Youth and Children Growth research

Research amongst churches which have grown in their under 16 Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) 2014-2019

Sample: 217 churches
Jan-April 2022
Between the years 2014 and 2019, of the 12,203 parish returns in 2019, only 431 (3.5%) of churches met our metric as growing churches, growing in the number of under 16’s reported within the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA), Average Weekly Attendance (AWA), and Usual Sunday Attendance (USA), and had each of these at least 10 in 2019, and had 2019 values bigger than 2014 values for all three measures.

12,203 parish returns

All 431 growing churches were invited to participate in a 25 question, online questionnaire as part of the quantitative element of the research. This asked them about their understanding of what had led to the growth and what challenges they had faced in the process. 217 of the 431 churches inter to participate took part in the questionnaire.

This happened between 10th January – 11th February 2022

217 churches (50.4%) 214 non responsive churches

Of the 217 churches that responded, those that indicated they were willing to take part, were invited to participate in a further piece of qualitative research on a first come first serve basis. This happened in batches so as to ensure a good spread of location, area type, church tradition, as well as changes that have taken place and challenges faced (as reported as part of the quant survey)

20 (9.2%) 197 churches

Through this process, 20 churches participated in a 45 min interview with Savanta, exploring further the factors that had led to growth and how challenges had been addressed.

This happened between 21st March – 8th April 2022
SAMPLE BREAK DOWN FOR 217 CHURCHES IN QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

CHURCH TRADITION

- Conservative Evangelical: 13%
- Charismatic Evangelical: 29%
- Open Evangelical: 14%
- Evangelical (other): 8%
- Middle or central church: 23%
- Liberal catholic: 16%
- Traditional catholic: 6%
- Other: 6%
- Cathedrals: 1%

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENT

- Incumbent/ Rector: 77%
- Youth, Children or families worker: 8%
- Associate/ Assistant vicar: 4%
- Curate: 2%
- Church Administrator: 1%
- Youth & Childrens volunteer: 4%
- Other: 8%

LOCATION

- City/town centre: 29%
- Estate/other urban: 23%
- Suburban: 26%
- Market tow/ Rural: 15%
- Remote Rural: 6%

DEPRIVATION/AFFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH

- Very deprived area: 13%
- Deprived area: 16%
- Narrowly more deprived area: 14%
- Narrowly more affluent area: 21%
- Affluent area: 29%
- Very affluent area: 6%
**COMMITTED LEADERSHIP THAT SEES YOUTH AND CHILDREN’S MINISTRY AS AN ESSENTIAL PRIORITY IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR GROWTH**

In most cases, senior leaders had been key drivers behind the growth of youth and children’s ministry. Sometimes this looked like support and empowering, as well as broader vision setting for the church.

**GROWTH IS THE RESULT OF INTENTIONAL CHOICES**

Churches that have leadership committed to the vision of growing the ministry have made a host of successful changes and initiatives. This has encompassed a range of activities, such as toddler groups, craft activities, Messy church, mum’s groups and (sometimes pooled) youth groups.

**EMPLOYING A YOUTH OR CHILDREN'S WORKER IS THE BIGGEST COMMON FACTOR TO GROWTH**

Employing a family and children’s minister is considered a key turning point for many churches in the growth of the children’s and youth ministry. Churches are eager and willing to commit to the vision of growing the children’s and youth ministry and see the recruitment of like-minded people, be that paid staff or volunteers, as integral to that success.
ENGAGEMENT FROM THE WIDER CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL TO GROWTH

Churches that grew often reflected the importance of the youth and children’s ministry being supported and developed by the wider church, rather than just paid staff or clergy.

Churches reported that the biggest challenge they faced was a lack of volunteers.

RELATIONAL INVESTMENT IN FAMILIES (AS OPPOSED TO DIRECTLY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE) WAS A COMMON THEME AMONGST GROWING CHURCHES

This either looked like reaching out to families as a whole through projects such as toddler groups or messy church, or investing in supporting and welcoming parents.
PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH NEED TO BE TACKLED HEAD ON AND INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS DISCUSSION CAN HELP

Churches need to be willing to adapt and change to be more accommodating to young people, children and families.

Often the best way to achieve this is in discussion with the young people, children and families within the church.
SUPPORT IS NEEDED, EVEN IN GROWING CHURCHES AND IS WIDER THAN JUST FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Churches need more support to achieve their vision. This goes beyond the financial support that is needed for recruitment, repairs and available space and includes training processes, support around safeguarding and shared resources.
Three quarters (76%) of churches describe their engagement with children and young people as through church families with children and young people.

The majority (52%) of churches engagement is with junior school age children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Babies &amp; Toddlers (0-4)</th>
<th>Children (5-10)</th>
<th>Youth 11-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>7 (21%)</td>
<td>17 (52%)</td>
<td>9 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 (24%)</td>
<td>30 (45%)</td>
<td>20 (30%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where does growth come from and what does it look like?

- We have church families with children and young people.
- We've developed new ways of engaging children and young people within our church community in the past 5 years.
- We've always invested time and resources into engaging families with children and young people.
New people moving into the area, children born to church-going families and growth from invite are all consistently selected as the top primary contributor to growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>New people moving into the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46%</td>
<td>Children born to church going family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Growth from invite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>People coming to church for the first time outside of attending with their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Transfer from other local churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>People returning to church having previously attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Change affecting school admissions (eg. Ofsted results)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

When asked what the top contributor to growth was, peer to peer outreach was the highest answer:

- Growth from invite (peer to peer outreach) - 43%
- Children born to church-going families - 46%
- New people moving into the area - 47%
- People coming to church for the first time outside of attending with their family - 33%
- Transfer from other local churches - 26%
- People returning to the church having previously attended - 22%
- Changes affecting school admissions (eg. new Ofsted results) - 6%
- Other - 16%

Top 3 reasons for growth:

- Growth from invite (peer to peer outreach) - 49%
- Children born to church-going families - 52%
- New people moving into the area - 53%

"We've got the children as part of the craft one week making invitations for a school friend, so every child that comes to Pulse, our after-school club went away with an invitation to give to another school friend, who then came along with their parents. We've got the Easter break now but we're hoping that those families who came and had a great time will come back again after Easter and join us.

St Mary w Emmanuel, Hailsham
Talking Jesus (2021) found that non-Christian adults felt significantly more comfortable talking about faith if it happened on multiple occasions and one the top follow-ups was an invite to church.

After Christians had a conversation with a non-Christian about their faith, 19% invited them to a church service (third highest response).

Non-Christians felt significantly more comfortable and positive if Christians had multiple conversations about faith, as opposed to just one.

How did you feel following an initial conversation about faith?

- I felt comfortable in the conversation: 75%
- I felt more positive towards Jesus Christ: 35%
- I wanted to know more about Jesus Christ: 23%
- I was open to an experience or encounter with Jesus Christ: 10%

How did you feel following an additional conversation about faith?

- I felt comfortable in the conversation: 90%
- I felt more positive towards Jesus Christ: 92%
- I wanted to know more about Jesus Christ: 96%
- I was open to an experience or encounter with Jesus Christ: 87%

The Talking Jesus research report can be found at www.talkingjesus.org.
Influencers: Peer evangelism amongst young people in the UK (2021) found that Christian young people (13-18) were most likely to invite a non-Christian friend to church. While 35% of young people said they had never invited a non-Christian peer to something, 93% would be willing to invite them to something.

Which of these would you be happy to invite a non-Christian connection to?
Total respondents 459

- Church: 56%
- Christian youth group: 38%
- Christian festival or camp: 32%
- Prayer group: 31%
- Sunday school or similar: 28%
- Bible or other study group: 28%

Thinking of the friend you invited to something, what did you invite your non-Christian friend to?
Total respondents 149

- Church: 72%
- Christian youth group: 45%
- Bible or other study group: 33%
- Christian festival or camp: 30%
- Sunday school or similar: 27%
- Prayer group: 25%
- Christian group online: 15%
- Course e.g. Alpha: 14%
- Social media with a Christian focus: 12%
- Closed messaging group e.g. WhatsApp: 11%
- Something else: 1%

The Influencers research report can be found at www.hopetogther.org.uk/Influencers
WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Church leaders measured youth and children's growth primarily in numbers:
- Numerical Growth: 58%
- Increased weekly engagement of young people: 45%
- Perceived spiritual growth: 41%

Increased youth and children's activities: 34%
Increased wider involvement in the church: 29%
Increased numbers of volunteers: 24%
Increased numbers of confirmations and baptisms: 13%

The majority of churches focus on activities separated by age rather than intergenerational activities:
- Mainly Intergenerational activities: 13%
- Tend to provide Intergenerational activities: 13%
- Tend to provide activities separated by age group: 40%
- Mainly provide activities separated by age group: 30%
WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Sunday School, Family services and parent and toddler groups were the most common run activities in growing churches

- **Sunday School**: 83%
- **Family services**: 77%
- **Parent and toddler groups**: 68%
- **School engagement (curriculum based)**: 64%
- **Serving on a Sunday**: 57%
- **Youth small groups**: 49%
- **Community engagement**: 39%
- **Outreach events and courses**: 35%
- **Children or youth services**: 33%
- **School engagement (pastoral support)**: 33%
- **Bible studies**: 30%
- **Messy Church**: 28%
- **School engagement (church based admissions policy)**: 27%
WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- **19** Choirs
- **19** Social action projects
- **18** Uniformed groups
- **17** Mentoring
- **16** Open Access groups (e.g., games evening focussed on community engagement)
- **14** Outreach programmes
- **12** Bell ringing
- **12** Open the Book
- **11** Other
- **10** Leadership programmes
- **6** External programmes (e.g., academic support, programmes with at-risk young people)
Two thirds (64%) of churches that run small groups regard them as very effective in engaging children and young people with the church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth small groups</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messy Church</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children or youth services</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family services</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and toddler groups</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible studies</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving on a Sunday</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>School engagement (church based admissions policy)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach events and courses</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School engagement (curriculum based)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School engagement (pastoral support)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?
COMMITTED LEADERSHIP THAT SEES YOUTH AND CHILDREN’S MINISTRY AS AN ESSENTIAL PRIORITY IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR GROWTH

“It's just trying, just making the effort, you know? The vicar and the volunteer that started the 5:30 family service, when they started it they announced it and the first week nobody turned up, but they agreed, 'We'll keep going until Easter'. Then the next week four turned up, and it kept growing to where the church was full, and you had more at the family service than you did at the two previous services.”

St Michael's Church in Middleton

Who, if anyone, initiated the choice to increase ministry with youth, children and families? (Those that made an active choice to engage more -190)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vicar</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Congregation (Sunday)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Staff (Families)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishioners (Sunday)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thinking of your parish clergy and leadership now compared to 2014 which of these are applicable?

- We have a different incumbent: 45%
- Our clergy team has grown: 33%
- Our Senior clergy has additional leadership roles: 24%
- We have specific oversight and investment in children's and youth ministry: 12%
- We have planted churches that are part of our benefice: 8%
- We have more churches in our benefice: 7%
- We have been planted from another church: 7%

Who, if anyone, initiated the choice to increase ministry with youth, children and families? (Those that made an active choice to engage more -190)
88% of churches said growth was the result of an active, intentional choice, as opposed to something that happened organically.

**Was this an active choice?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(All respondents 217)

It is important to point out that this isn't evidence that change in itself leads to growth, but it’s the kind of change that matters.

Being intentional about it, but also it's got to be deliberate. **You've got to be intentional about doing children's and youth work.** Adults, generally speaking, will come to church, regardless. But I think children and families particularly, you've got to explicitly provide something for them in order for them to feel like it's home, and they want to come … I think a combination of the leadership being actively involved and us being very intentional about going about it.

St John's Ellel
EMPLOYING A YOUTH OR CHILDREN’S WORKER IS THE BIGGEST COMMON FACTOR TO GROWTH

82% churches that employed a youth, children's or families worker report this as a very important change in growing the youth and children's ministry.

- 82% Employing a youth, children's or families worker
- 74% Increased emphasis in working with families
- 64% Changes in church style or programme
- 64% Increased investment by adults in the wider church
- 61% New church leadership
- 61% New volunteer led youth and children's initiatives
- 53% Increased funding or support
- 42% Increased emphasis with current school links
- 36% New engagements with local schools
- 33% Support from an external organisation
- 25% Parachurch organisations
- 14% Increased local population

"Having somebody paid to coordinate the youth side of things and devoting time to that, I think that's made a difference. ... our children's worker has been here maybe eighteen years, or something like that. I think that's a long term investment that starts to pay off."

St Stephen, Selly Park
ENGAGEMENT FROM THE WIDER CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL TO GROWTH

“It's paramount, it's absolutely paramount for us. It's a key priority. It's our key missional priority for how we engage with the wider community, and it's a key priority for the congregation in terms of its self-understanding of mission and how it resources mission.”

Holy Trinity, Weston

I think strong leadership with good support and encouragement and increasingly that becomes challenge as well. So, it becomes other people taking on a leadership, which is pushing me rather than me pushing... as the people who take on leadership change in terms of who they are. Then I think I become the one who is being challenged more than doing the challenging. Which is a really good dynamic

St Chad, Wolverhampton

We've been blessed with an awful lot of people coming and joining us in the last couple of years, and I think they've caught our vision of we really want to invest in the younger generation, so we put out a giving campaign over the last four years for our children's worker role and the money came in for it. So, we haven't really had to apply for grant funding for our children and families minister roles at all, so far, just because our congregation's been growing and people have given to a vision which they believe in.

St Andrew & All Saints, Malvern & Wyche
The most popular change (57%) churches have made in order to grow is increasing their emphasis in working with families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased emphasis on working with families</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to church style or programs</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New church leadership</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased investment by adults in the wider church</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing a youth, children's or families worker</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased emphasis in working with existing school links</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New volunteer led programmes</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New engagement with local schools</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our worker, only joined us last autumn ... part of our objective for year two of her work was to try and create some more family events in the summer ... barbecues and that, so we can bring both parents together, because when things take place in the morning, there's often one parent who's working ... our objective is, to bring all our children's worshipping communities together at certain events, so we can have a big celebration, so people understand that even though they might not attend church on a Sunday morning, they are just as much valued members of the church community.

St Augustine, Slade Green
PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH NEED TO BE TACKLED HEAD ON AND INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS DISCUSSION CAN HELP

“I think the church has got a huge, what we might call a sort of credibility issue with that whole debate. Regardless of which side of the argument, we’re not to take sides, but whatever you believe about God's intention for human relationships and sexuality, there's a job to be done with our young people, to bring them along in that conversation, I think. Because that is a credibility issue. So I think, you know, one of the things young people crave is authenticity and relationship. And if we're not authentic and real with our young people, then they'll look for that elsewhere. So I think that's a huge one.”

St John's Ellel

“they feel like it's okay to be here because there are children around and the clergy have got children and people needed lots of reassurance and yes, I think we underestimate maybe, that we think that people know they're welcome and they don't necessarily.”

St Peter, Earley
Reflecting on challenges churches had personally faced when looking to grow, 70% of churches said finding volunteers was the biggest challenge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of volunteers</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of available finance</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and children's retention</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of space</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

However when considering what might help other churches overcome barriers to growth, half (51%) said financial support would make the most difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Support</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support around recruitment (volunteers or paid staff)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved connections to young families and parents</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection vision to the wider church</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More training and support</td>
<td>32%</td>
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</table>

Very often, especially with the older group, volunteers look at the material and they'll need more help with it or they won't feel confident about it … one of my volunteers said, ‘I feel like I need the sort of skills to be a teacher and I'm not a teacher and I don't have the right skills,’

St Peter, Earley
When considering what might help other churches grow, there was only a small contrast between churches from affluent and deprived settings as to how much they felt finance made an impact on growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affluent</th>
<th>Deprived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of volunteers</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While lack of volunteers and lack of available finance were the two biggest barriers, in both affluent and deprived settings, the need for volunteers was seen as a significantly higher issue than finance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affluent</th>
<th>Deprived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of volunteers</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of available finance</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
KEY TAKEAWAYS

CHURCH LEADER PRIORITISES YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRY AND MAKES INTENTIONAL CHOICES TO INITIATE GROWTH

VISION IS CAPTURED BY THE WIDER CHURCH WHO SHARE AND PARTAKE IN THE MINISTRY

A YOUTH OR CHILDREN'S WORKER EMBEDS THE MINISTRY AND MULTIPLIES GROWTH