

The Growing Faith Foundation and St Mary in Charnwood

Exploring how to grow intergenerational worship through the All Age services at St Mary in Charnwood

Background to the research

The subject of intergenerational worship is vast, and one which is currently widely discussed and debated in all types of Christian churches. At the centre of these debates is often the matter of whether churches should strive to have ‘successful’ ‘All Age’ services, or whether they should uphold the more traditional model of segregation, whereby children go out of the service to groups rather than remaining in the services with older members of the congregation. In general, Church of England churches are currently asking ‘How to bring generations back together?’ and, moreover, ‘How can we encourage them to *grow in faith* when worshipping together?’. As Holly Catterton and Chris Barnett write, ‘This renewed interest in intergenerational ministry is also grounded in the growing body of research that supports the idea that intergenerational experiences contribute uniquely to sustainable, long-term faith formation across the ages’ (2018: 17).

However, the journey to providing ‘successful’ intergenerational worship isn’t straightforward. Nick and Becky Drake state, ‘The fact is it isn’t easy. It is far easier to narrow our ‘target market’ and deliver an age-specific style of worship and teaching every week’ (2021: 5). There is often the perception that All Age services are *children’s* services which adults simply have to endure. As Bob Jackson writes, ‘Established regulars may not like their service being displaced once a month by what seems to them to be a shallow, noisy and alien event’ (2013: 141). What’s more, there can be so few children and young people in an All Age service that their very existence can seem somewhat pointless. One church leader I spoke to explained that All Age services can often be viewed as being ‘No Age services’; services which all too often fail to satisfy the needs of *any* generation and end up veering away from the overall aim of encouraging all ages to grow in faith.

At St Mary’s developing intergenerational worship is hugely important. Reverend Adele Adshead explained that she would like to describe St Mary’s in five years’ time as being ‘vibrant, open, and growing in a deep faith and discipleship’. She is passionate about seeing ‘people of all ages engaging in worship, learning from each other and encountering God *together*’. Whilst there are some examples of where ‘good’ intergenerational worship *is* already happening at St Mary’s, she, and members of the PCC and congregation, acknowledge that there are opportunities to develop this further.

St Mary's therefore applied for a grant from 'The Growing Faith Foundation' to carry out a piece of research. We have chosen to explore how to grow intergenerational worship in All Age services at St Mary in Charnwood.

Context: St Mary's – Now

St Mary in Charnwood is situated on the outskirts of Loughborough. To access St Mary's, other than for a minority of attendees who are able to walk or cycle, access to the church is only possible with the use of a car. One member of the church community fondly described St Mary's as 'The church in the wood', for it boasts a beautiful woodland with views over the town. However, whilst the location is undeniably unique, there are evident drawbacks to not being a 'passing church'. Being out of the town centre means that the church isn't linked to a local school, and it doesn't come with a 'ready-made' catchment area of people who live nearby. As a focus group attendee pointed out, 'We are surrounded by fields, not people'.

Like many churches and places where larger numbers of people gather, St Mary's is experiencing a reduction in attendees which has worsened since the recent pandemic. Covid has changed the ways we all interact and for many, this has led to a continuing fear of coming together as a congregation. In a focus group, one adult expressed that they feel that St Mary's has lost some of the regular members due to this fear and anxiety. The group subsequently agreed that this is particularly apparent in All Age services, where some older members of the congregation are wary of mixing with school-age children and adults who have returned to busy offices and workplaces.

The regular congregation on a Sunday morning is made up of predominantly retired people. There are only a handful of families who attend weekly meaning there is a distinct absence of young families, children, and young people. Many parents are feeling dissatisfied with the lack of a youth culture. These gaps among the younger age groups can make 'intergenerational worship' partly impossible, and, worse, at risk of being redundant. All Age services happen once a month in which the children and young people stay in the church for the main 10am service rather than going out to groups.

Adele and the PCC are highly dedicated to ensuring that intergenerational worship becomes a core focus at St Mary's. At present, Adele explained that growing the children's ministry is as equally invested in as the adult ministry. Members of the PCC who I spoke with agreed that St Mary's must strive to attract younger families, but in doing so, should ensure that older members of the congregation feel equally valued. They emphasised that successful intergenerational worship must engage and appeal to all age groups *equally*. Whilst the commitment to growing intergenerational worship is high, there are challenges to achieving this. In a small congregation, there are inevitably only a small number of adults with 'a real heart and talent for children's work' who also wish to

volunteer their efforts and time into shaping the All Age services. In parallel, with such a small number of children and young people at St Mary's at present, it can be difficult to rely on there being enough of them at a 10am service for the planned activities to work. However, crucially, in the questionnaire which was conducted as part of this research, a striking 89% of respondents replied, 'yes' to, 'Do you believe it is important for people of all ages to worship together?' showing that there is appetite for developing intergenerational worship. It is therefore vital for St Mary's to work out *what to change* and *what to put in place* for intergenerational worship in All Age services to happen, and, what's more, how they can help people to *grow in faith* at the same time.

Methodology

This research has been conducted in three phases:

1) Preliminary Phase

- Gathering background information
- Meeting with Adele, a member of the PCC and Matt Long from the Diocese of Leicester
- Attending All Age services at St Mary's
- Attending All Age services at other local Church of England churches
- Interviewing 4 church leaders at surrounding churches
- Writing the questions for the focus groups and questionnaire
- Organising the 7 focus groups and preparing the material

2) Research Phase

- Sending out the questionnaire and gathering results
- Running a series of 7 focus groups, in person and online
- Interviewing Adele, the vicar at St Mary's
- Emailing members of the congregation who couldn't attend a focus group in person
- Reading books about 'Intergenerational worship'

3) Post-Research Phase

- Interpreting the questionnaire and focus group results and identifying key themes
- Writing a research report
- Presenting the research after a service at St Mary's
- Providing a summary sheet of key learnings and possible next steps

This Report

After analysing the results from the focus groups and the 46 questionnaires which were completed, 12 common themes were identified. Under each theme, the key findings are discussed and linked to reading on the subject of 'Intergenerational Worship in All Age Services'. Below each theme, the key learnings are summarised and some possible next steps are provided.

At the end of the research there is a copy of the questionnaire as well as the results from the closed questions.

12 Key Themes

1) Consider the implications of the status quo on the life of the church

In all of the adult focus groups, attendees discussed the importance of intergenerational worship in keeping the church alive. All groups emphasised the growing concern that the size of the congregation at St Mary's, not only at All Age services, has reduced significantly in recent years. Although the pandemic can be said to be partly responsible for this, the greater concern was about the lack of young parents, young people and children. One attendee explained that whilst All Age services are not his preferred service since his children have grown up and moved away, he believes it is still important to come to them in order to 'keep an eye on the children situation'. By this he meant that he deems it to be the responsibility of everyone at St Mary's to welcome, involve and support the younger members. Lucy Moore, the author of 'All Age Worship', supports this view and likens the responsibility which established members in a congregation have towards younger people in church to the adult-child relationship in a typical family. She says, 'If we are truly committed to growing disciples and ensuring that everyone that God sends to our community has the best possible chance to develop as a Christian, the people with the power need to be prepared to 'put themselves out' and make sacrifices' (2006: 34).

Others in the same focus group agreed with the sentiment above, stating that they like to see children in church as they will ultimately keep the church open and thriving in the future. One of the children's group leaders expressed, 'Intergenerational worship is important as we need to see that the church will go on through young people; church needs to be a living, breathing thing'. Moore uses similar words to express the same view: 'Church is about life and growth [...] Life comes from diversity' (2010: 16). In the focus group for adults without children who attend All Age services, one attendee cited a quote from former Archbishop George Carey, who, when speaking about the Church of England, said

"We are one generation away from extinction and if we do not invest in young people there is going to be no one in the future." In short, every church is in danger of ceasing to exist if we *don't* commit to growing intergenerational worship.

Key Learnings

- **The size of the congregation at St Mary's has reduced in recent years. If the church is going to have a future, investing in young people and intergenerational worship is vital.**

Possible Next Steps

- **It is the responsibility of *all* members of the congregation to acknowledge that they have a part to play in the future of the church.**
- **Sacrifices and commitment are important parts of discipleship. Whilst All Age services may not suit everybody, it is important that everyone fully supports the need for intergenerational worship.**

2) Review what it means to be 'welcoming'

In all focus groups, the opening question was 'How would you describe St Mary's as a church?'. Interestingly, *all* groups used the word, 'welcoming'. 'Welcoming' was also used in 5/6 adult focus groups when the participants were asked to describe the current All Age services, and in the questionnaire 67% agreed. One focus group attendee said, 'St Mary's is welcoming. I feel like people are interested in me'. Particular mention was made of the welcome at the door at All Age services which is 'always warm' and that 'particular attention' is paid to newcomers who are attending for the first time. When asked to explain how the All Age services *feel* welcoming, responses included, 'because of the people', 'it's friendly' and, perhaps most interestingly, 'It feels like family'.

At first glance, it is hugely positive to see that the All Age services are described as 'welcoming' and that people can feel part of a 'family'. However, alongside the positive connotations of these words there were also reservations about being 'family-like' and about whether St Mary's and the All Age services are *truly* welcoming to all.

Some respondents explained that being a small church can come with downsides, as the 'family' can easily feel rather exclusive. Others referred to there being a 'history' of the church feeling 'cliquey', with metaphorical 'barriers'. In general, people said that this has improved significantly in recent years but that some aspects of it remain. One participant expressed, 'We need to be careful with the word 'family'', implying that it instantly gives the impression that St Mary's is a closed group. Another explained that there is a sense that St Mary's can be 'rather inward-facing'.

In relation to All Age services, one respondent agreed that there is a ‘welcoming’ atmosphere but explained that people tend to stick together in their groups. Either family units sit together, or adults appear to interact mostly / solely with other adults. In the chapter ‘The intergenerationally sticky Church’ in the book ‘InterGenerate’, Cory Seibel writes, ‘In Christ [...] we are provided with “a new orientation”, one that call us to move beyond friendship “within a closed circle” toward “open friendship” with those who are different from us. [...] Helping people cross the lines that keep them from associating with the members of other generations is a key ingredient of intergenerational cohesion within churches’ (2018: 256). At St Mary’s All Age services, whilst they are ‘welcoming’ at face-value, it is therefore important to question whether this welcome is truly aiding generations to talk to, interact with and engage with each other. One lady explained, ‘We need to find ways of extending invitations across the divide. Otherwise, it’s like our (different generations’) wheels are running separately and they never converge’.

The questionnaire featured a question about ‘inclusion’, and asked whether St Mary’s is doing enough to meet the requirements of those with additional needs. Responses were mixed, with some sharing the view that ‘the church offers a lot and tries its best for those with additional needs, but there are limitations of the building and how much people can do’. Others replied, ‘we need to do more’, with some calling for ‘alternative ways to access the talk or activity’. One parent asked if it would be possible to have occasional All Age services where it's highlighted that there may be children with additional needs who need to be able to wander a bit more than others. They mentioned feeling concerned about people’s reactions if their own child was unsettled.

The research revealed that there are different thoughts on children making a noise. One person wrote, ‘I suspect some might find it disruptive / distracting to their worship [...] on the other hand it may be conducive and be an adjunct to worship (as well as a ‘learning curve’)’. Others were keen to underline that they *enjoy* hearing children making a noise and that children’s voices or cries are a valuable part of intergenerational worship. One member said that love to hear children excitedly using the toy bags which contain toys and books for people to enjoy during the services. Moore explains that it is common for there to be two ways of viewing children in church and that this is one of the key challenges when developing intergenerational worship. She uses the example below to highlight this:

‘Adult 1: You should have been in church today. Those children!’

Adult 2: You should have been in church today. Those children!’

[...]

Adult 1: No concentration at all! Crawling about on the floor!’

Adult 2: Lost in wonder at God's creation – they spotted a common house spider and marvelled at it for a full ten minutes' (2010: 36)

She later adds, 'If we don't have children simply being themselves in the midst of us, we are missing out, not only on our own developing discipleship as church members but on the whole purpose of the church (2010: 31-32). Nick and Becky Drake share this idea, and emphasise that 'God desires no one to miss out on being a part of his family' (2021: 46). They add that 'noise' and 'mess' and 'distraction' shouldn't make people steer away from intergenerational worship. They cite John Wimber of Vineyard Church and write, 'It's nice and tidy in the graveyard. It's alive and messy in the nursery!' I know where I'd rather be!' (2021: 5) Perhaps, as one research participant replied, if intergenerational worship is going to flourish at St Mary's, it will therefore be crucial to ensure that the whole congregation 'continues to develop patience and tolerance'.

In the focus groups, there were also discussions about whether or not the All Age services are sufficiently welcoming to new people. One adult who attends on an infrequent basis expressed, 'If you don't come often, it's easy to not feel welcome, and to feel judged [...] Sometimes I'm not sure where I fit in'. Other regular members of the congregation explained that although we say 'Everyone is welcome', there is much more to this than 'a smiley face at the door'. In reality, as discussed later in this report, this research discovered that for intergenerational worship to flourish, being truly welcoming must be multifaceted and deeper rooted.

Key Learnings

- **Whilst St Mary's is generally perceived as being 'welcoming', this welcome can also be seen as merely superficial.**
- **More needs to be done to ensure all ages and newcomers feel truly welcome and that St Mary's is seen to be an inclusive church.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Consider ways to make the All Age services increasingly accessible for those with additional needs (Could there be a need for Makaton signs in songs, visual 'timetables' to show what is happening?) Work to ensure parents of children with additional needs don't feel judged or anxious.**
- **Encourage the whole congregation to see 'noise' and 'mess' as valuable parts of worship. Challenge the perception that noise = distraction**

3) Build relationships first and foremost

One key topic of discussion in the focus group for adults who **do** attend All Age services, was that they feel that it is hard to really form relationships with others at church when everyone only comes together on a Sunday. This group strongly agreed with the benefits of intergenerational worship and were highly enthusiastic about doing 'their part' to make this happen. When asked if St Mary's All Age services are currently 'intergenerational' (with all ages engaging with each other, interacting with each other and *learning* from each other), or if they are 'multigenerational' (there are simply a mixture of ages in the same place at the same time), the overall feeling was the latter. This was echoed in the other groups where the feeling was that there are 'some moments' of when the All Age services succeed in developing intergenerational worship, but that there is a long way to go. When asked about how they believed St Mary's could do more to grow intergenerational worship, developing relationships was frequently suggested.

Many of the adults in the group of 'Adults who attend without children' have been coming to St Mary's for many years, some for many decades. One gentleman spoke fondly of a time when there was a social secretary who organised social events for all ages throughout the year. He explained that these were wonderful examples of intergenerational worship, albeit not in the church building, and that they provided an important link between 'church life' and 'home life'. Trips to Chester, Twycross Zoo and The Houses of Parliament were cited, as well as 'Saturday night quizzes and Beetle Drives'. Events were not organised to keep the generations separate, but to bring them together. This conversation then developed into discussing *why* exactly social events can help to grow intergenerational worship. Another attendee described connections and relationships as being 'the foundation', and the areas which we should focus on first and foremost in the quest for growing faith for all. It became apparent that there is an opportunity for St Mary's to be more of a community centre. Indeed, there isn't a school nearby or a conveniently positioned housing estate, yet St Mary's could still become more of a hub of social activity, bringing different ages together. Moore explains, 'To build a church that does all of its activities in discrete age groups and then expects to come together painlessly on a Sunday is a tall order' (2006: 50).

Of course, this doesn't negate the importance of groups which are distinctly for certain age groups. Starting Rite (for babies), Growing Rite (for toddlers), Ladies Groups, Men's Groups etc, are all thriving mid-week groups run by members of the St Mary's congregation which provide vital moments to socialise with others of a similar age and stage in life. As we will see later in this report, those who attend these groups speak highly of them and their purpose. Moore states, 'So there's a place for different things for different people', but a danger of this becoming 'the default setting' (2006: 51). She adds that coming together socially (for outings or events) is key as it not only helps to build bridges

between different age groups but that they should also provide ‘a time for listening to people’ (2006: 73).

In the focus group for children and young people, the younger children (Under 12s) generally said that they don’t talk to adults in church during or after All Age services. They said that they feel ‘shy’ to do so. The young people (aged 12-18) said that as they have got older they’ve started to speak to adults in All Age services, but explained that they don’t know each other very well. In ‘Messy Church Theology’, Judy Paulsen writes, ‘Disciple making has always depended on first connecting with people and then growing them spiritually’ (2013: 68). Providing social events and ways for all ages to come together *outside* of All Age services could therefore strengthen the bond between church, often seen as something that only happens on Sundays, and people’s social lives and friendships so that there is less of a division between the two.

Key Learnings

- **It can be hard to form relationships between people of all ages when they only come together during All Age services, once a month.**
- **Developing relationships outside of All Age services could provide a foundation for growing intergenerational worship *in* All Age services.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Consider running social events (e.g. picnics, or day trips) in the year where ALL ages come together, as well as continuing to run mid-week groups for distinct age groups which have a social aspect.**

4) Create a ‘safe space’

In all of the focus groups, a common theme discussed in relation to All Age services was a need for them to be a ‘safe space’. However, among the groups there were some key differences about what this means and *looks like*, and divided views about whether or not it is currently being achieved.

In one group, consisting primarily of adults who have attended and volunteered at St Mary’s for many years, St Mary’s was described as ‘safe’ and ‘secure’. One member explained that St Mary’s has always tended to attract people who look for and cherish the safety which a small church can offer. This developed into a conversation about St Mary’s being a church which people tend to choose to come to when they are ‘hurt’ or ‘in need of healing’. Members of the group unanimously decided that this is a true strength of St Mary’s, partly achieved by the peaceful woodland setting, but largely due to the small, gentle, often *nurturing* atmosphere and style of worship. They explained that whilst other

churches in Loughborough offer a more 'outgoing' and 'lively' approach, this wouldn't generally cater for the needs of those in the St Mary's congregation, and perhaps this is St Mary's USP.

The idea that St Mary's is 'nurturing' and 'safe' was also mentioned in other focus groups. Another attendee explained that she felt that St Mary's works for children who would otherwise feel 'overwhelmed' in a bigger church where the music is 'big and loud' and All Age services are more 'full-on'. Another adult who attends the All Age services explained that they feel 'safe' at St Mary's because it isn't 'too big, like other churches in the town'.

However, there were also responses from adults and children which suggested that St Mary's All Age services are not yet a 'safe' or 'nurturing' environment for all. In the focus group for children and young people, many explained that they would like to be more involved in the All Age services, but that they feel 'silly' or as though, 'all the adults are thinking something about me'. We discussed how, although they recognise most of the adults in the congregation, they don't generally speak to them much during All Age services, or only exchange a few words. As a result, the general feeling was that the children and young people *would* like to play a more active role in the All Age services at St Mary's, but they need to feel and truly believe that it is a safe space without judgement. When asked if they prefer to stay in church during All Age services or go to their groups during other services, all of the children and young people said they prefer going out to their groups. Moore cites Martyn Payne who explains that 'Children's group leaders often report that their children much prefer the group time than being together in the 'Family Service'. She adds, 'It's only when we feel safe that we can take risks, voicing our doubts and fears as well as our certainties' (2006: 70). In other words, as well as, or perhaps even *before* thinking about the *content* of All Age services, it's important to make sure that children and young people really do feel accepted, safe and comfortable alongside adults outside of their family groups. It is otherwise hard to imagine how they will grow in faith during an All Age service if they are not yet entirely at ease in the setting itself.

The concern about feeling 'judged' at All Age services was also mentioned in the focus group for adults who don't attend them or do so rarely. One attendee explained that they don't feel safe and secure, but rather 'like an outsider and I don't understand what's going on'. They explained that they choose All Age services because they are generally 'easier to understand' than other service types but that there is a lot of 'formality' which they don't understand. This can lead to feeling alienated. Moore says, '[Religion] can create a select few who know the rules [...] If you're made to feel worried about when to sit, stand and kneel, or if there's a bewildering array of apparently meaningful but incomprehensible gestures to try to copy, a church service will be an exhausting and embarrassing ordeal' (2006: 70). Adults who volunteer at All Age services explained that they have often been concerned that whilst some parts of the service are explained, other parts, such as what the blessing in a Communion service *actually is*, can appear to confuse people.

Key Learnings

- St Mary's is seen to be unique. Being a small church with a quieter, calmer approach, it can be regarded as 'safe' and 'nurturing' for adults and children seeking a gentler worship style.
- However, some children, young people and adults don't feel at ease in the current All Age services and therefore are put off from taking part or being involved.
- Intergenerational worship is about all ages interacting with and learning from each other. This will only happen when all age groups feel safe, comfortable and accepted.

Possible Next Steps

- It is the responsibility of all members of the established congregation to work on putting those around them at ease and ensuring that *any* contribution, even just *being in an All Age service*, is felt to be valued.
- Explanation is key to helping people feel safe. *All* generations need to feel that they understand what's happening and that they are able to ask questions during and after All Age services.

5) Consider the content and content level at All Age services

Content level

In the focus groups and the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the content of the All Age services at St Mary's. 67% of those who completed the questionnaire said that the content is 'Simplified, which works well' (see appendix for all results). In response to the question, 'What works well at St Mary's All Age services?', responses included, 'feeling part of a community with non-complicated services', 'an appropriate sermon, not too long' and 'engaging ways of putting across a particular message that can be understood by any age'. Another replied, 'All Age services are ok now – talk is usually pitched about right'. In the focus groups for adults, those who attended were asked to further discuss whether All Age services should have content which is 'simplified', including the bible stories, prayers, and the talk. As discussed below, the responses were more mixed, and it was evident that this is a topic which divides opinion.

On one hand, there were adults who stated that the content should be simplified, even if the elements of the service are therefore pitched at a level which is lower than that which they would personally prefer for their own worship. Adults who regularly attend All Age services largely agreed that for themselves, they 'prefer a service with meat in'; one which is 'deeper'. One replied that they personally regard the sermon as being highly important (a sermon is not included in the current All Age services at St Mary's). However, despite this, they unanimously agreed that it is vital that children

‘feel included in the body of the church’ and therefore, even if it isn’t their *own* preference to listen to a simplified service, they regard accessibility as being highly important in allowing all generations to worship together. They agreed that simplifying the content makes it more likely that children can access and process the information and in turn more probable that intergenerational worship can occur. In the group for adults who *don’t* attend, the attendees further expanded on this idea and added that the content of All Age services shouldn’t only be simplified for *children and young people* attending, but also for the benefit of some *adults*. One said, ‘If you’re a less frequent visitor it is even more important’ to simplify the content of the All Age service so that it is comprehensible. In the questionnaire, one adult agreed, stating, ‘We can’t always assume that ‘older = mature in faith’, so perhaps older folk gain insights from a simpler approach to worship on these occasions?’

On the other hand, the 11% of responses to the questionnaire who said the content of St Mary’s All Age service is ‘Over-simplified – I’d prefer it not to be’ mustn’t be overlooked. In a focus group, one adult explained that children are often *more* able than adults to digest content which is deemed to be ‘complex’. Interestingly, a curate at a local church explained that their most popular All Age service among young families and a good example of intergenerational worship is often Good Friday, largely due to the fact that the content cannot really be made simpler. Adults in the focus group who were pro-simplification explained that they agreed with this approach to an extent, adding that simplifying content ‘shouldn’t lead to a departure from the biblical truth’. Whilst the subject matter must be understandable for children (and also for adults who may be new to coming to church), they were keen to stress that this shouldn’t equate to the content being ‘dumbed down’. Another participant expressed that it is often a shame to send children to children’s groups due to the belief that they can’t cope with the complicated liturgy and sermon. Instead, she maintained that churches should make the All Age services accessible to everyone.

The focus group of parents of under 18s shared this idea of the importance of accessibility. Some participants explained that in the past, All Age services at St Mary’s had felt like they were designed to suit pre-schoolers. At this stage they neither satisfied the adults nor the older children attending, almost becoming a ‘No-Age’ service. As a result, they described how there certainly weren’t many examples of intergenerational worship. One parent used an analogy to explain their point of view on the content, stating that for intergenerational worship to happen, All Age services ‘need to be like the film Shrek’. Shrek is a film which can be enjoyed by adults and children alike as there ‘are multiple levels you can access it at’; different jokes and elements of the film appeal to different ages. They clarified, ‘All Age services must strive to be like Shrek, ‘not Teletubbies’, which only works for children. This is the only way they will work for everyone’.

The content itself

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked, 'Which of the following describe the CONTENT of the current All Age services at St Mary in Charnwood? (Select one or more)'. Here are the results, below.

Description	Number of votes	Description	Number of votes
Traditional	10	Predictable	3
Fun	12	Boring	1
Simplified	15	Contrived	4
Accessible to All	25	Repetitive	2
Engaging	17	In need of a refresh	7
Relevant	17	Old-fashioned	2
Up-to-date	3		
Forward-thinking	6	Other	6

On the whole, the 'positive' descriptors are on the left-hand side of the table above, whilst the 'negative' descriptors are on the right. However, as already discussed, 'simplified' could sit on either side. 'Predictable' could also sit in either column, for in the focus groups, many of the respondents explained that they *like* All Age services to be predictable so that they know roughly what to expect. Similarly, for some of adults and children who attend regularly, predictable can be helpful as it can equal familiarity.

It is encouraging to see that the more 'positive' descriptors were selected by more people. The four most popular descriptors were 'Accessible to All', 'Relevant', 'Engaging' and 'Simplified'. The most popular answer, 'Accessible to All' was selected by 54% of those who completed to the questionnaire. Whilst this is positive, it equally demonstrates that only just over half of people agreed. There are therefore significant opportunities for improvement.

37% of questionnaire respondents said that the current content is 'relevant' whilst only 7% selected 'up to date'. The children's leaders explained that 'certain topics lend themselves to being suitable for All Age services' more than others. In several of the focus groups, it was suggested that the 'theme' of the All Age service should be one which 'hooks in' the young and the old; themes which are relevant and important to everyone. Topics including 'the environment', 'the local area' and 'our local community' were suggested. One parent told me about a 'Remembrance Day' All Age service which worked well because it was linked to Loughborough. Other adults suggested that we should link the theme to the church woodland and local countryside.

Key Learnings

- **Simplifying the content of All Age services can work well to make the service accessible to people of All Ages. However, age shouldn't be seen to mean 'mature in faith'. Sometimes children *can* access and enjoy content which isn't overly simplified.**
- **The content of the All Age services needs to become more relevant to all age groups.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Try piloting All Age services where the content isn't simplified. Evaluate the effect on intergenerational worship, compared to when the content is simplified.**
- **Look at the themes of the All Age services. Develop themes which hook in all ages; themes which are relevant and important to everyone. Consider making links to the immediate environment and local community.**

6) Put 'play' at the heart of intergenerational worship

A key theme which emerged from this research is that All Age services must be 'fun' and 'creative' if Intergenerational worship is going to be successful.

There was some evidence that All Age services at St Mary's is already partly achieving this aim. 26% of respondents to the questionnaire described the content of them as 'fun', whilst 37% selected, 'engaging'. In the questionnaire, the word 'engaging' was frequently used in response to the question, 'What works well at St Mary's All Age services', with one person adding that they like, 'the pure enjoyment you see from everyone'. One adult who only attends a few times a year, explained that he chooses All Age services because they are 'more creative and imaginative' whilst another questionnaire comment said that they are, 'a balance of the familiar with the creative'. This view was shared by another member of the congregation who added, '(The All Age services) are sensitively balanced to engage everyone, regardless of age, and they bring people together through this – and are rejuvenating and uplifting!'

In the focus groups, we delved deeper into the topic of 'fun' and which activities in particular have led to intergenerational worship taking place.

Hands-on Activities

All groups agreed that activities where the congregation are invited to get stuck into a practical activity work well. The children's group leaders explained that craft activities (e.g. a recent example where the congregation were asked to make a tree out of sticks and marshmallows, and making clay pots in the past) work by generating a buzz in the church and facilitating interaction among older and younger

members. The focus groups all agreed that this interaction generally needs to be initially encouraged (e.g. by using an activity to facilitate the formation of mixed age groups before the service starts) as it doesn't happen automatically. However, it is important to note that in the focus group for children and young people, the over 12s said that they preferred to work on a craft / practical task of their own, even if they are seated in groups, rather than the whole church making one larger piece of work at the front. In contrast, the under-12s prefer to do collaborative craft / hands-on activities.

In some groups we discussed the importance of play for all ages and of not assuming that playful activities should be reserved for children. Nick and Becky Drake emphasise that we are all 'children of God'. 'Worshipping together, no matter who or what age and stage is in the room, is in spiritual reality *a group of children at play in the Father's House!*' (2021: 17). In the focus groups, some adults said they continue to come to All Age services despite their own children and grandchildren having grown up or moved away, because they love 'the joy in worship' which All Age services can offer. Some cited an example of a recent All Age service where a ball of wool was thrown around the church. They said they enjoy being able to participate in the same activities as the children as this is when all generations, 'are sharing the love of God'. Another added that when children perceive adults to be playful and 'fun', this helps to break down barriers between the age groups.

Involving all the senses

Linked to the sub-theme above was the idea that All Age services must involve all of the senses and not overly rely on the 'visual'. Some respondents explained that merely showing something at the front, either physically or using the screen, will only appeal to visual learners and, worse, excludes those who are blind or partially sighted, particularly if visuals are not described and explained. Moreover, respondents said that they feel that over reliance on visual elements 'isn't engaging' for children.

One member of the focus group for adults who attend without children suggested that an excellent way to engage all ages would be capitalising on the wonderful woodland at St Mary's. Children and adults alike enjoy being in nature, and it is an environment which could lead to engaging all the senses and to all generations learning from one another.

Kinaesthetic activities were also perceived to be highly important in encouraging intergenerational worship. Interestingly, an adult who doesn't attend All Age services due to preferring other types of worship, cited an example of the New Year's Eve evening service where those who attended were encouraged to move around. They said they found this highly memorable as the congregation were 'worshipping with their whole bodies' and that this encouraged interaction between people. The children and young people agreed they like activities where they 'get to move'.

Fresh Ideas – Element of novelty

In the focus group for parents, some explained that different, novelty-like activities engage all ages. They cited the example of an All Age service which raised money for Christian Aid in which a bucket of worms was brought in. This led to excitement, and moreover, *shared excitement* among different age groups and the activity was linked to a wider biblical message. They agreed that ‘a spark of creativity’ is needed, with ‘fresh elements’ and ideas.

Story and drama

An idea which came from the children’s and young people’s focus group was including more storytelling and drama in All Age services. One said, ‘When the story is playing, people could be acting it out’. An adult who has attended St Mary’s for many years explained that ‘drama’ used to work really well in All Age services in the past. The scripts were ‘funny’ and people of all ages used to want to get involved. A curate from a local church explained that they often use family groups to read or act out the readings. This provides an excellent example of intergenerational worship, whilst making those who are more nervous feel comfortable at the same time.

Activities with choices

In this research, people were keen to underline the importance of giving choices. One of the parents who attends said that All Age services have worked best at St Mary’s when people are given two or more activities to choose from which take place simultaneously. The children in the focus group agreed with this, stating that they ‘hate sitting for too long’ and like to get up and ‘choose’. They suggested that during some parts of the All Age service, there could be the option to get up ‘and do a step-by-step art and craft activity linked to the story’, whilst the children and adults who wanted to stay sitting could do so. Indeed, this would still result in intergenerational worship, as the activities wouldn’t need to be divisive by age. Both children and adults in the focus groups stressed that they don’t like to be made to join in with anything, and that whether it is an action song or an activity, the person leading the service should always emphasise that participation is optional.

Alongside the ideas above about which activities work well to encourage intergenerational worship, there were several caveats about activities not being too ‘preschool-y’ and therefore losing their appeal. Parents explained that in the past, the level of the activities in All Age services was poorly perceived, with many being too ‘baby-ish’ for their own children let alone themselves. Adults who do attend All Age services warned of St Mary’s not being the place where a ‘happy-clappy’ approach works well, as ‘gimmicks’ and too much focus on ‘entertaining’ can easily come across as ‘amateurish’. Some adults who lead aspects of the All Age services explained that the children and young people at

St Mary's 'tend to be more reserved' anyway, and that activities which are designed for children can consequently miss the mark, failing to engage them and totally alienating older members. At present, some adults admitted that they 'get a sense that we are putting something in for the children', as though there has been the desire to 'tick a box', without thinking about if they are activities which will work for St Mary's congregation.

Key Learnings

- **Play shouldn't be viewed as only for children. This research highlighted that children *and adults* regard play, fun and creativity as being important.**
- **Playful activities can help to break down barriers between different age groups if they are thoughtfully done. Be wary of activities being gimmicky or babyish, and worse, causing confusion about the true message of the service.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Trial inventive and playful activities which use all the senses and have an element of novelty. These can be more inclusive and facilitate greater interaction and engagement.**
- **Encourage multigenerational participation through storytelling and drama.**
- **Always offer choices to the whole congregation. Participation should be encouraged but never obligatory.**

7) Recognise the role of music in unlocking intergenerational worship

The research highlighted the importance of music to children, young people and adults at St Mary's and suggested that music may pave the way to effective intergenerational worship.

In the focus group for adults who attend without children, the adults gave examples of where music has really worked to create a wonderful atmosphere for growing in faith. Special mention was made of the time when a musician played drums during an All Age service. They said this encouraged, 'everyone to join in'. Members of another focus group said that the accordionist who played at the Harvest Service provided a 'fresh element' and 'variety'. Another attendee explained that music is a 'bit of an issue' at St Mary's, yet so important.

In the focus group for children and young people, almost all of them proudly explained that they play a musical instrument. We talked about how there used to be a church band, where children, young people and adults all played their instruments during the services. When asked if they would like to do this, they all said they'd like to, adding, 'as long as we have time to practise' and 'aren't put on the spot'. One said they like it 'when there is more than one instrument because there's more detail and

the song can get better'. Other adults spoke of the shared enjoyment which singing can bring. One spoke of having attended another local church where children and adults were given 'flags to wave' during the worship songs, which was an example of worship happening intergenerationally.

In terms of the style of music, in both the questionnaire and the focus group, some people felt it is important to have 'more lively music, songs and interaction' if St Mary's wishes 'to bring in children and families who don't attend church'. Another added, 'I wonder if the music is suited to young people?' However, in the focus groups, some adults warned against replicating a model which may well work at other churches, but which may not be the right style and fit for St Mary's.

There therefore appears to be an appetite and enthusiasm to grow the music at St Mary's, particularly at All Age services. One questionnaire respondent suggested that 'this needs someone with the skills to bring new musical ideas'. However, it is important to underline that this will rely not only on more volunteers to lead the music but also on greater participation and *willingness* to participate from *everyone*. One member of church remarked, 'In worship songs we are often encouraged to clap. It's always so disheartening when it's just a few of us joining in'. People told me that we have 'lots of talented musicians' in the congregation, but that, as with many aspects of leading All Age services, 'volunteers can be thin on the ground'. Becoming an intergenerational church requires small changes from everyone. Cory Siebel explained that on the journey to becoming an intentionally intergenerational church, when it works it is because 'the people themselves have taken on a new way of being church together' (2018: 95).

Key Learnings

- **Music is perceived to be highly important by adults, children and young people at St Mary's. There is a real appetite to improve the music at the church. St Mary's should consider viewing music as a key to unlocking intergenerational worship.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Trial ways of involving all ages in music. Focus on this being a way to encourage fellowship between generations.**
- **Experiment with the style of music offered. Variety is key. Encourage all generations to feedback on what works well.**

8) Consider a new take on planning and leading the All Age services

Cory Seibel writes, 'The process of becoming a vibrant intergenerational church can be compared to baking a cake' in that there are a several ingredients to combine (2018: 253). This research indicated that two of these are the ways that All Ages services are planned and delivered.

Planning

In the questionnaire, people were asked who they would like to see involved in planning the All Age services. The results are below:

	Number of votes
The vicar/ person leading the service	32
Members of the All Age team	37
Adults attending the service that day	14
Young people attending the service that day	25
Children attending the service that day	18

It is particularly interesting to look back the third most selected option for 'Who should plan the All Age services?' which was 'Young People'. This shows that the congregation would like to see young people taking a more active role, whilst a further 18 people voted to include children in the planning process. I spoke to a Youth Leader at a Leicester church where intergenerational worship is thriving, so much so that they are now striving to become known as 'an intergenerational church'. At the end of each of their All Age services, they invite those who are willing to group together to plan the All Age service which will take place the following month. The Youth Leader explained that the take-up was slow at first, but slowly more and more of the young people have wanted to be involved, so much so that they now comprise a large group who regularly come and propose ideas. The children and young people at St Mary's were asked if they'd like to be involved in the planning of All Age services. The majority said, 'yes', providing that there isn't any pressure. One suggested 'if my parents are there too' with another saying 'yes, but I don't like making decisions'. Another said, 'yes, if my parents and adults are there'. They agreed that they would be willing to have a go, providing there are other adults there and they could suggest ideas (if they wish to), without any expectation. Interestingly, this would also provide an opportunity for intergenerational worship even before the service itself, with people of all ages coming together to work on a plan for shared worship.

Leading the service

Similarly, in the questionnaire, people were asked who they would like to see *leading* the All Age services. The results are below:

	Number of votes
The vicar/ person leading the service	34

Members of the All Age team	29
Adults attending the service that day	9
Young people attending the service that day	22
Children attending the service that day	13

It is important to note the ‘The vicar / person leading the service’ and ‘Members of the All Age team’ are fairly equal. The parents of Under 18s explained that All Age services work well when there is a variety of speakers. In the questionnaire, the importance of having ‘Someone other than the vicar / voice of the establishment leading the services’ was underlined. One focus group mentioned a recent occasion where the vicar attended the All Age service in ordinary clothes and sat with the rest of the congregation in the pews. They said this instantly made the atmosphere that bit more ‘informal’.

However, many people were quick to underline that having a variety of speakers is limited by a shortage of volunteers. Participants in the group for adults who attend All Age services explained that, as it stands, there isn’t a huge number of adults who lead the services, with one adding, ‘St Mary’s has a number of talented people to present the message (in the All Age services) ... but not enough’. This view was shared by those who currently lead the services who agreed that it is difficult to find enough people with a real heart for children’s work and / or who wish to lead parts of the All Age services.

In the group for children and young people, they were shown a number of photos of unknown people and asked to select who they would prefer to lead the service. They unanimously chose images of the male and female who were under 40, adding that they didn’t mind if they were male or female. When asked if they could explain their choice, responses included, ‘Because I think they are more interesting’, ‘I think they could lead the craft and know more (about it)’ and ‘I think I’d be more involved’.

Key Learnings

- **The results show that people would like to see the young people more involved in planning the All Age services. The children and young people are keen to have a go, and asked for this to be done in a mixed-age group.**
- **Seeing members of the congregation leading aspects of the service provides variety and helps to create an informal atmosphere.**
- **Children and young people like to see an adult under 40 leading the service.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Pilot planning an All Age service as a mixed group, with the vicar, members of the All Age team as well as adults, young people and children from the congregation.**

- Encourage people of All Ages to lead parts of the service. Recognise that this may require small steps, e.g. suggesting a parent / grandparent and child do a reading together.

9) Experiment with the Setting but Keep the Format Consistent

Setting

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked, 'If attending an All Age service, I would prefer it to be...'. They were able to select more than one option.

	Number of votes
At St Mary in Charnwood, in the Church	38
At St Mary in Charnwood, in the Chapter House	8
At St Mary in Charnwood, in the Chapter Woodland	19
At another venue e.g. Home Farm, in the barn	23

In the focus groups, we discussed this further. Parents who attend the Parent-Toddler group explained that they like All Age services to take place in the church itself, as they believe this is important for their children as well as for themselves. Respondents in other groups expressed their wish for All Age services to remain in the main church building, but recognised the limitations this poses, due to the static pews and limited space. Another adult agreed with this, but suggested that St Mary's needs to find ways to work around these hurdles and think of clever ways to overcome them. This view was shared by somebody who completed the questionnaire who said, 'We need to be creative with the space we have until we can build more space!'. The children who had suggested having different activities taking place at the same time (mentioned earlier) said these could simply be 'at the front or at the back' of church.

It is interesting to note that the second most popular option selected in response to the questionnaire was, 'At another venue, e.g. a Farm / barn'. Indeed, when asked to nominate recent examples of where intergenerational worship *has* worked at St Mary's, all of the focus groups for adults cited the Harvest service, which in two recent years has taken place at Home Farm, inside a large barn. Respondents to the questionnaire described this particular service as having 'intergenerational activities'. When asked *why* they believe these services have been so successful, many explained that it is because different ages could easily sit in small groups. The chairs could be arranged informally and people were encouraged to move their chairs to make sure they were sitting with older and younger members. Moreover, respondents explained that having a service in a more informal setting helps to put people at ease. One focus group attendee explained, 'There's the perception that church is a sacred, holy space. Church should be a space for *people* and not depend on the building. Another

expressed, 'People, especially newcomers, think there's a way to act in church' which makes them feel less comfortable. Another agreed, adding that having a service in a barn 'breaks down barriers' between not only older and younger people, but between more established members of the church and newcomers. People feel more relaxed, less like they 'need to be on their best behaviour' and more likely to grow in faith together. Indeed, somebody replied in the questionnaire, 'We have only attended one service so far. Found the structure quite formal and content / delivery quite hard to follow for younger children'.

In the future, there are plans to extend the Chapter House at St Mary's to provide bigger spaces for worship and community groups. One lady explained that having a space without pews could be vital in facilitating and growing intergenerational worship. She talked about a church she knows of where they took out the pews and replaced them with little chairs and tables. At the back, they have an area near the entrance which was originally designed for children. A disabled gentleman found that he couldn't get to the seats nearer the front, so began to sit in 'the children's area'. What has in turn developed has been a wonderful example of intergenerational worship in an All Age service, where the gentleman and the children have learnt to talk to, engage with and learn from one another. This example was inspiring to listen to, and it certainly highlighted the effect that seating and spaces can have when starting to develop intergenerational worship in churches.

Format

Short Service – Clear Message – Simple Language

All focus group attendees and many of those who completed the questionnaire agreed that All Age services must be shorter than other services, with short, 'snappy' sections. The parent cited above, who has only attended one All Age service, described it as 'lengthy'. The children and young people agreed that the services tend to be too lengthy and that they don't like 'sitting too long'. They suggested that there should be a 'break' and 'refreshments in the middle' of services. As we have seen, given that building a community is so important for intergenerational worship to thrive, it would perhaps be interesting to see if a break in the service, where all ages are encouraged to mingle and socialise, could lead to greater interaction between them in the All Age services themselves.

Many adults also commented that in order for services to work for all ages, the message needs to be incredibly clear. Many praised the level of creativity, but explained that this can often result in the meaning being somewhat lost. One parent expressed concern that, 'The message must be drawn out or self-evident. Sometimes they have failed to achieve this'. Another adult said St Mary's need to work on explaining 'What today is about and then summarising it at the end'. Without this clarity, others explained that people of all ages fail to grow in faith and come away feeling 'somewhat confused and unsatisfied'.

Language

One response to the questionnaire was, 'The talk or activity can be a good idea in theory, but is often explained in language only adults would understand. This loses the children's engagement'. Another adult in a focus group shared this idea, that when the language is not pitched at the right level 'the service doesn't unlock itself'. Language was described as being key to making the services accessible to all. Some explained that regardless of the level of content, if it isn't *accessible* to all, it will be difficult for people to understand.

Key Learnings

- **The Church is the most 'popular' setting for an All Age service. Whilst the church has limitations due to its size and space, the focus should be on finding creative ways to work round these.**
- **Taking All Age services outside the church building is beneficial to encouraging mixed age groups to sit and worship together. Less formal settings can also help to put people at ease.**
- **Whatever the setting, the format of the service should remain consistent: short, with short, 'snappy' sections, a clear message and language which is easy to understand.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Consider being more inventive with the space in the Church. Does the congregation have to face the alter? Could activities take place in different corners of the church? Could there be breakout activities in the Chapter House or woodland?**
- **Reassess the length of All Age services. Consider adding in movement or refreshment breaks before the end of the service.**
- **Check that the message of the service is clear throughout and delivered in language which is accessible to all. Keep coming back to the core message and summarise it at the end.**

10) Engage with the community – encourage diversity

Another theme which came to light from this research was the effect that engaging with the wider community can have on encouraging intergenerational worship in All Age services, and at other times too.

Many of the groups explained that although intergenerational worship is not yet consistently happening in the All Age services at St Mary's, it *is* taking place at other points in the week. Starting Rite and Growing Rite, for parents and their babies and toddlers, were referred to as being excellent examples of intergenerational worship. Mums who have attended these groups spoke fondly of the

way these groups encourage all ages to interact, support each other and learn from one another in a Christian environment. Furthermore, Growing Rite takes place in a residential home and residents are invited to join in or simply observe during the session. As a result, there are babies as young as nine months interacting with residents in their nineties. Diane Shallue explains that 'these intergenerational interactions help older adults create meaning and purpose'. She maintains that when different ages mix, 'older adults can play the role of a respected elder' whilst 'the energy of the children' creates a 'lively atmosphere' (2018: 196). One of the 'Growing Rite' mums said she likes seeing her children with the residents, as it is a unique opportunity for them to interact with older people. Similarly, she likes bringing her children to All Age services for the same reason, as they are able to mix with adults they don't know, a chance they don't have in many other areas of their lives.

Other focus group attendees suggested that connecting with the wider community *more* would help to boost intergenerational worship in All Age services. One adult said they'd like to see 'more outreach' whilst another said 'St Mary's should be out in the community more'. When asked why, they replied that this would help to create vital links between the church and people's home lives. In the group for adults who *don't* attend All Age services (or do so very rarely), the adults attending concluded that St Mary's can feel a bit 'like a cocoon from the past'. Whilst this has its benefits and unique qualities, the question was raised as to whether the almost entirely 'white-British, middle-class congregation' 'is representative of the community in which we serve'. This moved on to them questioning whether St Mary's could do more to engage people of other cultures living locally to ensure that everyone feels equally welcome and valued. They then discussed whether other faiths are mentioned in All Age services at St Mary's at present, given that in Church of England primary schools there is an emphasis on learning about *all* faiths. The under 12s in the children and young people's group also mentioned this, with 4/7 of them saying they would like other faiths to be spoken about in All Age services. Whilst striving to be *intergenerational*, it is important to consider whether there are opportunities to develop diversity more broadly, at the same time. As Nick and Becky Drake write, intergenerational worship aims to develop churches which 'might truly show a glimpse of the fullness of God's family, male and female, black and white, young and old; varied beautiful, *diverse*' (2021: 5).

Interestingly, the children and young people also highlighted the importance of St Mary's (and other churches) having links with their school. When asked 'Where do you worship God the 'most'; at church, at home or at school?', the majority replied, 'At school or at church'. One said they like it when people from churches come into their school, something which St Mary's already do through the Experience Easter and the Experience Christmas projects at Holywell Primary School. Interestingly, the children and young people appeared to regard talking about faith at school and at church differently, with one explaining that they 'learn' at school, whereas at church they 'see how to get a better connection with God'. Another explained that they like 'the community' at St Mary's, something which they see as unique about coming to church. Given that they see the importance of both settings in

growing their faith, it would perhaps be interesting to explore how further liaisons with local schools and community groups could lead to more children and young people at All Age services, and ultimately to people having a more integrated faith. Moore suggested that All Age services can be hugely valuable in making this happen. Her suggestions include inviting the congregation to share stories from school, work or their home lives during the service, or bringing objects in to show, all with the aim of encouraging generations to listen to, respect and learn from one another (2010: 107).

Some respondents explained that alongside engaging with the local community, All Age services need to be advertised differently. One respondent explained, 'All Age services are not really publicised adequately in a way which will appeal to families. (It) might be a good to plan the programme for 6 or 12 months and make sure that families are well notified in advance. Apart from Easter or Christmas, the services can seem like an 'after-thought'.

Key Learnings

- **St Mary's already runs community groups which are excellent examples of intergenerational worship, but there are opportunities for more and for further outreach links.**
- **It is important to reflect on whether the congregation is representative of the community which St Mary's serves.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Develop further links and outreach activities with the local community to encourage intergenerational worship outside of the All Age services.**
- **Review how other cultures and other faiths are presented in All Age services. Recognise that adults and children are keen to acknowledge other faiths and see them represented more often.**
- **Encourage conversation which links church, school and home life. Recognise that this provides unique opportunities for people to share stories and experiences, thus encouraging interaction between different generations.**

11) Remember the benefits are two-way

This research showed that the majority of respondents were passionate about the benefits of intergenerational worship, with many suggesting that if St Mary's manage to achieve it, the benefits could be two-way, with both adults and children consequently growing in faith.

The benefits for adults

It was overwhelmingly positive to see that most adults who participated in this research feel that they *gain* something from worshipping with younger generations. One adult said that children and young people ‘add energy’ to the services, whilst another explained that they ‘bring life and vitality’. Shallue explains that ‘interactions between older adults and children ‘need to be intentionally fostered for the sake of the mental and spiritual health of older adults’ (2018: 195). One adult in a focus group went as far as to say that rather than listing what children *add*, we should consider that ‘without them, something is *taken away*’.

Other adults said that worshipping alongside children has, at times, helped them to grow in their own faith. One explained, ‘Children’s questions add something’, whilst many shared the view that, ‘Children often have such a different perspective to offer. Their ideas and thoughts can be so refreshing and can give older members food for thought’. Another adult told their focus group that they often find themselves learning about the Christian faith (and indeed other faiths) from their grandchildren. One attendee referred to Jesus, who, in the Bible, often stressed the importance of children being there to listen to his teaching, adding that Jesus ‘wanted to show that we can all learn together and from one another’. An interesting discussion began in one focus group about whether we should rename the services, ‘All Welcome’ or ‘All Together’, in an effort to stop overly focussing on age altogether.

All Age services can also be the only time in a week where generations can grow in faith together. One of the parents told me, ‘I like my children to be with me in church, as I just like being together’. Moore explains that this is a view shared by many parents who find the general pace and stresses of life overwhelming and inconducive to family life. She explains that parents like to ‘share an experience of church’ (2010: 10).

The benefits for children

In the book, ‘Intergenerate’, David Goodwin’s research is cited by Holly Catterton Allen and Chris Barnett. They write ‘adult engagement with children and the provision of meaningful opportunities for children to be involved in worship with adults will “assist children to grow in faith, their love of God, and their connection to the church and its faith practices”’ (2018: 18). The children and young people in the focus group said that although they prefer to go to groups, they do ‘learn things’ from their parents and other adults about God and the Christian faith. In the questionnaire, someone wrote, ‘Older members may have experiences and words of wisdom worth sharing’.

We have already seen the huge importance of establishing safe spaces and a strong community before intergenerational worship can thrive. Shallue believes that in general, older adults are largely

responsible for creating this community, saying, 'As valued elders, older adults are strong branches, nourishing the vine that is the church, part of a caring community that connects all ages' (2018: 200).

Other people explained that they believe All Age services provide an important 'middle step' for children and young people who are otherwise unfairly expected to 'jump' from attending children's groups to sitting in services of Morning Prayer and Holy Communion. As one person wrote, 'They can learn expectations of a church setting and feel welcomed and appreciated by other adults'. Of course, as we have seen, there are steps to be taken to ensure that this is the case.

Lastly, other participants in the research felt that intergenerational worship is important in levelling out the playing field; showing that 'adults too are still learning and exploring faith just as they are'.

In short, the benefits are seen to be two-fold. As one respondent wrote, intergenerational worship can 'bring us all together. Both the young and old benefit from this'. Another agreed, stating, 'Both gain recognition, understanding and respect for the different ways in which we can worship, and a real sense of belonging to a wider family – God's'.

Key Learnings

- **Intergenerational worship benefits people of all ages. We shouldn't view All Age services as 'something which adults do for the children'. Both adults and children can learn from each other and develop in faith as a result of worshipping together.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Review the name 'All Age' services. Is it necessary to focus on age at all? Perhaps instead, 'All Together' or 'All Welcome' would suggest that *all* generations are equally valued members of God's family.**
- **Encourage everyone to see themselves as both a teacher and a learner when they are worshipping intergenerationally. Everyone has something to offer *and* an opportunity to grow in faith by listening, interacting and engaging with others.**

12) There will always be a need NOT to worship intergenerationally

As St Mary's begins to decide on the next steps to develop intergenerational worship in their All Age services, it is important to note that many respondents stressed the importance of continuing to provide a variety of forms of worship. 58% replied yes to 'In addition to the All-Age services, would you be interested in St Mary's having a regular service which is aimed at children and young families?' The children's group leader focus group agreed that it is worth piloting an additional service / activity

day for children and their families. They suggested that these may provide an opportunity to 'sow a seed' about what is happening at St Mary's and allow them the chance to 'check in with us every now and then'. Many of the adults who attend All Age services without children said they would still attend these, both to see how well they are going and to share in another worship opportunity. In this way, despite being advertised as being for 'children', this shows that there would still be people of mixed ages and opportunities for intergenerational worship to happen. Parents who attend Starting Rite and Growing Rite suggested that these would work well on a termly basis and that they would be 'a nice way for people to get to know each other'. Again, this would be another way to prioritise building a community *first*, as a foundation for intergenerational worship.

Similarly, many adults explained that they will always like to have opportunities to worship alongside other adults, for example in the evening services or at events such as 'Worship with a classical flavour'. People explained that keeping the variety is key, so that St Mary's continues to offer a variety of styles and formats of service.

Key Learnings

- **On the pathway to building intergenerational worship at St Mary's, it will be important to remember that offering a variety of services is still important.**
- **Even services and events which are *aimed* at a particular generation can still attract multiple generations if they are done well.**

Possible Next Steps

- **Pilot running a termly service / event for children and young families as well. Encourage people of all ages to help with the planning and leading of the service and invite all members of the congregation to support it.**

Conclusion

This research has been important to assess and include the views of as many people as possible with links to St Mary in Charnwood. Their enthusiasm for intergenerational worship and appetite to take on the challenge it represents has been really encouraging.

Across the 12 themes which emerged, there are numerous ideas about how to grow intergenerational worship through the All Age services.

Some of these can be put into practice fairly quickly. Since the beginning of February, Adele has trialled some of the changes suggested, such as providing multiple activities to choose from during a service and encouraging the congregation to bring their musical instruments to play in All Age services.

However, it is unlikely that these initiatives will lead to significant change until others such as creating a 'safe' environment where all ages feel accepted and included, and building a community through socials and outings are fully invested in. It is these longer-term changes which will provide the strong foundations for true intergenerational worship. Many go beyond the boundaries of the 10am All Age service, putting St Mary's on the path to becoming *an intergenerational church*. It is only when these are bearing fruit that the other ideas will be able to take root.

Above all, it is clear that intergenerational worship will require a willingness and courage from the whole congregation if it is going to work. It will be the responsibility of everyone, young and old, to embrace the challenge and be open to trying out new things. The limitations of the building and the congregation size should no longer be seen as barriers to intergenerational worship flourishing. As this research has demonstrated, it is the *people* who make a church and encouraging true discipleship between them which will lead to learning and interaction across the generational divide.

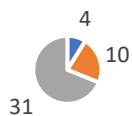
Over time, it will be important to steer away from the practice of counting the number of children in the All Age services as a measure that intergenerational worship is taking place. Indeed, truly intergenerational services are not about the number of people in a room, but more about the atmosphere created: where people of all generations interact with, engage with, and learn from each other, and, as a result, grow in faith.

Bibliography

1. Lucy Moore, *All-Age Worship*, (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2010)
2. George Lings (ed), *Messy Church Theology*, (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013)
3. Nick and Becky Drake, *Worship for Everyone*, (SPCK Publishing, 2021)
4. Holly Catterton Allen (ed), *InterGenerate*, (ACU Press, 2018)

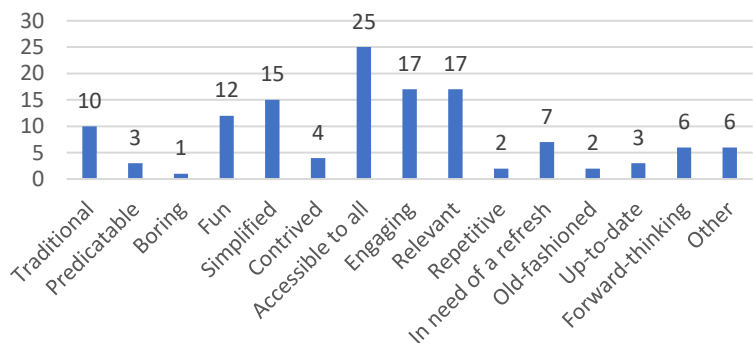
Questionnaire: Closed Question Results

If you attend All Age services at St Mary's, do you:

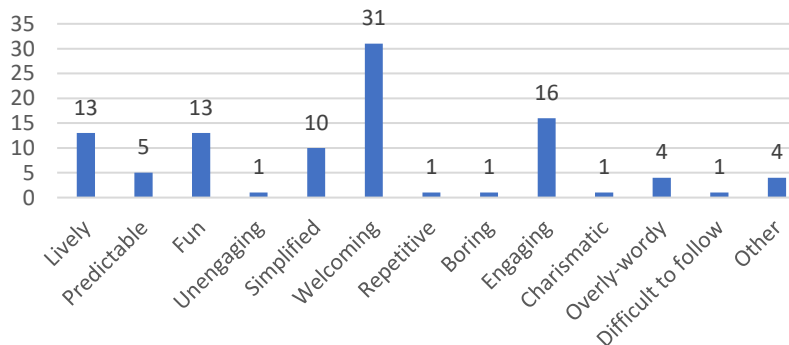


- Mainly attend All-Age services at St Mary's
- Choose not to attend All-Age services at St Mary's? (You may attend another service instead)
- Attend the 10am services regardless of the type of service which is taking place?

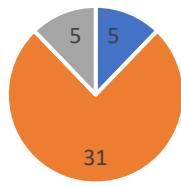
Which of the following describe the CONTENT of the current All-Age services at St Mary in Charnwood? (Select one or more)



How would you describe the PRESENTATION/ DELIVERY at the All-Age services at St Mary in Charnwood? (Select one or more)

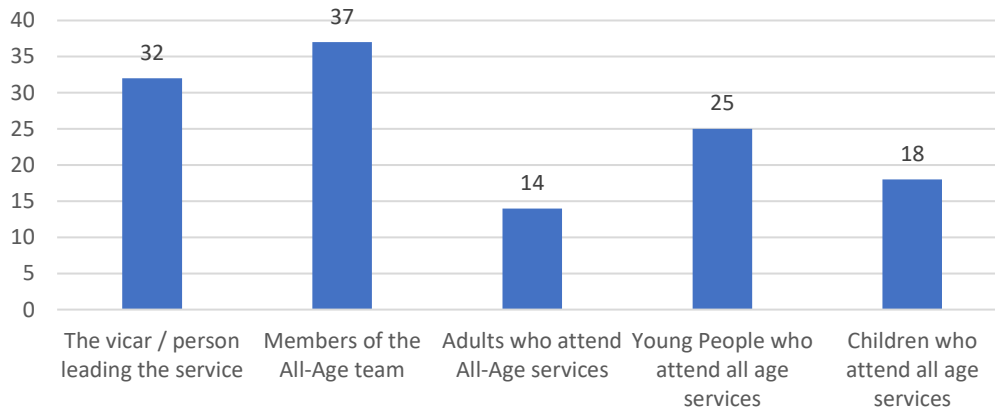


The content of All-Age services at St Mary's is...

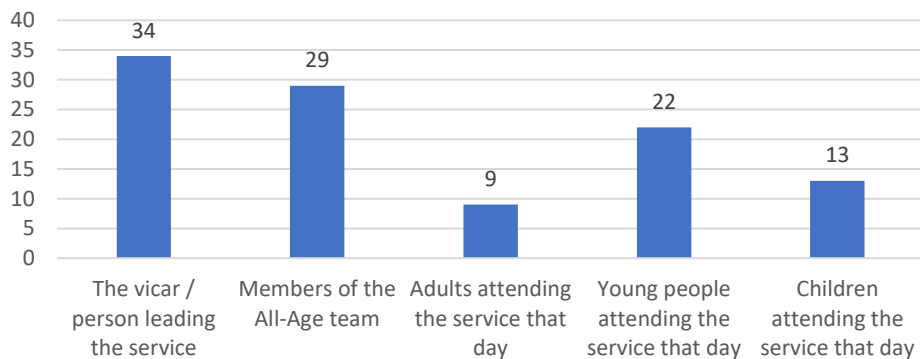


- Pitched at the same level as at other services
- Simplified - which works well
- Oversimplified - I'd prefer it not to be

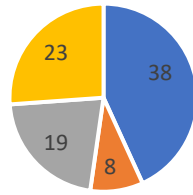
In an ideal world, who would be involved in planning All-Age services? (Select one or more)



Who would you like to see leading aspects of the All-Age services? (Select one or more)

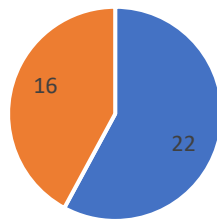


If attending an all age service, I would prefer it to be:
(Select one or more)



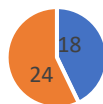
- At St Mary in Charnwood, inside the church
- At St Mary in Charnwood, in the Chapter House
- At St Mary in Charnwood, in the woodland
- At another venue, e.g. Home Farm (for Harvest in a Barn)

In addition to the All-Age services, would you be interested in St Mary's having a regular service which is aimed at children and young families?



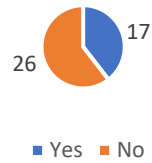
■ Yes ■ No

If you are unable to attend an All-Age service, would you like there to be a way to catch up on what you have missed? E.g. a summary / YouTube recording?

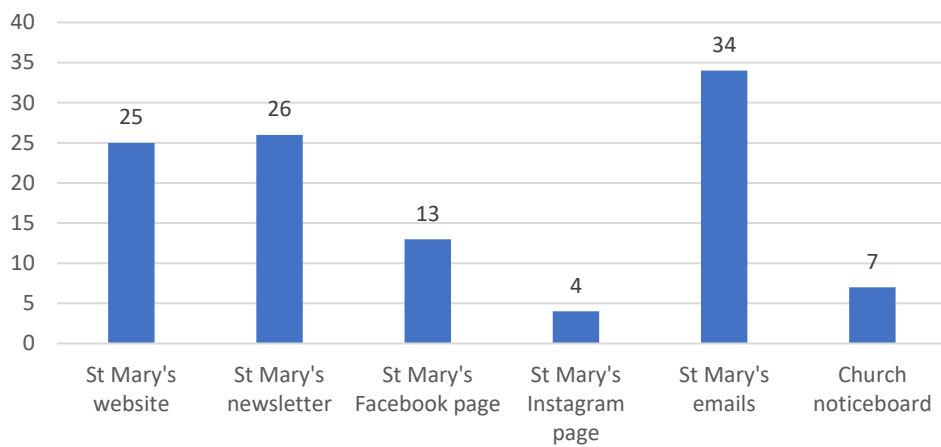


■ Yes ■ No

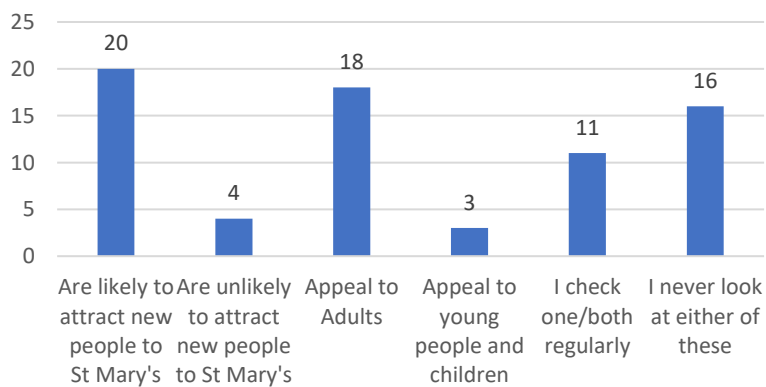
After an All-Age service, would you like to hear about how you could continue your worship at home? E.g. A short activity, conversation starters, prayer ideas?



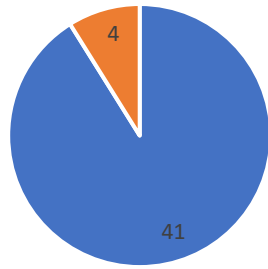
Where would you like to hear about our services and events?
(Select one or more)



The current St Mary's website and Facebook page... (Select one or more)



Intergenerational worship: Do you believe it is important for people of all ages to worship together?



■ Yes ■ No