

Passing Faith On Discussion

Great Smith Street, Westminster
13th April 2016

In the room for the discussion were :: **Jamie Cutteridge** (Editor for Youthwork Magazine / Children's Work Magazine); **Judi Cox** (Youth Worker from Horsham); **Ed MacKenzie** (Discipleship Development Officer, Methodist Church); **Gareth Crispin** (Youth, Children and Families Minister, St John's Lindow); **Ian Macdonald** (Diocesan Youth Officer, Church of England Diocese of Oxford); **Nate Morgan-Locke** (Youth Evangelist, Christianity Explored); **Jason Gardner** (Associate Pastor, St Peters Harrow); **Mary Hawes** (Church of England National "Going for Growth" Officer - Children and Youth); **Mark Walley** (Home for Good).

Intro :: I kicked off our time together with a couple of quotes from David Voas' work looking at faith in the Anglican Church via his paper produced in 2014 as a follow up to "Anecdote To Evidence" (See links to both here :: [Anecdote to Evidence](#) / [Church Growth Research Paper](#))

1) The reason for decline in affiliation and attendance is the failure to replace older generations of churchgoers. The problem is not adults leaving the Church: it is that half of the children of churchgoing parents do not attend when they reach adulthood.

2) This key finding has important implications. Retaining children/youth is critical; it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders. There is no harm in pursuing programmes aimed at former or non-churchgoers (Back to Church Sunday, Alpha, etc.), but expectations need to be realistic. Recent history suggests that gains and losses during adulthood are roughly in balance; the challenge is to retain the new generation.

It is easier to raise people as church goers than to turn the unchurched in to attenders. This is, in essence, what the stats tell us. Yet, we continue to struggle with grasping and teaching and modelling discipleship - whilst pursuing an agenda of evangelism and mission (which isn't bad, we are just a bit lopsided!)

How do we change the church from the "unconcerned" to those who passionately invest in their children (and others) to pass on faith, share and live out the gospel? - This is the question we began the day with, and to be honest, before you read any further it is the question we were left with at the end of the day!

We need to enable the discipleship journey in adults if they are to join our children on the journey of faith.

The European Values Study allows us to investigate this issue. There is a battery of items introduced as follows: "Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five." Eleven qualities are listed: good manners; independence; hard work; feeling of responsibility; imagination; tolerance and respect for other people; thrift, saving money and things; determination, perseverance; religious faith; unselfishness; obedience.

The sample included 505 respondents who identified themselves as Anglicans. Religious faith was by a considerable margin the quality that was mentioned least often by this group as something that children ought to acquire. It was included as a priority by only 11%, as compared to good manners by 94%, tolerance and respect by 83%, independence by 47%, or even imagination (the second-least popular) by 27%. On average, people who call themselves Anglican seem unconcerned about transmitting religion to the next generation.

Discussion ::

What follows might be rambling and disjointed, I might repeat myself at various points. If something struck me particularly, then it is in bold - that will probably be a bit subjective, so do read all my notes if you are interested in this topic!

We need to reduce the differential between children and adult - like the difference in a child's and adult swimming pool temperature. What does parental leading on faith look like, whose responsibility is it?

Who will step up and make something happen? What is *not* happening? Lots feel they should be doing something - but not. Family worship resources have been developed for lent, advent etc . . . Jesse tree, catechism resources, **what we found is people are waiting for the next resource** - How then do we build the capability and the confidence of parents?

Could these three simple things help? Read together, Pray together, Sing together?

Do we have discipleship by extension as people continue to walk away?

Culture eats strategy for breakfast. What culture are we creating? This is long haul, tough stuff to shift the focus of our gathered meetings to inter-generational environments where we learn, share and grow together. We need to **restore confidence**. Story, and encouraging people to do it // share your faith.

In some of our churches we may not wanting to impose, we have been anxious not to impose faith (seen as proselytising) but lost **confidence**, the whole church has done this . . . children are a gift to the community, but in terms of the faith it is everyone discovering together.

Wholeness is the whole family of God. There is some soon to be released research around faith and young people - looking at "what is it that roots people in the faith"? (see "Rooted in the Church" survey info).

How do we pass on faith through reaching out? We need to continue evangelism with kids with no church background . . . how do they integrate with the church . . . what does it look like for them to be part of it? What are our expectations of the journey these young people need to make to discover Christ and who He is? What are we prepared to do that creates the space, opportunity, possibility of encounter with Him?

What have we prioritised - Has in been an over emphasis on something that by itself ? Get your kids to church. Attending church is where the magic happens, modelled to parents is - get your kids to church . . .

How do we restore a collective loss of nerve?

There is no neutral way to raise a child. Decisions to speak or not to speak, how we spend time, money, energy . . . overwhelmingly what has been communicated? It's not worth it, it's not that important . . .

We all "home school" our children, it depends what we school them in.

How would I? "When you sit at home, as you walk along the road" (Deuteronomy 11:19) Where it isn't is in the tabernacle, the place of meeting, the synagogue or the church . . .

Confidence.

Christian kids are often inarticulate about their faith because they are not being taught about their faith. **Biblical literacy** is poor, what do we do about that? They don't know the story of God.

Intergenerational stuff - don't teach? Read the stories, they find out the truth. The lens through which we explore those stories . . . family ministry and intergenerational ministry . . .

We referenced through the day various books and resources - in particular, these came up ::

"Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus" David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith (IVP)

"Mend The Gap" Jason Gardner (IVP)

"Together with God" Ed MacKenzie and Gareth Crispin (MorseBrown Publishing)

"Sticky Faith" Kara Powell (Zondervan)

"One Generation from Extinction" Mark Griffiths (Monarch)

Restoration of Families?

How do we avoid a pendulum thing . . . how do we balance between these things?

People get inspired by what they see in others.

What is our primary calling?

The significance of those around us, wider than parents and family - significant other adults involved . . . What are we modelling? Very serious questions . . . more focus on children's work and family work . . . a focus on "Messy Church" . . . ?

Anxiety . . . are we not giving teenagers enough credit?

A lack of confidence in the gospel.

The point of all these things is to know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified. The declaration, it is in Jesus. It is the Gospel.

Focus all of it on Christ.

Tradition - "Pass On" . . . (Sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see).

What we do in youth groups now is going to stop us having this conversation again . . . Are we banging our head against the wall?

What is the preaching which parents are hearing . . . not, it seems, an awful lot of Jesus. Ok, we've "got you in", but . . . where does faith grow? Through the sermon? What does discipleship look like with our adults (if they aren't disciples, but attendees of church, how will they shape and lead on discipleship in the home?)

The Bible is about God and what He has done. Proclaim Christ. The gift is Christ, it is not a transactional thing.

You have to explore in scripture just how wide the ripples of the gospel goes. Keep the Good News central.

What does a inter-generational church look like?

How do we continue the conversation, research . . . what are we doing? Unless people are being taught differently . . .

Who is doing the stuff . . .

As long as they hear the right information they will change?

Equipping parents to nurture faith . . .

If the local church puts the emphasis on "event" . . .

How do we see our work with children and young people as central . . .

"optional" teaching that is

Application of the gospel,

- where are your practical life applications .

Lets redress the communication issue,

Calling and sending out . . .

The machine is our priority . . .

Share Resources . . . //

We have an exciting story that changes everything.

- are minority ethnic Christians doing this better?

Re-discover . . . as Christianity becomes more of a minority, it becomes a cultural retention . . . decline of nominalism, dynamic between home and school - an increasingly tense conversation . . .

Confidence about sexual orthodoxy . . . // morality and relationship . . .

The ability to lead stuff in an explicitly Christian way is challenging, exception stuff . . . all that our children are absorbing at school, the confidence that parents need to have with talking to their own children . . .

How do we give back primary responsibility to parents and the confidence to have biblical conversations with children.

What Next? ::

What do we do? What can we do?

+Useful to have a map of who is doing what and where?

+Resources being used, written . . .

+Aged 10 /11 . . . How do we equip people as they journey into adolescence . . . helping parents with faith? (automatically - having conversations . . . have we got the nerve?) The depth of teaching that is on offer, parents get to a 12 year old child . . . Transitions stuff . . .

+connection with potential catalysts for change.

+ gathering the research (and, what is missing).

+what is not being done? Here are the people doing this - but who aren't doing this.

Sticky Faith // Care for the Family // Faithfull Generation // Children Matter // Youthscape

+ Holistic ministry with children, young people and families . . .

+ spiritual disciplines . . .

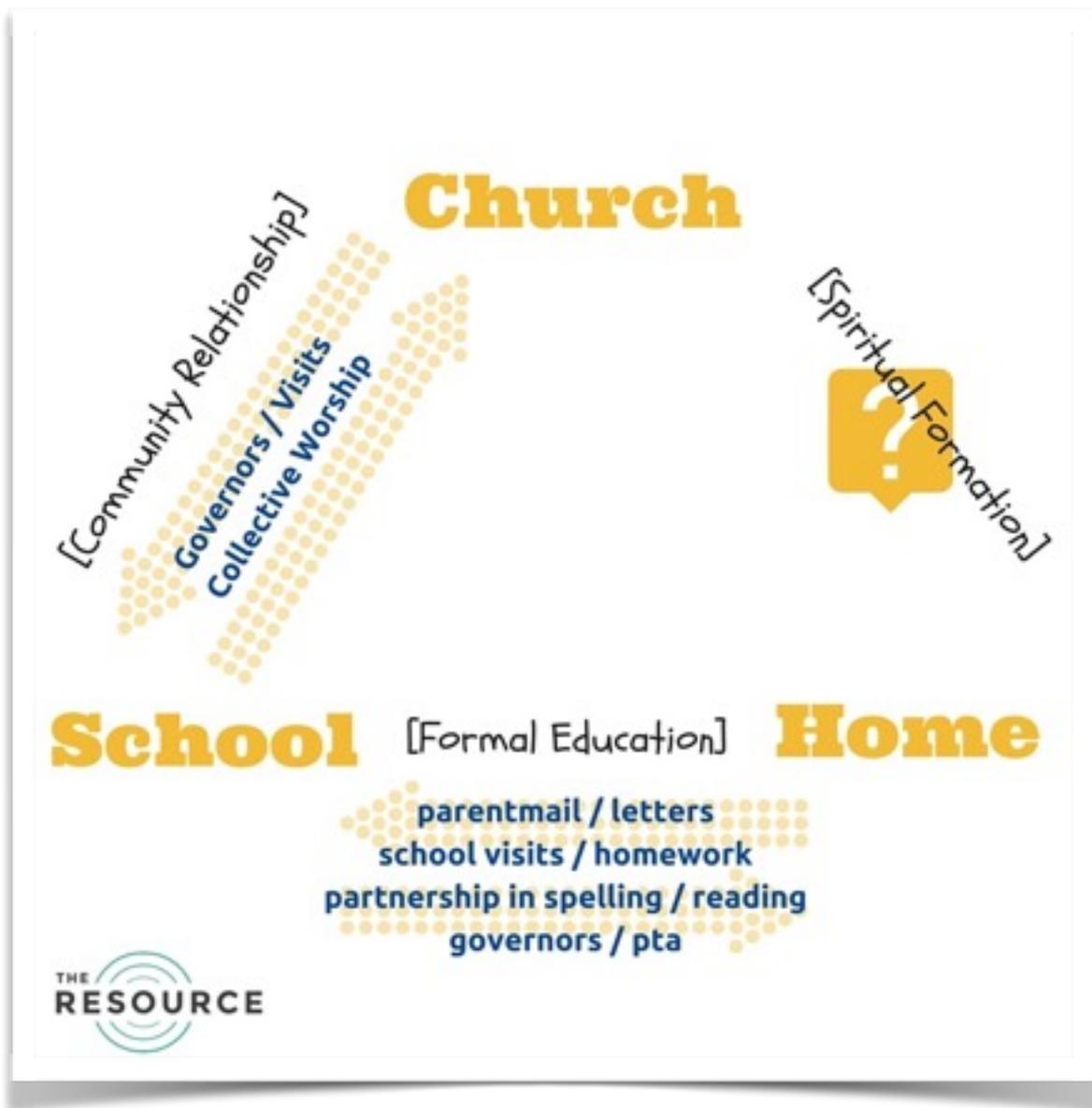
+ interact with para-church

Additionally, there is a diagram I used to illustrate a "gap" in what we do as the church - it's on the following page, but a quick explanation :

There are strong links between **school** and the **home** around the *formal education* of children - right from the start, parents are encouraged to get involved in spelling, writing and reading with their children - a good school fosters partnership around learning and parents are vital for that. Then there is parentmail - those constant, almost daily communications, about activities, there are regular parents meetings, sessions for parents explaining teaching methods and topics as those things change through a child's school journey.

There can also be good links between **church** and **school** - whether that is assemblies, collective worship, school visits to church buildings, church leaders being governors etc.

What then, of the relationship between **church** and **home** and the *spiritual formation* of children?



Finally ::

The key points towards the end of our discussion are areas we would like to explore and pursue together (whatever that looks like!) and, as best as I am able, I'll try to keep sharing and spreading the news of what is going on - PLEASE share your stories, your practice, the things you are doing where you are to make a difference and equip the church to pass on faith!

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