

## GENERAL SYNOD

## Growing Faith: Churches, Schools and Households

**Summary**

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*Growing Faith* is the vision set by the House of Bishops to ensure a national commitment to achieve a significant culture change within the Church so that every aspect of mission and ministry is seen through the lens of what it means for ministry with children, young people and households. It will flow into the type of relationships encouraged between schools and churches, and how these are developed to resource and support households to grow in faith together.

*Growing Faith* envisions children, young people and households coming to faith, growing in discipleship and contributing confidently to the Kingdom of God through the community of faith. It is about how, as members of the whole people of God, children and young people are encouraged and how the whole Church is equipped to think intergenerationally.

It brings together work in Education, Evangelism and Discipleship, Ministry, Renewal and Reform and Setting God's People Free (SGPF), seeking to enable the people of God of all ages to live out their faith confidently in homes and schools. In doing so, *Growing Faith* seeks to maximise effectiveness and enable dioceses and parishes to have ready access to resources for growing faith in churches, schools and households.

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**Introduction**

1. Over the course of 2018 the House of Bishops, Archbishops' Council and the Renewal and Reform Futures Group have considered broad themes of education and mission, culminating in a discussion at the House of Bishops in December when the House endorsed *Growing Faith* - a vision for every aspect of mission and ministry to be viewed through the lens of its implications for children, young people and households.
2. *Growing Faith* is a vision where children, young people and households are coming to faith, growing in discipleship and confidently contributing to the Kingdom of God through the community of faith.
3. It brings together work under: Evangelism & Discipleship Priority 3 which prioritises children and young people in and for evangelism and discipleship; Renewal and Reform which has *Growing Faith* as one of its key areas for focus; SGPF, which will be developing resources for use in the home; the Digital team, which plans a focus on children and young people; the Strategy team, which promotes mission across the generations; and the Education Office which promotes a broad range of activity in this area.

**Background and Data**

4. In 2001, General Synod affirmed that church schools are "at the heart of our mission to the nation." In 2010, *Going for Growth*<sup>1</sup> set out a call to action for the church to work at national, diocesan and parochial level towards "every child and young person having a life enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ." In 2013,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.going4growth.com/home](http://www.going4growth.com/home)

Education Division set out ten marks of a high performing Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) as part of *A Diocesan Board of Education for the Future*<sup>2</sup>. This was followed in 2016 by a freshly articulated vision<sup>3</sup> for the Church of England's work in education which Synod endorsed, giving clarity to why we think involvement in education is vital as part of our mission, being deeply Christian and serving the common good. The Church's *Life Events* work on christenings has brought a welcome focus to the importance of ongoing engagement with families who are bringing babies and toddlers for baptism.

5. However, despite regular publication of reports like, *Children in the Way* (1988), *All God's Children* (1991), *Youth A Part* (1996) *Going for Growth* (2010) and *Rooted in the Church* (2016) it is not always clear that the church is sufficiently focused on the engagement in ministry with children and young people and the appropriate connection between education, mission, and evangelism and discipleship at national, diocesan and parish/school level.
6. Childhood years are a vital indicator for faith. Research by ComRes, carried out for the Church of England<sup>4</sup>, reveals the ages at which children & young people come to (and leave) faith. When practising Christians were asked at what age they came to faith, the results showed:

40%	before the age of 5
16%	between 5 & 10
20%	between 11 & 18
7. Another question asked respondents who previously used to be a member of a religious group (not just Christian) 'At what age did you stop considering yourself to be a member of this religious group?' The results showed:

4%	between 5 & 10
34%	between 11 & 18
21%	between 19 & 24
8. The fact that 76% of Christians said that they came to faith under the age of 18 indicates the importance of focussing on how children and young people are helped to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ so that their faith is firmly rooted in the Christian community.
9. The Education Office commissioned research to explore the relationship between the Church of England and young people and better understand what helps young people stay rooted in their faith and church lives. The findings, which centred around four key themes, are summarised in a report *Rooted in the Church*<sup>5</sup> and have been presented as a simple two-minute animation:<sup>6</sup>
  - i. *Inclusion*: Young people want to be part of the whole church family rather than always being artificially separated. An intergenerational approach was highlighted as being important in the growth of faith.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2013\\_a\\_diocesan\\_board\\_of\\_education\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2013_a_diocesan_board_of_education_for_the_future_web_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/vision-education>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/church-of-england-mapping-survey/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Rooted%20in%20the%20Church%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBe8vFPtSVQ>

- ii. *Equality*: Young people articulated a desire to be treated as equal members of the Church, participating in its life and leadership.
  - iii. *Leadership*: Youth leaders (whether volunteers or employed) make a vital contribution in building bridges between the generations.
  - iv. *Space*: Room to explore faith and life without fear of being judged.
10. After the influence of parents, research shows consistently that the biggest indicators of young people growing into an adult faith are:
- a. Active participation in worship
  - b. Connection to other adults in the faith community
11. Research shows that parents have the largest influence on their children in matters of faith.<sup>7</sup> Foundations for faith are often laid in childhood, but Christian families do not always find it easy to model living and sharing faith together. Care for the Family research shows that although 90% of Anglican families thought it important to teach their children about faith, only 29% thought it was their responsibility. Barriers to living faith together included family time being devoted to other things; not knowing what to do and a lack of confidence in discussing matters of faith or establishing patterns of prayer.

### **The House of Bishops' Vision: Growing Faith in churches, schools and households**

12. The House of Bishops' vision for *Growing Faith* brings together work across Education, Evangelism and Discipleship, Ministry, and Setting God's People Free, in seeking to see the people of God of all ages living out their faith confidently in homes and schools. It is a vision for transforming the culture such that *Growing Faith* is woven through the structures of each diocese, and forms a central strand of every parish, deanery or diocesan mission action plan, reflecting the unique makeup of each diocese, and the particularities of each parish and deanery. Therefore, although the underlying principles of *Growing Faith* remain the same, the outworking will look different within each diocese.
13. *Growing Faith* wants to see:
- a) Every parish creating expressions of church where children, young people and households are actively involved, growing spiritually and have their voices heard.
  - b) 100% of Anglican parents recognising the importance of sharing faith with their children and actively engaging in this responsibility
  - c) Clergy and lay ministers who are confident in supporting households in sharing faith at home.
  - d) Congregations which nurture and support the faith of children and young people.
  - e) Churches which serve and are served by their local school communities, actively building strong relationships between church, schools and households.
  - f) Children and young people who are confident to share their faith with their peers and families.
14. *Growing Faith* will seek to achieve impact through a variety of practical and tangible ways, but it cannot simply be a series of initiatives. The culture change required in the life of the whole church is such that at every level the question which needs to be asked is: "How we are seeking a renewal of minds and hearts within the diocese so

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<sup>7</sup> Anecdote to Evidence, Generation Z, Care for the Family, Passing on the Faith, Parenting for Faith

that it becomes second nature to look at all daily activities and every decision through the lens of what it means for our children, young people and households?”

## **Growing Faith in Churches, Schools and Households**

15. The partnership between churches, schools and households is crucial in *Growing Faith*. Recognising the wide range of examples though which *Growing Faith* in churches, schools and households is already happening, several themes have emerged that are needed to ensure the impact of this vision:
- a) Households becoming confident in sharing and nurturing faith.
  - b) Every member of a congregation (including lay and ordained leaders, parents, grandparents, godparents and other laity) to recognising the part they play in how children and young people understand life as a Christian, and to become confident in sharing their own faith.
  - c) A clear focus on churches serving the life of schools and all Church of England schools committed to working in partnership with churches, building meaningful long-lasting relationships with children and young people which help them navigate the transitions from pre-school to primary, primary to secondary and secondary into further and higher education or employment.
  - d) Work in partnership with Ministry Division to ensure that *Growing Faith* is a strand which is woven into all levels of clergy selection, formation and continuing development, so that clergy recognise the vital importance of this ministry and are better equipped to facilitate it in their parishes.
  - e) Recognition that there are particular challenges and opportunities to develop work with older teenagers and students in both further and higher education which needs specific focus. The excellent infrastructure of Church of England schools offers a wonderful opportunity to see one million children grow and flourish in their spiritual lives through encountering the person of Jesus and the Christian faith, but there is a great deal to do to ensure those foundations bear fruit through secondary school, FE colleges and HE institutions.

### *Growing Faith in Schools*

16. In addition to the day to day experience of a child in school, there are many extracurricular opportunities for intergenerational mission:
- a. Church/school partnerships that foster discipleship such as Prayer Spaces in Schools, Godly Play, Messy Church, Bible clubs, holiday clubs and summer camps and festivals.
  - b. Supporting children spiritually in the transitions between primary and secondary school and beyond. The connection we have with 800,000 children in Church of England primary schools is often lost as they go to secondary school. Scripture Union's *It's Your Move* is widely used to support children in the move from year 6 to year 7. Developing innovative ways of maintaining that connection and building on the experience children had in a Church of England school in a way that enables them to engage with the Christian faith as they develop into teenage years, is important.
  - c. Developing children and young people as leaders of collective worship and building on this as a model to encourage their leadership within the church context.

- d. Encouraging children and young people to take the lead in building relationships with their peers and equipping them with the confidence to share their faith with family and friends.

### *Growing Faith in Households*

17. Supporting households by providing and signposting to national resources to promote evangelism and discipleship is a key priority for this work. There are already many of resources to help with growing faith in households signposted on our Going for Growth website<sup>8</sup>. From 2016-18 The Vine Project highlighted the need to help families grow in confidence to share faith in the home and it has generated a range of activity in this area. There are also many excellent examples of work being developed or already happening in parishes and dioceses and other denominations.
18. The development of national Church of England resources will draw on all of this work, highlight the best ideas and enable them to be disseminated more widely. Particular areas of focus will include:
  - a. Growing faith through family prayer.
  - b. Developing a rule of life.
  - c. Following up from the successful life events work and providing resources to help children and adults develop spiritually.
  - d. Developing creative ways to share the stories of our faith, working alongside creative models such as Open the Book, Godly Play, Audio Bible stories, Messy Church.
  - e. The use of music, song and worship to build links between churches, schools and households.
  - f. Help and ideas for parents, grandparents and godparents to pass on faith to their children / grandchildren / godchildren.
  - g. Resources being developed through Digital Church to ensure that Christian faith is available to the young through the digital world.
  - h. Promotion of materials and ideas already in development through Setting God's People Free and the Christenings Project.

### *Growing Faith in Churches*

19. The reality of the Church of England's provision of 4,700 Church of England schools, as well as the relationship with many community schools enables the Church to serve its community through the life of the school. The connection between what a pupil experiences in school and how that translates into an active faith, nurtured through a local church often needs to be developed further.
20. Education has changed a lot over the last 30 years, and the dynamic experience young people have through their schools is not always matched by their experience

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<sup>8</sup> [www.going4growth.com](http://www.going4growth.com)

in church. Young people tell us that they are not often involved in decision making or given leadership responsibility in the church. When the Church talks of setting God's people free, or of growing leadership or reimagining ministry, it is often interpreted as being adult focused, rather than recognising that children and young people should be active participants in these areas.

21. Common to all good schools is a focus on pupils being active participants in their own learning and their development as leaders who are given a voice and actively enabled to contribute towards the functioning of the school community. It started with school councils, but it is now commonplace for children to be involved in interviewing teachers and school leaders, driving initiatives such as charitable activity and community service, and engaging in peer to peer mentoring. This level of engagement needs to be replicated more often in children and young people's experience of church.
22. In Church of England schools, pupils will increasingly experience a dynamic approach to developing their understanding about Christianity through our Understanding Christianity<sup>9</sup> resource. From ages 4-14 they will keep engaging with and learning about significant theological concepts within Christianity as part of developing their wider religious, theological and cultural literacy. The core concepts of Christianity are presented in an engaging way which helps children engage with the text and make connections to the rest of their thinking and lives.
23. Outstanding Collective Worship in Church of England schools is participatory, engaging, contemporary and relevant. Children are encouraged to be leaders of as well as participants in worship. Resources like our Worship Workshop<sup>10</sup> website, enable this to happen. Again, churches should consider how this experience which is commonplace in schools can be replicated in church.
24. Church of England schools are encouraged to work closely with their local parish church to ensure that spiritual development is seen as fundamental to the life of the school and the education offer. In all of this, the revised Statutory Inspection framework (SIAMS)<sup>11</sup> has set out very clearly what it means for schools to be offering authentic Christian education which is deeply Christian, serving the common good. It encourages worship, prayer, spiritual development, courageous advocacy and effective RE. Feedback from headteachers during the revision process for the new SIAMS schedule revealed concern that their school would be downgraded because of the persistent lack of engagement from their church.
25. *Growing Faith* in schools and households requires the support and ministry of the whole people of God. Specific areas of focus for Growing faith in church include:
  - a. Working to ensure that all those being trained for ministry in the church are committed to and equipped for ministry with children and young people in churches, schools and families. Our assumption is not that all clergy must be skilled or expert at ministry with children, young people and households, but that all should recognise the vital importance of this ministry and be better equipped to facilitate it more ably.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.understandingchristianity.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.worshipworkshop.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-school-inspections>

- b. Promoting and supporting effective chaplaincy and other forms of missional leadership in schools, colleges and universities to ensure greater connection with churches and households and create more opportunities to reach the huge proportion of children and young people (and their families) who are not yet in church but are in schools and colleges.
- c. Expanding the work of the *Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership* to include the development of clergy and other ministers as leaders of the church's mission in educational settings. Currently the Foundation's work is focussed on school leaders and diocesan education teams. Developing a programme for lay and ordained ministries and a bespoke strand of the very successful peer support networks will enable the support and continuing development of clergy and others in their understanding and practice about ministry in schools and colleges.

### *Leading the vision*

- 26. The House of Bishops commends the vision for *Growing Faith* and is committed to each diocese appointing a *Growing Faith* Champion within the bishops' senior staff, prioritising *Growing Faith* and weaving it through each strand of their diocesan strategy by asking the questions at every senior leadership team meeting: 'What are the implications for children, young people and households?' and 'How are we hearing the voice of children and young people in our vision planning and decision making?'
- 27. General Synod is asked to welcome the House of Bishops' vision and encourage all dioceses, parishes, fresh expressions, Church of England schools and college or university chaplaincies to ensure they weave it through every strand of their strategy for mission and ministry.
- 28. In doing so General Synod may also want to consider committing itself to always assessing the impact of its own policy, practice and priorities through the same lens.

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