parents
- 3% (2,270) were placed for adoption
- 2% (1,860) were living independently or in residential employment
- 70% of looked after children had one placement in the year, 21% had two placements, and 9% had three or more placements.⁷

³ National Statistics (March 2022) Main Findings: *Children's' Social Care in England 2021*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2021/>

⁴ Bywaters, P., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., Hanratty, J., Mason, W., McCartan, C., & Steils, N. (2016). *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: An evidence review*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

⁵ Department for Education (2021)

⁶ Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (2021)

⁷ Coram BAAF (2022) <https://corambaaf.org.uk/resources/statistics/statistics-england>



- Moreover, when children are removed from their parent(s), siblings may not always be placed together and can lose the support that being in a sibling group can provide.

The Chief Executive of Coram has told the Commission on Families and Households that there is not enough consistency in adoption and fostering and that a continuum in social care is urgently needed. The Conservative government made a commitment in its 2019 Manifesto to commission a review of the care system, and established an independent review in March 2021. Josh MacAlister, the Chair of the Independent Review of Social Care,⁸ has stated that:

*‘How we care for our children is a reflection of our values as a country. When we get it right, children’s social care allows children and families to flourish - it can be a reflection of England at its best’.*⁹

The MacAlister review, published in May 2022, has concluded that:

*‘This moment is a once in a generation opportunity to reset children’s social care. What we need is a system that provides intensive help to families in crisis, acts decisively in response to abuse, unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children, puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise. For these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable.’*¹⁰

This review calls for a whole system change and indicates that *‘without a dramatic whole system reset, outcomes for children and families will remain stubbornly poor.’*¹¹

Within the context of increasing numbers of children entering the care system and concerns about its appropriateness, in our Call for Evidence we asked ‘how can we ensure that appropriate kinship care or alternative family provision is in place and well-supported?’ Here we recount the main themes that have emerged from the responses to this question.

Provide more support for families who foster or adopt

A number of responses highlighted the need for families who look after children to be better supported, and referred to the lack of support from professionals with heavy caseloads:

- *Support families who adopt or foster children and make sure the special needs of these children are adequately met*

⁸ MacAlister, J., (2022) *The Independent Review of Social Care: Final Report*
<https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/>

⁹ Ibid, Foreword

¹⁰ Ibid, Executive Summary <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Executive-summary.pdf>

¹¹ ibid



- *Have more family support workers*
- *Emotional and practical support. £££ for mainstream carers needs to be increased. (We are foster carers). Parenting classes regarding trauma and therapeutic techniques*
- *Our family has an adopted son who is severely disabled. We adopted 7 years ago. Any support which used to exist is no longer in existence. We haven't had a single day of respite in the past 7 years. Financial support is minimal, and certainly not sufficient to meet our needs. Everything is a fight and a struggle. There is little support for care leavers when they age out of the system. Families who foster and adopt need massively more help and support. The system is at breaking point, or has possibly broken already. Social workers have huge and unsustainable caseloads*

Support for kinship carers

It has been recognised that finding alternative support for children and young people within their own family network is usually preferable to placing them with strangers, but a number of responses suggested that kinship care is not well-supported:

- *There is often little support available for kinship care. The Local Authority may have some duties to support some kinship carers but they do not always receive financial, practical or emotional support. Often a gap exists*
- *Make provision for weekend respite support to be more readily available*
- *We need the early presumption that family where possible is the best place for children where they cannot live with their birth parents. More use of special guardianship*
- *More support and access to therapy is needed to support anyone offering kinship care*
- *Provide ongoing support to the carers, child and parents and ensure that truth is at the heart of this and the truth is a shared truth for everyone, and the child does not feel blame for the circumstances they find themselves in*

Provide adequate statutory care

Many of the answers to our question focused on the perceived inadequacy of the social care system and some called for increased financial investment from local and central government as well as ensuring that professionals have smaller caseloads:

- *Councils and the government need to ensure that the funding for this is high on their agendas*
- *Fund local authority social care departments properly. How can a social worker give anything like proper care when they sometimes have upwards of 100 children in their portfolio?*



- *Ensure these services are provided by government and not private providers making profits*
- *Fund it [social care] and give social workers smaller caseloads so they can keep a closer eye on the cases they have. Use and fund charities ... to support children. Engage more partnerships between organisations*
- *[Make] adequate provision for sufficient well qualified social workers to ensure adequate, caring and timely assessments*
- *Through partnership working with health and social care, ensure that vulnerable children and young people are placed with the most suitable and appropriate family once all the correct checks have been carried out and the family is able to meet the needs of the vulnerable individual, and systems are put in place to support and monitor both the family and child, including their religious wellbeing*

Ensure support for children and young people

While many of the respondents focused on the care system and the need for support for carers, others highlighted the need for children and young people to be supported when they are involved with the care system:

- *Keep them [children] in contact with birth parent/s where appropriate and safe. Provide safe spaces for meetings*
- *Acknowledge and support those [children] in this position e.g. explicit acknowledgement that not all children live with birth parents, refer to 'carers' as well as parents, or 'the adult who looks after you/you live with'. Recognise the particular needs/challenges of looked after children and their carers. Be sensitive e.g. on Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day - use inclusive language, acknowledge adoptive parents, foster carers etc. ... Encourage church members to be aware and maybe to consider fostering if appropriate*
- *Give children advocates who can speak on their behalf in the system, provide access to mental health resources and extra school support if needed*
- *The looked after children are the forgotten ones, they often have a really hard time adjusting. Many foster parents are very good, but children's homes are just awful*

The role of the church

A few responses included comments about the role of the church in supporting vulnerable children:

- *My experience as an adoptive parent in church is that people do not support you. They see the children's behaviour and judge both the child and parent. People like to support*



the families with “easier” children. Churches could help with sensory spaces, alternative ways to worship and promoting acceptance

- *Fostering programme and Christian adoption agencies still need more support from churches and wrap around care for such families. A vision for churches to have family care centres, that provide local care and support for foster and adoptive parents would be wonderful. But this requires funding and training, and collaboration with local agencies*
- *As a couple we have had several instances where we have tried to do this [fostering] but found that Social Services are suspicious of Christians getting involved*
- *People in my church and my family are involved in fostering and in adoption. Church and state organisations that provide fostering and adoption services need to be well supported*

Talk about fostering and adoption

As with answers to previous questions about children and young people, the Call for Evidence respondents pointed to the importance of talking about fostering and adoption, expressing a view that issues which are sensitive are not talked about enough:

- *As much as we can, make sure that this family is a good fit for the child, talking more about fostering/adopting in society, in church, in colleges etc., just getting it more out there so potentially [there] can be more families/couples that can do this*

Summary

The overall themes emerging from the responses have been the call for more support for children, foster parents and adoptive parents, and the belief that the current social care system for vulnerable children is not adequately resourced. In many ways the responses echo the conclusions drawn by the MacAlister Review.

Nevertheless, several respondents acknowledged that caring for vulnerable children is a complex task:

- *[It is a] very difficult problem to deal with: it needs great personal responsibility and understanding and the church can provide this, but it's better if the church and the social services for young folk can work together to support these very difficult young folk. Patience and care are the two greatest criteria*
- *This is just very complex and difficult. There are no blanket "right" answers. We have to do our best to love. We should ask ourselves hard questions about our own motivations. We need to be brave. We need to be willing to give our all ...*



There is also recognition in the responses that working in partnership across the statutory, voluntary and faith groups can do much to support children and young people:

- *Close working partnerships with school, charities, church, community groups, social services, if engaged properly will cover the provision children need*

Several respondents suggested that organisations such as ‘Home for Good’ and ‘Safe Families’ can be extremely helpful in providing a faith-based response to supporting vulnerable children, and that each provides resources that the church and faith groups can use. The Commission is engaged with each of these organisations.

In your personal and professional experience, how can families be supported to enable children and young people to thrive and reach their potential?

Context

In our Call for Evidence we have focused on asking questions about how children, families and households can be supported to flourish. Respondents have given their views about tackling difficult and sensitive issues such as relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, parental neglect, gang culture and youth violence. We explored what is understood by ‘flourishing’ in Briefing Two, and heard that basic needs must be met as a priority, and that safety, security and support are essential if individuals and families are able to flourish. Many answers to our questions have referred to the importance of love and belonging as essential ingredients in everyone’s life.

In 2020 the Early Intervention Foundation published its report on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and concluded that a set of 10 adverse experiences in childhood are associated with an increased risk of poor health and other problems in later life.¹² The ten original ACEs are: physical, sexual and psychological abuse; physical and psychological neglect; witnessing domestic abuse; having a close family member who misused drugs or alcohol, or who has mental health problems, or has served time in prison; and parental separation or divorce.¹³ While ACEs occur across society, they are far more prevalent among those who are poor, isolated or living in deprived circumstances. These social inequalities not only increase the likelihood of ACEs, but also amplify their negative impact.

Other adverse childhood experiences such as bullying at school and having a disability can also lead to poor outcomes. Over the past 20 years, ACE research has shown that the greater the number of ACEs experienced before the age of 18, the greater the chance of poor outcomes in adult life.¹⁴

¹² Asmussen. K., Fischer. F., Drayton. E., and McBride. T., (2020) *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Summary*, Early Intervention Foundation

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*



Given the challenges children and families can face, we asked respondents to the Call for Evidence to consider how families can be supported to help children to flourish and reach their potential. We report here on the key themes that have emerged from their answers, some of which were very detailed.

Encourage learning opportunities

A number of answers drew attention to the importance of education and the need to encourage children to learn:

- *Education! Education! Education!*
- *Families must encourage children to seek learning opportunities and be encouraged by parents, teachers and family members to follow their interests. Community institutions and schools must provide a wide range of subjects, academic and otherwise for children to experience and develop their interests. Breaking down barriers to learning and barriers to trying new areas are key to opening horizons for children. ... Higher-Education is important. Family should play a mentoring role to provide direction and career advice. Family members and teachers should guide the young children to use their potentiality to reach their desired career and potentiality*
- *Provide more education in life skills*
- *Children need relationship skills. These are not taught at school nor are there good healthy examples of them in public life - this is critical to a child's learning. We need to show and teach relationship skills*
- *[We need] a substantive evaluation of what our schools provide for children and young people, and how this addresses the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century is crucial if we are going to make a fundamental difference*
- *We need to lobby for equal access to education for all regardless of gender, background and ethnicity*

Provide support for parents

The majority of responses included reference to the need to offer support to parents and carers:

- *Educate and equip parents to build strong relationships, overcome challenges and avoid family breakdown. Develop policies and financial support so parents / carers can be present for children in a meaningful way. Ensure children are given basic nutrition through school feeding programmes*



- *Where parents are struggling, help, support and mentoring should be provided. Where parents have SEND children, or children with mental health issues, the support for those children should be automatically there*
- *So much of media, news, and information is based on the premise of wrongdoing. What if the basic assumption was that most people are doing it mostly right more of the time so that there was more encouragement being shared!*
- *More funding is needed to help families thrive without children being removed and without families turning down support for fear of children being removed*
- *[Provide] Kids clubs that provide a break for parents; family events so parents can do things with their children; parenting classes. ... poverty is the biggest issue. And also proper help for parents of SEND children. They have to fight for everything*
- *[Provide] more support for parents to grow with their children; more support for parents to not be too financially disadvantaged if they choose to spend more time with their children rather than going out to paid work!*

Early Intervention and relationship support

Alongside support for parents there was a plea by some respondents for earlier intervention, especially in support of relationships, and not waiting until there are problems to address before help is offered:

- *Many services can play a valuable role in strengthening early relationships, which are critical for early development. For families facing the most severe and complex challenges to early relationships, more specialised support is required. We believe these families should be able to access specialised relationship support through a parent-infant relationship team*

Value everyone and show love

The answers to this question demonstrated a good deal of concern for parents and families, and a willingness to support them to thrive whatever their circumstances:

- *Wherever they are they need to know about disability and make sure that they see potential, and not dismiss these families as only needing help*
- *Keep families together wherever possible. [Provide] suitable accommodation and take them out of poverty. [Promote] activities that make them feel valued and increase self-esteem*
- *Educate social services to teach parents the valuable exercise of making their children feel valued*



- *Physically cuddling and loving in very young children [is essential]. Have supportive and responsive relationships. Ensure they do not have sources of stress. Children should] have a good healthy diet, and be cared for and feel safe*
- *Accept them [children] just as they are, inspire them to invest in their personal passions and Jesus, and then they already are their potential. Establish what is important in 'reaching your potential' and that this isn't about grades or things that society have taught to be important, but the very things that Jesus spoke about. Loving people and having good character being a few of them*

Provide resources for children and young people

A substantial number of responses highlighted the need for there to be a wide range of resources and activities available for children and young people, several citing the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme, the Scout and Guide movements, sports clubs, after school clubs, and martial arts clubs:

- *[Provide] more groups and support services in the locality - so many of these have been cut or have a cost attached to them. Urgently address the lack of youth resources and healthy spaces for them to be ...*
- *Provide and fund extra-curricular opportunities and activities. Fund arts, music and drama education. Support more vocational training*
- *Make sure children and young people have equal access to education and support to enjoy healthy extracurricular activities*
- *Keep extracurricular activities affordable and open to all - whether after school or at weekends- no one should feel excluded due to cost*
- *[Provide] mentoring schemes to raise aspirations*

Listen to children and young people

There were several responses that emphasised the importance of listening to children and hearing their voices:

- *Listen to them. Spend time with them*
- *In the context of separated families, children need to be given a voice, to be heard, to have their views taken into consideration when decisions are made which affect them*

Address poverty

Embedded in some responses was a call for government to address poverty and inequalities in society:

- *Equality of access to services and basic needs; tackle government systems that are in place which hinder people living in poverty to thrive as a family and as individuals*



- *Universal Basic Income would unlock physical and emotional availability in adults, to better support and protect children*

Summary

The answers to this question were primarily calling for more support for families, parents and their children. This support included early intervention and parenting programmes, and supportive activities for children that are readily accessible and affordable for all. Education is seen as a key resource which can inspire children and young people to strive for their potential in whatever form that might take. The message that everyone should be valued and shown love permeated the responses.

The responses also emphasised the importance of team work:

- *Team work - no one person has all the answers. If families are encouraged to work together with those with expert skills then they can feel safe and build the skills to help their children*

The Mother's Union provided a very detailed response that emphasised these themes and listed a number of programmes and initiatives which have been shown to support children and families to thrive. These will be considered by the Commission as it gathers further evidence.

Thinking about spirituality and faith in children's lives, from your experience or that of your organisation, how can the Church of England and other faith groups support the development and teaching of faith?

Context

The Call for Evidence asked several questions about the role the Church of England and other faith groups can play in supporting individuals, families and households to flourish. The responses have suggested that many people believe that the church and faith groups have a vital role to play in their communities in supporting families and households and that they could do more than currently.

The Commission is aware that the numbers of families attending the Church of England has diminished in recent years and questions have been asked about how children and young people learn about spirituality and are brought to faith. A survey carried out by Brierley Consultancy on church attendance (as opposed to membership) for the period 1980-2015 found that Church attendance had declined from 6,484,300 to 3,081,500 (equivalent to a decline from 11.8% to 5.0% of the population).¹⁵ It has been estimated that with a continued rate of decline at this level, the number of UK-born Christians would reduce to zero by 2067.¹⁶

¹⁵ Brierley Consultancy <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>

¹⁶ *ibid*



Inevitably, the coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on churches and church membership given that most were closed and services switched to being on-line.

Since the National Society for the Promotion of Education was founded in 1811, the Church of England has had a long and respected history of involvement in education: currently around one million children attend the **4,632** Church of England schools in England. Moreover, about **15 million** people alive today went to a Church of England school. While pupils and staff in church schools come from all faiths and none, religious education (RE) is a highly valued academic subject that enables understanding of how religion and beliefs affect our lives. At the heart of RE in church schools is the teaching of Christianity and pupils also learn about other faiths and world views.

The Church of England's vision for Christian education is that it should be educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills; educating for hope and aspiration; educating for community and living well together; and educating for dignity and respect.¹⁷ Some of this education is currently offered by school chaplains who work in all kinds of schools, including in non-church schools, although there is no one single model for school chaplaincy. Chaplains come from different backgrounds, some are clergy and some are lay people, some teach and others do not, some combine their chaplaincy with another role, for instance leading a local church.¹⁸

In addition to supporting the emotional wellbeing of pupils and staff, school chaplains aim to build a bridge between the school and church, and between the school and the wider community, including other denominations and faith communities. The school chaplain might be the main and, often, only contact some pupils have with the Church. It is important to note, however, that chaplaincy support is not universal and there is considerably more chaplaincy involvement in primary than in secondary schools due to the school numbers in each sector. The Church of England Growing Faith Initiative is seeking to bring together church, home and school.¹⁹

Through chaplaincy there is an Anglican presence in the vast majority of England's Higher Education Institutions: there are around 1,000 people providing chaplaincy support to staff and students in higher education establishments. In this way, children and young people can have access to faith-based support throughout their journey to adulthood. However, there is a paucity of chaplaincy in the Further Education sector – a situation which the Church of England is actively seeking to address. *'In line with the Church of England's role as the established Church, our vision is for the common good of the whole community.'*²⁰

¹⁷ The Church of England: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/vision-education>

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ See: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/renewal-reform/growing-faith>

²⁰ *ibid*



At a time of considerable change as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the rising cost of living, and the initiatives of the Church of England to grow faith in local communities, in our Call for Evidence we were keen to know how the Church of England and other faith communities can support the development and teaching of faith. We received information about a number of programmes which we are taking into account during our continuing evidence-gathering activities. The key themes that have emerged from the responses to our question are reported here.

Reflecting modern daily life

An important theme relates to the belief that the teaching of faith needs to reflect the experiences faced by young people today:

- *Emphasis on broadening the out of school curriculums and educational institutes can help the younger generation to resonate with the content and develop life skills in areas not previously focused on. Ensure learning offered is reflective of the current challenges faced in society by the younger generation with regards to their faith and its relevance to modern life. Follow an up-to-date and appropriate curriculum for Faith and culture awareness education*
- *Invest in creating a solid children and youth faith development programme with trained and inspiring youth workers rather than just a "baby sitting" service; use a variety of learning styles and educational technology to engage a very digitally savvy audience; combine online, digital and in person experiences; combine creative activity and age appropriate conversations / presentations; develop a mentoring programme*
- *Provide online resources and apps targeted to kids*
- *Work with schools and local authorities to ensure the same core messages are given to families. Make resources relevant to modern living. Demonstrate the value of Christian values.*
- *Provide plenty of opportunities for families to learn and grow together. Keep in touch after Baptisms and marriages. Learn to fit in with today's way of family life so that families are able to access activities and services*

Some respondents acknowledged that children and young people today have less exposure to the teaching of faith than in the past: and therefore church services need to adapt:

- *Young people today have less experience of faith environments than in the past and can be scared away by our formalised Christian services until they see the love and joy that living with the Holy Spirit gives us*

The following detailed response set out the need for leadership that encourages church services and activities to adapt in order to be inclusive of young people:



- *We need a clear lead from bishops and other faith leaders to remind and re-enforce the idea that families, children and young people are as much part of the church/faith community as everyone else. If young people are going to develop faith and spirituality they need opportunities that are both age appropriate and culturally appropriate for them, including Sunday school, youth groups and appropriate church services. Within the Church of England there needs to be a clear understanding that expecting children and young people to develop faith by being part of BCP/common worship services written for and aimed at adults is insufficient and communicates a lack of understanding and a lack of valuing children and young people. Providing support and training to young people who are enthusiastic about faith so that they can share their faith with their peers is also important. Often Christian young people feel isolated at school and experience conflict between their own values and the values they experience at school. They can feel equally isolated at church where they are expected to fit into a culture dominated by older people who are out of touch with the younger generation. Prayer spaces in schools, school chaplaincy, and national events such as Spring Harvest and Soul Survivor all contribute hugely to young people's spiritual development.*

Talking about faith

In addition to ensuring that faith teaching and church services are relevant to today's young people and their families, several answers referred to the importance of talking about faith at home, in schools and in church:

- *Just talk about the basics that all faiths have in common i.e. love and connection, and the possibility that there is 'more' to life and how that may be experienced*
- *Encourage parents/carers to talk about faith at home - lots of resources such as 'Growing Faith', 'Faith at Home', 'Parenting for Faith'. Provide opportunities for children to learn about faith e.g. Sunday or midweek groups for children, Messy Church, holiday clubs with a faith theme. Engagement and partnership with local schools e.g. offering support with seasonal services, assemblies, RE and PSHE teaching, running an after school or lunch club to look at faith/spirituality. Make church very accessible for children and families e.g. maybe offering a shorter, interactive service that is particularly suitable for families with younger children*
- *Education about all faiths is valuable, but must be done in such a way that it is an academic look, not religious instruction.*

Being active in the community

A large number of responses talked about the importance of church and faith groups being active within their communities and taking faith teaching out to communal spaces where families gather:

- *Be proactive within the local community. Clergy support surgeries. Provide activities like youth clubs and holiday activities to engage with young people. Sunday schools. Go into*



schools increasing accessibility, other outreach activities

- *Be involved across the community. Offer things for children and young people which don't cost money*
- *Work closely with schools and education. Connecting into community groups and statutory services*
- *Create safe spaces in places where children and families can gather safely; fund support workers. Also not just on a Sunday – it has to be every day and wherever people are*
- *Children no longer have faith expected of them. Many parents s have never been to church and as one family said when we were open as part of a local park activity "WOW its lovely in here do you have to pay to come here". It is easy to see that expecting children to come to church is not going to happen. We need to take Jesus out to them*

Fostering an intergenerational culture

Some responses drew attention to the value of taking an intergenerational approach to teaching about faith and spirituality, particularly as it may be the older grandparent generation who are more likely to be church goers:

- *Encourage a culture of intergenerational learning. Have adaptable and adaptive ways of teaching and enabling access to the Bible and learning the faith. Fund and support church music and musicians*
- *Support learning together e.g. whole family groups for confirmation and first communion; options for grandparents to learn with grandchildren*
- *Provide plenty of opportunities for families to learn and grow together. Keep in touch after Baptisms and marriages. Learn to fit in with today's way of family life so that families are able to access activities and services*
- *[Take] a holistic approach to appeal across generations, offer a style that suits all ages, keep the family together until things are familiar and they can trust the wider group. At that point they would all be more confident to split up and do individual, age-related activities. It all takes time and effort to pay dividends*

Being active with children and young people

A key theme from the responses was the need to be active with children and young people, engaging them directly in a variety of activities:

- *Run clubs and Sunday schools in the churches. Offer to go into local schools to help with assemblies and clubs. Our church youth worker runs a basketball session at a local primary school. We have also offered a Bible story exhibition in that school. In another*



school we ran a weekly lunchtime club with a Bible story and craft activities which the children thoroughly enjoyed; we also invited the local school to a 'Christmas Experience' in the church, in which they interviewed King Herod, Mary and the shepherds at three different stations.

- *Start in junior schools. 'Open the 'Book'; Godly play. Bible story time. Have more head teachers at infant junior level who are of a faith*
- *'Open the Book' has taken Bible-stories into primary schools through local teams of people acting them out. This is a brilliant initiative because it's not exclusively aimed at church schools, and when they say before the prayer: "If you want to make it your prayer, say amen", it gives children the choice to participate or not.' ...*

Welcoming children and young people

Respondents highlighted the importance of children and young people being made to feel welcome and church activities being inclusive. Some respondents indicated that they felt this is not always the case:

- *Let them [children] know they are welcome and belong in the church family just as much as adults. Encourage and develop their sense of awe and wonder: e.g. at being in a beautiful church building, seeing the beauty of creation, enjoying making music. Provide age-appropriate teaching and socialising activities. ensure adults in the church do not put other people's children off by complaining about their presence*
- *Include children as readers of the Bible passages in church, being servers in services, delivering intercessory prayers, being part of the welcome team in churches*
- *Talk to the children in a language they can understand and be attracted to*
- *Start with their inbuilt sense of wonder and spirituality. Children have much to teach adults*
- *Bring children back into the heart of the church family and stop excluding them on a Sunday morning. This is so outdated, and damages the ability of a family to worship together and share their faith journey ... Equip and support families to nourish their children's faith*
- *Actively engage with young people. Youth workers they can relate to are brilliant but even more importantly is acceptance by the wider church, a willingness to let them have a go at things, older members being cheer leaders for them & befriending them*



Summary

A very small minority of responses to this question challenged whether the church should be involved in the teaching of faith to children and young people. They suggested that it is up to children whether they wish to be engaged in learning about faith and spirituality and, if they do, then they can find out about them on their own and without the church and faith groups being involved. The vast majority of respondents, however, were keen that the church should do more to introduce children to the scriptures and Bible stories. There was consensus in these responses that children should be welcomed and included in activities both inside and outside church buildings and that schools should include information about different faiths in their curricula. The Mothers' Union, for example, recognised that, in their experience, *'children are instinctively spiritual and this needs to be encouraged in the early years'*.

Respondents mentioned a wide range of resources that are available for children and young people, as well as activities such as Godly Play. There was support for church buildings to be open *'so that people can go in even if it's to eat lunch in a safe place'* or having candles available that children and young people can light. The emphasis, many people told us, should be on creating child-friendly churches that are visible in local communities through outreach – being seen to care and offering activities that support families.

There was a clear message in the responses about the need for the teaching of faith to be appropriate for today's young people who are very skilled at using online and social media sites:

- *The pandemic has provided an opportunity for us to provide a variety of resources and opportunities for families alongside their children to explore faith through the 'together at home resource and other similar initiatives*

Professor Janet Walker OBE
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