

## **Project title:**

# **‘Being church all together most of the time’: Faith and Belonging among Children in Hybrid Intergenerational Church in Haslingfield**

What is the impact of a hybrid intergenerational model of church, including Forest Church, on the belonging and faith development of children?

## **Introduction:**

The term hybrid intergenerational model has been coined for this research project to express the way that we seek to work towards intergenerational church whilst acknowledging that there are limits to what can be achieved in our context. We seek to be ‘church all together most of the time’. But we feel we need to maintain some services largely unaltered and make space for age-appropriate discipleship on one Sunday morning. This term is an acknowledgement that we are attempting to alter culture but will not achieve a full intergenerational model, and are instead exploring what can be achieved in a hybrid model.

Despite being hybrid rather than fully intergenerational, inclusion is a fundamental concept in our church context. This applies to all ages, backgrounds, needs and abilities and neurodivergence.

We seek to explore the impact of this model on the belonging and faith development on children, with an interest in the place of Forest Church.

## **Context:**

The context of this research project is a rural Anglican church which is part of a team of eleven networked worshipping communities. The church is in a village approximately six miles south-west of Cambridge, and as such the village houses a number of young families, whilst also making it easy for them to opt to choose a church of a certain worship style in Cambridge. Before Covid-19 the church had a thriving Sunday Club three Sundays a month. Since Covid-19 we have been exploring, out of necessity and theological imperative, ways to include children and young people in the heart of the church. The church welcomes an average of thirty five worshippers on a Sunday morning with about a quarter being children and young people. The relatively small size of the

worshipping community is a strength when it comes to developing an identity of church family of all ages together.<sup>1</sup>

The church has long been welcoming to children and young people, but recently we have sought to be intentional in including them in the heart of the church and worship through adjusting the service pattern to ensure that they have provision every week, and over half the time they are in joint worship with the adults, and under half the time their provision is age-separated. This allowed us to maintain the traditional pattern of services expected by the existing congregation, but to adapt some of them to make them more accessible, whilst leaving others in their traditional form. This aims to honour all members of the congregation to worship in a way that suits them most of the time.

This research deliberately refers to children rather than children and young people, as there is an extra provision for young people of secondary age from external partners (West Cambridge Christian Youth Ministries or WCCYM). However, the young people were invited to join the children in taking part in the research as their insights are equally valid and give a different perspective on their journey so far than the children.

### **Background of Intergenerational Church:**

There has been an increase in research and interest on this topic recently,<sup>2</sup> including recently published works *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church* by David M. Csinos<sup>3</sup> and *Being An Intergenerational Church: Practices to Bring the Generations Back Together* by Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip.<sup>4</sup> Much of the scholarship is American and recent

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<sup>1</sup> This is supported by the Church of England's research: "Respondents from smaller churches reported more personal change. This was only a slight difference, but it suggests that larger churches may not always be at an advantage in helping members grow spiritually."

The Church of England, 'Transformation in the Kingdom of God: Introducing the Fruitfulness Framework for Fresh Expressions of Church'

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions/what-greenhouse/measuring-impact> Church' [accessed 24/01/24], p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, *Intergenerate: Transforming Churches Through Intergenerational Ministry*, (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Suzi Farrant and Darren Philip, *Being An Intergenerational Church: Practices to Bring the Generations Back Together*, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2023).

British contributions come from the Methodist Church<sup>5</sup> and the Church of Scotland<sup>6</sup>. Thus, there is a pressing need for a greater Church of England contribution to this discussion. (Excellent books on all age inclusion by Ally Barrett<sup>7</sup> and Margaret Pritchard Houston<sup>8</sup> are two exceptions to this).

Intergenerational church has been defined by the leading theologians on the topic, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, as:

Intergenerational ministry occurs when a congregation intentionally combines the generations together in mutual serving, sharing, or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the body of Christ to each other and the greater community.<sup>9</sup>

The theory is based on bringing back together the generations who have been separated in age-segregated ministries.<sup>10</sup> Inter-generational church differs from multi- and cross-generational offerings: multi- suggests polite interaction and tolerance and cross- suggests some sharing and listening but little 'collective transformation'.<sup>11</sup> However, in intergenerational church this goes deeper: there is 'comprehensive mutuality, equality, and reciprocity' this making transformation more likely.<sup>12</sup> It is not necessary to always have all the generations present,<sup>13</sup> which is important for rural Anglican churches where there are likely to be missing generations, especially the younger ones.<sup>14</sup> The first task for churches is to consider how they are configured now, whether it is generationally or intergenerationally.<sup>15</sup> This awareness is in itself is a big step, as many churches have never had cause to examine how they are set up with regard to the generations. Disagreements may be less differences than adherence to the way things have always been done:

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in this book of global conversations the two UK contributors were Gareth Crispin and Ed Mackenzie: Malan Nel, *The Generative Church*, ed. by Cory Seibel (Wipf and Stock, 2019), pp. ix–x.

<sup>6</sup> Farrant and Philip (2023), cited above.

<sup>7</sup> Ally Barrett, *Preaching with All Ages: Twelve Ways to Grow Your Skills and Your Confidence* (Canterbury Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Pritchard Houston and Sandra Millar, *Beyond the Children's Corner: Creating a Culture of Welcome for All Ages* (Place of publication not identified: Church House Publishing, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Christine Lawton Ross and Holly Catterton Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship, First edition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP USA, 2012), pp. 17–18.

<sup>10</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> 'Rural Mission', The Church of England <<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/rural-mission>> [accessed 22/01/24].

<sup>15</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 20.

'[these views] reflect deeply held, and often unquestioned, theological commitments.'<sup>16</sup> Thus, the theory behind this concept is that all generations can come together to be lifelong disciples walking together and sharing their faith together.<sup>17</sup> This research seeks to explore whether this can be adapted in a hybrid model for the rural Anglican context.

This is not something that can be fallen into accidentally or by default: intergenerational church embodies an outlook, a vision or 'Kingdom culture', that is more than the activities we do, but rather who we are as church and how we see ourselves.<sup>18</sup> Thus, intergenerational church is an intentional approach to nurturing the discipleship of all generations and in doing so it can nurture the spirituality of children and help in their belonging in church. The work of John H. Westerhoff III continues to be important in understanding children's faith and the place of the whole church in nurturing it<sup>19</sup> and his faith stages are still used in understanding children and young people's faith development. Westerhoff emphasises that Christian nurture is not about *education* but about *enculturation* (my italics). We learn through being part, ideally the centre, of the community: 'For faith, it is therefore especially important to acknowledge that the most significant and fundamental form of learning is experience.'<sup>20</sup>

### **Rationale for Question:**

According to the definition of intergenerational church above, our church cannot claim that we consistently combine the generations, although we are deliberately attempting to shift the culture and some of the worship pattern. Thus, the question seeks to explore the role of belonging in a hybrid intergenerational model, and how children's faith develops in such a context. Coupled with this, the role of Forest Church as an outlier beyond the Sunday morning service, and a 'Fresh Expression', will be explored in the context of the hybrid intergenerational model. Belonging is central to children's sense of themselves at church. Faith development is of course vital to the discipleship of children in any church context, but here we seek to explore whether 'being church all together most of the time' will effect their faith development, and if any further steps are needed to support this.

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<sup>16</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Madeleine Albert, workshop on 'Intergenerational Worship', 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Albert, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Third Revised edition (Harrisburg, PA : Toronto, Canada: Morehouse Publishing, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Westerhoff, quoted in Houston, p.80.

## **Methods:**

### **A) Children's Focus Group 1**

Seeking the voice of the children was a priority in this research so we started with a children's focus group which asked questions with answers that they could answer kinaesthetically on a spectrum (e.g. 'I feel like part of the church': stand at one end of the room, by the 'agree' sign, if you agree, the other end, by the 'disagree' sign, if you disagree, or somewhere in between). This allowed everyone to express an opinion without having to speak or write if they did not want to. Those who chose could articulate their reasons for standing where they were, which in turn provoked a general discussion which others joined in. This was a reasonably successful kinaesthetic method of including everyone, though on reflection some children and young people with neurodivergence may have found the spectrum difficult over an absolute answer. It did however include all children and young people even if their particular needs meant they did not always have full cognitive understanding of the questions. Where this was the case, a special meeting was also held with the parent / carer to fully include the voice of that child / young person.

The questions that were addressed at this focus group included:

'I can serve at church' (agree / disagree / stand between)

'I learn about God at' (home / church / stand between)

'I pray to God at' (home / church / stand between)

'I worship God at' (home / church / stand between)

### **B) Parents/ Carers' focus group**

After a Forest Church session we hosted a guided discussion with loose, guiding questions for the parents / carers as key stakeholders in understanding their own children's sense of belonging, and particularly their faith development. While the children played in the Glebe, we had hot chocolate and open discussion about the following:

1. Their view of the hybrid intergenerational model: benefits, challenges and the impact it has on belonging, and faith development
2. Their view of how their children develop faith
3. Their view of how the church can better support them with this
4. How they see Forest Church fit into this

This informal discussion allowed us to cover much ground and take the discussion in organic directions. It did require management to ensure that one or two voices did not dominate. Follow up conversations were held subsequently with parents / carer who were unable to be there.

### **C) Questionnaires for adult church family**

To aid in the understanding of the larger church family of the hybrid intergenerational model and to gain their views and suggestions for this, we wrote a questionnaire for the adult church family. This could be completed online or on paper, to ensure that no one was excluded from participation, and we deliberately ensured all demographics were represented. The questions asked in the questionnaire were as follows:

#### **Questionnaire for the adult church family**

- At All Saints' we are trying to welcome the **children and young people** to be **involved in the services** as much as possible.
- This is inspired by an '**intergenerational**' approach to church.
- This means the children and young people are involved in the services on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays.
- On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday they have **age-appropriate discipleship** in **Sunday Club**.
- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday most families attend **Forest Church**.
- Sarah is doing some research into how this approach impacts the **belonging** and **faith development** of children and young people.
- We would love to have your views below. Thank you.

1. What helps you feel you belong in church?
2. What do you think helps the children and young people feel they belong in church?
3. Do you have any memories of what helped your faith develop, or any people who were significant in this?
4. Can you think of ways to foster dialogue across the generations in our church family?
5. Have you ever been to Forest Church? If not, would anything encourage you to try it?

The uptake of this questionnaire was excellent. Over three months we had 21 responses, in a congregation which averages 30-35 including children and young people. We can be confident that most opinions were represented.

## **D) Children's focus group 2 (open questions)**

It was important to conclude with the voice of the children, and in particular give them the chance to express how they encounter God without leading questions or suggestions. This presented a challenge with the variety of ages and needs of the children and young people, but we were able to listen to the voices of all the children and young people, with the support of adults for those that needed it. The brief the children were given was as follows:

Please can you write down, draw, or get a grown up to write down.....

'What helps me to encounter (meet) God? How do I know him?'

I don't want to give you answer to choose from as I want the answers to come from you!

Think about services, and prayers, and other ways..... Try to give me detail if you can!

The children then had the opportunity to respond however they chose: some wrote a list, some combined pictures and writing and others (especially younger ones) talked with an adult who wrote down or drew their ideas, sometimes creating a picture together. It was important that this was an open-ended task where the children and young people could respond with their answers in their way.

### **Findings:**

#### **Belonging**

There was an overwhelming sense from all demographics consulted and surveyed that there is sense of belonging amongst children. Their views most importantly show this in their discussion about the church building and the church as a family. There is a palpable sense of ownership over space in the church: dedicated spaces such as tables and the creche area are always available, and children can move freely between these. Toddlers who come to church were observed bringing their parents into the church, clearly understanding that it is their space. One child articulated that the large wooden door was a barrier to some coming into the physical space of the church, and suggested we make a 'welcome' banner to mitigate this. Being in the body of the church building for two to three Sundays out of four clearly gives the children the sense that it is as much their space as the adults. Importantly, the adults do not just accept or tolerate it. The majority welcome it. Their survey results made very little reference to the possible disturbance that may come from children being in the body of the church most of the time; where they did most said they did not mind. No one stated this as a reason not to employ a hybrid intergenerational

model. Overwhelmingly the adults welcome the children to share the space and rejoice in their presence.

The children articulated clearly and strongly that they already wanted to share their gifts with the church family and serve in church. They came up with a number of ways that they are already doing this. These included playing music in church, doing the Bible readings, cleaning, moving chairs, helping tidy the hymn and service books away, and more generally “I help people”. This is an area that is crucial to belonging and suggestions for how to give children and young people more responsibility will be discussed below.<sup>21</sup>

The children and young people, and the adults, articulated that they could develop relationships with others in the church. Ways of doing this exist in the services and over refreshments; further opportunities will be explored below.

The sense of the church as people was important to the children and young people and they strongly considered themselves as part of this. A profound moment came when hearing the voice of a young person with additional needs (through his mother). Church is where his friends are when they are together: it does not matter if they are in the café for Café Saintz (our monthly youth provision), in the Glebe for Forest Church, in the vestry for Sunday Club or round tables in the church for other services. To this young person there is no distinction as church is the people. His sense of belonging in all those places, with his friends, was palpable.

Overall, the findings overwhelmingly suggest that the children and young people have a firm sense of belonging in both the church family and the church building.

## **Forest Church**

The research concerning Forest Church was equally conclusive but not in ways that were expected. From the adult perspective, it was seen as separate from church. This is probably because of its afternoon timing and that it started as a children’s ministry during Covid-19. Thus, it is still seen as a children’s ministry despite attempts to present it as intergenerational. Almost all adults said they would only go with children or grandchildren. Two have tried it without children or grandchildren. One person said that they were not sure that they would be welcome, so the messaging of welcome to all needs reiterating. Some adults do not see it as ‘church’.

The adults and children who do go “love it.” It is a valued ministry for those who attend and most children named it in helping them connect with God, expressing clearly the importance of creation

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret Pritchard Houston, and Sandra Millar, *Beyond the Children’s Corner: Creating a Culture of Welcome for All Ages* (Place of publication not identified: Church House Publishing, 2020), p160-1.



and worshipping in it.<sup>22</sup> Practical, tangible activities such as praying with giant bubbles were cited as ways of connecting to God.

The adults who do go (parents / carers) articulated the value to their children, and some also mentioned its importance to themselves. They were keen to integrate older generations and had a fruitful discussion on how to differentiate the ministry and welcome other generations. (For a while we did have an older person who came and the mutual benefit to her and the children was clear). Differentiation has been tried since with clearer advertising emphasising that all are welcome, and adaptations that have been made. So far this has not led to other adults without children coming along. There is clearly an entrenched view that this ministry is for the children; adults are glad it happens but do not feel it is for them, or the time does not work for them. Clearly it is part of our provision in supporting children and young people's fellowship and faith development. It may remain as such, as an 'outlier' in our hybrid intergenerational pattern, or over time we may succeed in welcoming other generations and thus offering further intergenerational opportunities.

### **Faith Development of Children and Young People**

From the children's perspective, they valued both church and home as opportunities to connect with God. There was a range of views on which was most important, but both were valued. They considered learning about God happened at home as well, as did prayer, but worship was mostly at church. There was a variety of responses depending on the children and young people.

When asked how they connected with God, the children's responses were very interesting and not necessarily what had been anticipated. A majority cited what could be considered 'symbol-centred' approaches to faith, according to the spiritual styles of Joyce E. Bellous.<sup>23</sup> Examples included candles and stained glass windows which featured heavily in responses. Without suggestion from adults, the children also referenced taking communion, particularly their first communion, as ways they encountered God. Some children are not admitted to communion (through choice) and one of them referenced the prayer of blessing at communion as being significant: being "prayed on." One child said, "communion made me feel more involved in God." These are mostly ways of connecting that we need to be in the church sanctuary (as opposed to Sunday Club or at home) to achieve. A majority of children mentioned Forest Church and Sunday Club (including "playing and colouring at Sunday Club") as being important ways of encountering God, adding weight to the

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<sup>22</sup> This is supported by research on how outdoor worship supports our rituals indoors and "soaking up creation" supports our faith. Rachel Summers, *Wild Worship: Discovering God Through Creation*, (Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew, 2019), p.6.

<sup>23</sup> David M. Csinos and Joyce E. Bellous, *Children's Ministry That Fits: Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Nurturing Children's Spirituality* (Wipf & Stock, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), pp. 125–43.

accepted idea that age-segregated provision is still very important within an intergenerational,<sup>24</sup> or indeed a hybrid intergenerational model. It would be difficult to provide this age-specific discipleship and fellowship during the week, so the children go out to Sunday Club once a month, as well as gathering at Forest Church. This is why we have termed the pattern of services 'hybrid intergenerational'.

Our established practice of having activities related to the service at tables at the centre of the church building was seen as important for the children, as one child said, "having something to do with my hands helps me concentrate and learn more". This is established pedagogical theory,<sup>25</sup> but not everyone in the wider church accepts this, some thinking that children should always been seen to follow the service from the book and stand up and sit down in the appropriate places.<sup>26</sup> Our adult congregation did not express this view in the questionnaires and seem to understand the need for the children to access the service in their own way, especially if they are in the service the majority of the time. The adults were very supportive of the tables with activities on, and unexpectedly the only difficulties expressed were concerning when it is acceptable for the adults to join them. Some adults would also like to access the service this way: everyone does at the All Age Service but in other services it is usually just children. This opens some important questions for future consideration. Our decision to use tables at All Age is underpinned by the need for people of all ages, needs, learning and faith styles to access the service their way. This could then be extended to more formal services as well.<sup>27</sup>

The researchers expected the children to reference music and the Bible stories more than they did: the examples above outweighed references to these, though they were mentioned by a few children. One child mentioned appreciating "appropriate songs" and finding the words of some hymns difficult to understand. This is well known and despite efforts to address this we can always do more as we balance the preferences of the whole church family. It was interesting that the children did not say the same of the liturgy which is used at the fourth Sunday inclusive communion service (we do try to use the shorter communion prayers and sometimes use the prayers used at the children's First Communion).

The older children and young people referenced connecting God in other ways and times through other provisions. In particular, a Christian holiday camp that some older children and young people attend, and the area youthwork provision, WCCYM, were mentioned. This raises interesting

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<sup>24</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p.134.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Pritchard Houston, p.62.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Pritchard Houston, p.62.

<sup>27</sup> Csinos and Bellous, pp.125-43.

questions about the multiplicity of provisions that can contribute to the children and young people's faith development: home is crucial, as is church which provides the belonging and church family with (hopefully) many opportunities for connection with God. However, the older children and young people also benefit from these other provisions which are clearly significant in their faith development. With the young people, the provision from outside the home and church allows them to explore and own their faith in a way that a small rural church may not be able to provide. There is an important lesson here for small rural churches: partnering with other provisions to support the faith development of older children and young people can be a strength, and opportunities for churches and other providers to work together can be sought and exploited.

The range of perspectives, from children and adults, about whether faith development is for church, or home, or both was interesting. We have a responsibility to provide a space and opportunities for worship and faith development in church, even if this is usually within the main service, alongside monthly Sunday Club and Forest Church. We also have a responsibility to support families in their faith journeys together at home. This is a careful balance as families are very stretched and any indication that they 'should' be doing more at home would not be helpful or well received. But providing opportunities for conversations about this, and resources to support it for those who would like, are important steps.

### **Adults' Perspectives**

The adults were overwhelmingly supportive for the children being in the church body during the services. Only one expressed appreciation of when children are out at Sunday Club as making it easier to concentrate. The majority are happy that people are "tolerating noise" and "not tutting" as has been the case in the past. One parent still preferred the previous weekly Sunday Club age-separated provision, but appreciated the opportunities in the monthly Sunday Club and Forest Church provide for fellowship and mutual support.

Adults made suggestions for how to better support the children and young people in their faith development, for example they offered to pray for children and young people and become ad-hoc spiritual mentors.

The majority think that friendliness and hospitality are key to the welcome and belonging of children, and indeed all people coming into church. There was a genuine interest in children and their faith development. Adults cited a number of influences on their faith development: Sunday School teachers, mentors, friends, vicars, family members, nighttime prayers with mother.

One person said that “the welcome is important but actually just the feeling of the presence of the Trinity gives a sense of belonging.” This underlines the importance of being in the centre of the church building and family during the services, rather than being segregated into a different space.

Many adults identified welcome by name and being given service materials to everyone, including children. This reflects the work we have done as a congregation to be intentional in welcoming all ages. This is supported by research that underpins children’s belonging in church.<sup>28</sup>

Suggestions such as church picnics, meals and social opportunities were made, and will be followed up. There will be a need to ensure that in such gatherings the ages do not automatically segregate. Most adults recognised the work we are already doing as a church community to include the children and young people and supported this, for example the discussion during the All Age Service gives the opportunity for genuine intergenerational faith sharing. An example of this at Palm Sunday (discussion round tables) included children’s perceptions of Jesus riding a donkey refreshing and challenging some adults existing ideas. There was also some scepticism: “I think it would be unusual for the ‘young’ to integrate beyond a superficial level.” Attempts at this can still be made and opportunities explored.

Adults identified music as being important way of integrating into church and sharing gifts: the deliberate attempt to include musicians of all ages, which we do at two services a month. They mentioned similar jobs to the children, for example reading and collecting books.

The overwhelming support of the adults for the hybrid intergenerational model was in some ways surprising but very gratifying that the adults are on board and the efforts we have already made towards culture change are beginning to bear fruit.

### **Changes so far:**

As a result of the research over the last year, we have made some changes, mainly to better support families with their faith development at home. We have adapted our half termly mailings to include not just service times and information, but also resources to support faith development; offers to meet for support and signposting to other websites etc.<sup>29</sup>

Coffee at the end of the service is a time when intergenerational mixing is possible but traditionally has not happened. Some older church members have been deliberately going to sit with the children and young people to develop relationships with them. As mentioned above, we have seen

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Margaret Pritchard Houston, p.56.

<sup>29</sup> An example of the resources we signpost is GodVenture: <https://godventure.co.uk/> [accessed 22/01/24].

sidespeople always offer books to all ages and welcome all by name, which is a culture change from previously.

### **Future Plans:**

As adults have offered to pray for children and young people, we can formalise this through setting up a scheme, possibly a prayer box for them to put prayer requests in, anonymously if they prefer.

We are planning to start a book exchange where faith based books, Bibles and devotionals can be borrowed so families can try different materials and be supported in talking about faith at home.

On feedback from the adults, we could consider more tables for the traditional services as well as the All Age Service, to allow adults who prefer to access the service this way.

Socials are an important method of supporting intergenerational relationships. We can introduce meals and picnics for the whole church family, on the suggestions of “intergenerational social gatherings.” Care will need to be taken to ensure that they do not become age segregated (for at least some of the time, recognising that peer support and fellowship is also important to all ages).

Developing more intergenerational musical opportunities would support these relationships.

When analysing our hybrid intergenerational offering against the criteria on p.3 (inter-, cross- and multi-generational church)<sup>30</sup> we are still most often a cross-generational church, with moments of transformation in an inter-generational sense. This may be a consequence of the hybrid model, but also a reflection that we are on a journey. This could be a consequence of the hybrid intergenerational model. An important change that could allow children and young people a greater stake in the church, beyond the superficial, would be to take the serving the children and young people offer to a different level through inclusion in decision making. This could be through garnering their views on a topic and feeding back or inviting them to visit the PCC.<sup>31</sup> We are making plans to include the voice of children and young people in the production of a team profile for the appointment of our next team rector.

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<sup>30</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Pritchard Houston, p.159-60.

## Recommendations:

Themes that have emerged from our research that would help other churches in a similar position include:

- Partnership with other agencies will help support the children and young people in their faith development. In our case it was a Christian holiday camp and local youth work charity. This is important for rural church with limited resources.
- Intentional support for families (who would like it) to discuss faith themes at home is important.
- Culture change is a gradual process and needs to be consistent and intentional with support from all those in leadership.
- Intentional intergenerational encounters and opportunities for transformation normally happen with careful planning and management. In our case this is usually the All Age Service with discussion around tables.
- Small adjustments can be made to traditional services to make them more inclusive to children and young people. This can also make them more accessible to some adults as well.
- Age-separated time is also important in this model and if it cannot be achieved mid-week then a Sunday morning is a good option (for example a Sunday Club):
- Accepting the limits of what can and should be changed is important.
- Culture can be changed (slowly) without needing to revolutionise all the services.
- A good starting point is to consider how the generations interact currently in the church, following the process of 'adaptive change' (Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch).<sup>32</sup>
- Any adaptations to the pattern of services, or particular services, to better include children and young people may well make the church more accessible to the unchurched of all ages and others with varying needs, learning and faith styles and neurodivergence.

Thus, we have learned that our hybrid intergenerational model allows for a great sense of belonging for children, who consider the church family and building as "theirs". There are sufficient opportunities for faith development through the services, and the Sunday Club and Forest Church. A range of provision supports different spiritual styles. This can be enhanced by supporting any families who wish with faith at home, through ideas and resources. Small changes can make a difference and improve inclusion beyond children and young people. We would not consider

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<sup>32</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, pp. 90–93.

ourselves fully intergenerational according to the definition on p.3 but have found a balance that allows traditional worship for those who prefer, with enough adaptations for inclusion.

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