

## **St. Marys Church Woburn - Children and Youth Ministry Report 2022/23**

### **Church youth worker:**

Fay Grech-Marguerat (LLW) for Explorers and Followers role

### **Safeguarding officer:**

Paula Sawers

### **Volunteer youth leaders and helpers for Sunday groups:**

Matt & Fay Grech-Marguerat, Lisa Schmidt, Chris Langford, Jason Huntsmith, Flavia Langford, Chelsea Kennedy, Emma Huntsmith and Emma Brooker.

### **The Faith in Young People Report – Diocese of St. Albans 2019/20**

Extensive research was carried out in 2019/20 on behalf of the Diocese of St. Albans, to determine the shape and scope of youth provision in the diocese. Canon Rev'd. Steve Nuth and Fay Grech-Marguerat took part in this research.

It confirms that young people are vital for our churches to flourish and grow, and for many of us, it was as children that we first discovered Jesus. The vision of the diocese, 'living Gods love', is key to the emerging generations in terms of seeing opportunities and addressing the challenges we face.

The diocese plan to use the findings to provide a foundation for new strategies to support and enable each church in its work with children and young people. The report invites us to confront the current trajectory we are on as a nation, giving us a chance to change it.

### **Summary of findings:**

- Most churches in the diocese are on a trajectory of decline regarding the participation of children and young people in church. At the current rate, the average Sunday attendance of 0–15-year-olds would be **ZERO** in just 10 years' time!
- Most churches are at the point where they have few or no children and young people in church.
- There is a much greater focus on work with children than young people across the diocese. Without the development of youth provision, many of these children are unlikely to stay connected with churches when they reach adolescence.
- Less than a third of churches offer any kind of regular youth activity.
- Youth work in churches is mostly run by small numbers of volunteers. Where there is a paid youth worker, clergy are more likely to prioritise youth work and feel equipped to reach young people.
- Less than half the churches surveyed actively partner with parents/guardians to support young people's discipleship.
- Only a quarter of clergy felt they were equipped to engage positively with young people.

- Congregants and clergy encounter young people in a range of ways outside formal church activities. But few churches create ways to grow these contacts into relationships or build pathways to faith.
- There are opportunities for every church to engage with youth ministry, regardless of their circumstances.
- Clergy stressed the need for renewed confidence in the relevance of the Gospel for young people. They also identified the need for more partnership, whole church ministry, openness to change and the need to look beyond Sunday service attendance.

### The good news!

The good news is that we have children and young people in **regular** attendance at St. Marys, both on a Sunday and at the monthly Tuesday youth groups. Thanks be to God for this blessing and thanks to the volunteer leaders and helpers who make it possible. The age ranges below are approximate because we base when a child is ready to move to the 'older' group on how they feel rather than on their age, and on discussion with their parents/guardian:

Group	Age range	When
<b>Sunday school</b>	5/6 to 12/13	Sunday morning weekly
<b>Next Generation</b>	13 to young adult	Sunday morning weekly
<b>Explorers</b>	5/6 to 12/13	Tuesday evening monthly
<b>Followers</b>	13 to young adult	Tuesday evening monthly

Our leaders and helpers are DBS checked and have undertaken the diocese safeguarding training, guided by Paula Sawers. Apart from Fay, the team members are all volunteers who work very hard to facilitate the children and young people's ministry at St. Marys, for which we are extremely grateful:

	<b>Sunday school</b>	<b>Next Generation</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b>	Matt & Lisa	Matt & Lisa
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b>	Flavia & Chelsea	Chris
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b>	Join in service	Join in service
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b>	Fay & Emma H	Chris & Jason
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b>	In church	In church

### Resources

For Sunday school and Next Generation, we use a variety of resources to ensure the teaching and activities we provide are relatable, relevant, and fun. So much is available on the internet now. We always base sessions on the main events of the year, for example: Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance, Advent, Christmas

In between, we look at some of the main characters in the Bible (old and new testament), Jesus' miracles and parables and some of the 'stand out' scriptures like the Psalms, the Beatitudes, the Lords Prayer. We note the topic we teach each session, on the register, to avoid repeats in a year. We take our main inspiration from resources developed by Scripture Union and the Church Pastoral Aid Society.

## **Session content**

Sunday school sessions tend to include a game, a song with actions, a video, prayer and an activity (colouring, wordsearch, craft), as well as teaching. Next Generation sessions tend to include an ice breaker, group discussion, a video, prayer, deep dive into scripture, as well as teaching.

## **Monthly groups**

Explorers and Followers meet on the last Tuesday of the month. Explorers is now face to face, having met on Zoom throughout the pandemic. The focus of the evening is fun, with a light Christian theme, as part of the purpose of the group is to reach out to the local community.

Followers is still meeting on Zoom currently. This group also met throughout the pandemic, which encompassed some of our young people and young adults who were members of our church/benefice but had started university. It has been important to continue this group on Zoom because of the peer support the group have provided one another during the pandemic. This has helped immensely with the transition back to a new normal way of living.

## **Outreach**

However, we are now reaching out to the local lower schools for Explorers and the local feeder middle/upper schools for Followers, which will mean that Followers will need to move back to face to face meetings. Links will still be maintained via Zoom, with the young adults who belong to our church/benefice, but are now at university or working, so that they still feel supported. We also encourage the young adults at university now, to join a local church or student Christian union, while they are away from home.

## **Whatsapp**

The St.Marys Church Woburn Youth KIT (keeping in touch) whatsapp group was set up in lockdown under the guidance of the St. Albans diocese youth team policies. It was extremely useful for checking in with the children and young people of our church, and their parents/guardians (for the under 16's). We also used it to share videos for the online services, which the youth took such an active role in providing throughout the height of the pandemic.

This group has continued. It is used to update everyone about children and youth provision at church, and to share prayer requests and inspirational videos and worship songs. Communication between the children and youth ministry team and our members and their families is regular and good.

## **Additional needs**

We encourage parents/guardians to inform us if their child/young person has additional needs so that we can work them to ensure that their experience in the youth groups at St.Mary's is a positive one and feels inclusive and safe.

## **Church website**

The church website has an excellent children and young people's section, created by Rich Langford, with clear guidance on the groups offered, including a downloadable membership form.

## **Safeguarding**

Paula Sawers is a great support to the youth leaders and helpers, guiding us on the training required by the diocese and the procedure for DBS checks. She makes herself accessible to those needing support regarding all things safeguarding and makes sure we update when we need to.

## **Future aims under the guidance of Rev'd Dr Rachel Snow and PCC, as appropriate:**

'Youth Alpha' with enough leaders and helpers to enable age-appropriate groups, ie: 13 to 18 and 18 to 25

'Adult Alpha' to encompass new joiners to church, regular members who need refreshment, searchers and people ages mid 20's to 30

More house groups to signpost 'Adult Alpha' attendees to

Family fun days/Children and young people's holiday club

***"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it". Proverbs 22:6***

