

LISTENING & RESPONDING TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Reporting back on Network Meeting 1

27th Sept 2022

WHY ARE WE MEETING?



We explored the purpose of the network : by December, we we will have co-created an action plan for 2023. We will know the work we want to do next year to improve the way we listen and respond to children and young people in the church. We will know who we need in the room, and we will have organised what the next steps are and how and when we are going to take them.

At the moment we don't know exactly what that will look like, but we are here, committed to listening, to contributing, to acting on the prompting of young people, one another and the Holy Spirit.



TODAY'S BIG QUESTION



Why is it important that the church listens and responds to children and young people?

WE ARE TRYING TO ENSURE THAT....

- At local, diocesan and national level, the church hears from a range of young people who are representative of the demographic as a whole.
- There is a church-wide culture where young people are valued as spiritual beings who hear from God, are active agents in the faith, and co-creators of faith traditions and the future of the church.
- Diocesan synods, bishops' councils and PCCs and other arenas are spaces in which young people are valued, respected and whose questions and comments are engaged with in love.
- The church responds prayerfully, humbly and robustly to the voices of young brothers and sisters in Christ, leading to meaningful outcomes.



PRAYER

Elizabeth Olulari prayed for children, young people, for the church and this network. She asked God for us to be people of great joy within this serious business of elevating young voices.

Elizabeth is the National Education Lead for Racial Justice and she works in the Education Office at the Church of England.

WE HEARD FROM....



5 YOUNG PEOPLE ON WHY THEY THINK THE CHURCH SHOULD LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Some of the comments from the adults in response:

*I was deeply moved by the view point that said,
'We hear God too!'*

*Just the sense of excitement that came through what they were saying
was brilliant to hear...*

...we need to be this excited about what God is doing here.

*If we listen attentively the young people have plenty to tell us....they hear
from God and can explain the part they play in the church.*

We must listen to them!

*These children are hope and light -
a new generation of disciples.*

*"..blessed are you Father, you have hidden these things from the wise and
learned, but revealed them to children [and young people]"*

***Why do you think the church should listen
to children and young people?***

JONNY MASTERS - YOUTH & CHILDREN ADVISOR, DIOCESE OF CHESTER

Jonny spoke about the difference between a professional and theological reason for listening to children and young people. He made us think about why it's important to God. Jonny reminded us that Jesus said, "Do not hinder them".



What do you think this means?

LUCY MOORE, LOU PEET, ELIZABETH OLULARI



These three ladies had a chat about how much they value young people's input in their work, and how they learn so much from young people about God. They told stories of when young people have influenced the adult way of doing things, and when they've brought about change for good.

Lucy is Head of the Growing Faith Foundation, Lou is the Chaplain at a school in Coventry, and Elizabeth is National Education Lead for Racial Justice Lead in the Education Office.

***When have you seen examples of the church listening and
responding well to younger people?***



HURDLES

We spoke about some of things which make this work tricky:

- church structures
- adults forgetting to include younger people in discussions at an early enough stage
- when members of staff who advocate for younger people leave their jobs or move away
- that children are often heard in school but have a very different experience in the church
- most conversations are adult-initiated, and young people can see through this tokenism. Some young people feel so sure they won't be heard that they no longer feel it's worth trying to communicate.
- we need to be inclusive of all children and young people, and there are some children who are overlooked (perhaps because of their age, communication skills, background or because the structures we use to hear from them are exclusive.
- Sometimes we're afraid of what young people are saying, and whether or not we can do what they're asking.
- This work isn't easy and we need to trust young people and be very generous-hearted!

***What things do you notice getting
in the way of the church listening
and responding to children and
young people?***



OPPORTUNITIES

- Listening to young people leads to change.
- We have the opportunity to teach young people about church structures, and facilitate them infiltrating and being welcomed at every level.
- Some dioceses are already working on intergenerational communication, and they have offered to share their resources and ideas with the network.
- The more time we spend with young people, the more we will share understanding.
- Children don't always have to have fully-fledged ideas. Conveying their feelings can be really helpful to us.
- If we are intentional about listening and responding to children from a very young age, then voicing views and being involved will be normal as teens and young adults.
- There is a difference between consultation and genuine participation. It's exciting to think that change is possible.
- Children's concerns can lead us into fuller intergenerational worship (e.g. outdoor church).
- We need to ensure that young people are genuinely represented, and not just assume we are representing them, but we have amazing work in schools to learn from. This is a gift.

What opportunities can you see in church listening and responding to children and young people?

OUR HOMEWORK

It's important to us that we work on this issue practically between meetings. This month, we are each going to think about and write down our theological reason for why the church should listen and respond to children and young people. We are going to try to involve some younger people as well as our colleagues and communities in this task, because we think that it's better when we work together and hear one another's thoughts and ideas. Next month, we will share our theological reflections with others in the network.



REFLECT

We listened to [this song](#) together for a time of reflection as we committed to doing this homework, and asked God to guide us. One of the participants said, *"What a blessing & privilege... we get space to take moments out like these in our working day to focus on Christ"*.

Could you listen to [this song](#) and pray for the church?

BIBLE ENCOURAGEMENT

I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Psalm 27: 13-14

Shared by Lucy Moore

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Ephesians 3:15

Shared by one of the young people

NEXT MONTH...

We will hear from Hannah Chukwu (Penguin Books), Bishop Jonathan of Portsmouth, Matt Long from Leicester Diocese and others from within the network.

Our big questions will be: How do we HEAR from children and young people? What does it mean to really hear? How do we ensure we're hearing from the right people?

GET IN TOUCH!

Hannah is the Networks Lead at the Growing Faith Foundation. She facilitates this network. Hannah would love to hear from you! Hannah.Persaud@churchofengland.org