

North Blackwater Parishes Vision for Youth – exploratory meeting

Monday 26th April 2014

Andrew Eastham facilitated and led the evening of discussions. He began by posing some questions.

1. How did we come to faith/ what was our own experience of youth groups when we were young?

Responses included:

Faith and works; living theology; experiences; faith in action; belonging; being preached at; negative and positive – teach us! Sharing things together; serving others; people who listen and care; ownership and trust; getting together with a big crowd.

2. Why are our young people important? Why do we need a vision?

Responses included:

Because there are so many children; they are our future; no vision, we may give up; outside pressures taking them away; we need them to keep us up to date; so many children at Edward bear Club we need to move them on (they are comfortable); church club into young mums not much more than youth themselves; it is a natural flow from children to youth; need to put something in place for 12-13year olds - question: should we be the providers?

3. Why do they need to explore their faith? If they do not they will not grow.

4. What might be possible? This led us on to hopes and fears.

Our Hopes

The hopes tend to fall into four categories though some of these are interchangeable and could fit in more than one category

Emotional and practical needs of youth to thrive

- Leaders the young people relate to
- Young people feel important to the church
- The creation of a culture that allows thought and questioning for parents and children
- To be listened to and to be aware of that
- To involve the youngsters in the Sunday services
- A thriving group catering for all ages that grows faith in each member
- To be flexible in our approach and recognise where people really connect

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- Long term commitment to [youth and their] activities and not just bursts
- An environment they are happy to invite friends to
- Friendship
- That young children of Christian families take up the faith for themselves
- We have the commitment to drive this forward despite our busy lives
- This involves all young people from all our villages

Church family membership and belonging [reaching out/ heart for growth]

- No gaps
- Young people want to come to church
- Wanting to come and join
- Good number in each age group
- Families come to church together
- To fill all the generation gaps
- To encourage more families into church on Sundays
- That families with members of all ages feel welcome and encouraged and can grow in their faith
- That in finding a vision for youth we also bring in their mothers and fathers
- to have more 10-15 year olds wanting to learn about God
- To have a vibrant Christian youth group in our villages and encourage them to assist in the worship
- Full busy thriving churches
- To have lots of people wanting to work with children
- The seeds of faith will grow. The children will enjoy fellowship with the whole community
- To have lots of baptisms (as Bishop of York?? Youth?)
- To have lots of families in church on Sundays
- The parents become involved, inspired and grow. The youth become and inspiration for other generations
- Work as a benefice not as four individual units

Buildings and resources

- Variety of events and activities
- Modern activities combined with traditional themes
- A place where all young people can meet with people peers: Deanery Bus? Picks up children from all villages
- Combine resources with other churches in area/deanery
- To have a full time youth worker for the benefice

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- Members of all churches involved and using all churches
- To be able to go to other churches to meet other youngsters to see the sort of things they do there
- To have an active Facebook and Twitter feed
- To have a Sunday School in Tollesbury every week
- A place for them, to meet
- Christian music
- Find somewhere/centre in our benefice that can be used by all ages any day of the week: build a new hall?

Spirituality

- Knowing the Bible
- Allowing the Holy Spirit to move³ among us
- True worship in Jesus Christ
- Freedom in Christ
- Excitement
- Young people of all ages will find Jesus Christ
- Prayer always
- To do something that would make God smile!
- May Jesus be real in everyday life to all
- Children find the love of God for themselves
- Provide good and exciting discipleship for the children we have coming & already connected to the church
- For worship to come alive for our young people give them a faith and an enduring hope
- Laughter
- Joy

Our Fears

Our fears are fewer in number but nevertheless highly significant. These seem to fall into three categories.

Our own faults and limitations

- That [whether] we are able to help when trouble arises and not to criticise
- That we would not have a listening ear
- We can't [attitude] – not let's try and see what happens
- That we would not show the love of Jesus Christ to all

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- That we would [could?]do anything to hinder their faith in Christ
- That in taking care of ... we will forget about ...
- That we forget to build on prayer and get too busy and too tired
- That we will be frozen and not feel able to respond
- Talks too long to our vision together
- Stuck on who what and where rather than what
- That we just expect them to follow our ways
- Wanting to return to how it was
- Sustaining time and energies and commitments of all involved:
leaders/children/families/adults
- Wanting to get youth to fit in with perceived norms
- The whole benefice doesn't get involved
- People saying, 'Yes... but..'
- Alienating older worshippers

Opposition from other sources

- Outside activities
- Lack of commitment of youth and parents
- Some parents may oppose their children's interest
- Lack of commitment from families

Fears about the future

- It will fade out, no more youth
- That we won't be strong and courageous and end up thinking too small & too near, not looking ahead
- Fear of losing children as they grow older and they no longer enjoy church
- Fear of aging congregations and no young people coming along to enhance worship

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Our unlimited, all-out-go-for-it visions!

Working in three groups we developed a brain stormed vision for the future. Again there's a lot of overlapping in terms of ideas and recurrent themes.

These are the results:

Vision One

- Mystery Plays - including all. Young people could write them
- Look outwards
- Run bible studies
- Do things in church as they want
- Whole benefice/unit
- Present things in church service
- Plan services
- All ages and traditions catered for

Vision Two

- Bar'n'bus located in benefice
- David Beckham, Bear Grylls, Blue Peter presenter regular visitors
- No pews - bean bags
- Everyone working as one group
- Groups throughout the week
- Bible study for teenagers
- Regular sports
- Sunday school for each school year
- Sports Hall
- Hall with 10 rooms for all ages

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- Active group visit and bring cakes to the elderly
- Packed churches
- Feel safe
- Fleet of mini buses church football and cricket team mins league
- Good worship group with 20 piece band
- 15 youth workers
- Weekly monthly baptisms and confirmations
- All school children involved
- A mega church
- Spring Harvest in the benefice for us
- Youth services every week
- Weekly after schools clubs

Vision Three

- 100% young people engaged on a faith journey
- Pooled resources
- Paid youth workers
- Sharing across the age range
- Social media and networking
- Weekly messy church
- Love of the word
- Believing how big God is
- Abundant love
- Spirit filled youth
- Understanding the power believers have
- Prophetic ministry
- Purpose built accommodation
- 24/7 prayer
- Fleet of mini buses

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- Sharing adventures
- Sharing ups and downs
- Young people running charity events
- Positive vision
- No grumbling (sorry that's a negative but a positive one)
- Bible studies in every street
- Abundant life
- Cycling, gardening, craft, etc. etc. all for Jesus activities/groups
- Producing and attending events ministering to community needs
- big ones
- Fun

Our visions were to be all out and looking ahead twenty years.