

'Good News for Young People?'

Report on mission and ministry to children, youth and young families in the Diocese of St David's, Church in Wales

Church Army's Research Unit

November 2021

Church Army is an Anglican Mission Society and Mission Community working across England, Scotland, Wales and the island of Ireland.

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Introduction

This report from Church Army's Research Unit presents the findings of an evaluation of the mission and ministry to children, youth and young families in the Diocese of St David's. It was commissioned by the diocese in 2021 in preparation for the Year of Discipleship in 2022. We were given the board aims of assessing the present engagement, primarily at the Local Ministry Area (LMA) level, identifying key challenges and highlighting some signs of hope, with suggestions for potential ways forward.

Our methodological approach has been designed to establish a picture of the current situation in the diocese:

- Analysis of statistics as provided by local authorities and churches to assess the presence and characteristics of young people in areas across the diocese.
- Survey of Local Ministry Areas (LMAs), where a representative from each was asked to complete an online evaluation. This was an opportunity to provide statistics and views on the role of young people in churches, and the work with schools and other bodies. We were also interested in any particular challenges and what visions people have for future work. 16 of the LMAs responded to the survey out of the 24 that it was sent to¹.
- Interviews of people ministering in local areas, including the representatives of the LMA where further information was forthcoming, and those who work for Plant Dewi² and Church Army/Diocese of St David's Centres of Mission³.
- Focus group and written submissions from young people. This is considered one of the most important sources of information for this report. The voice of young people needs to be heard, and although the young people who contributed were not necessarily a representative sample from across the diocese, they remain a vital input to this report.

Inevitably the scope of the report is limited by time we have been able to give and the partial response of some of those who were contacted. However, although there will be aspects we have not been able to fully investigate, this report provides a useful analysis of much of the mission and ministry to young people in the diocese.

We recognise the bilingual context of much of the work in the diocese and have ensured that communications and survey were produced in both Welsh and English.

It is not possible at this stage to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on the life of communities and the work of the church. Our approach has been to assess the situation before the lockdowns began, in the hope that as restrictions are gradually lifted the church will be in an ideal position to plan for mission.

We hope and pray that many who read this report will agree with the words expressed by one contributor:

'My passion is to share the gospel with children, young people and families through meeting needs practically, building relationships and taking opportunities as they arise to introduce them to Jesus through words and then journeying with them as disciples of Christ.'

¹ At the time of the survey there were 24 LMAs within the diocese; we understand that there are now 25.

² <https://stdavids.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/st-davids-diocesan-council-social-responsibility/plant-dewi/>

³ www.churcharmy.org/com

The current situation

St David's 'Reach'

The table below aims to give some measure for the numbers of children (under 18 years) who are connected to the Diocese of St David's in some way (figures are given for the most recent years available).

	No. of children
Attending CiW church on an average Sunday (2018) ⁴	762
Pupil at a CiW school (2021) ⁵	3834
Supported by Plant Dewi (2019/20) ⁶	3054

There will undoubtedly be some overlap between the children in these three groups e.g. some school pupils also attending church. However, it could be posited that the Diocese of St David's currently has a reach of 7650 children which is just over 10% of all children living within the diocese area⁷.

A breakdown of this data shows that the large majority of these children are under 12 years old (primary school age and younger). The diocese's reach of children in this age group is 7207⁸ which is just over 15% of all the children of this age group living within the diocese area.

The reason that we have considered these three different avenues of connection and engagement with children, youth and young families in this report is that, while the approaches, aims and levels of engagement of these three avenues may be different, they all are a part of the Diocese of St David's and all a part of the mission of God. While attendance at church on a Sunday may be seen as the traditional mode of mission and ministry and may offer more overt 'evangelistic' content, CiW schools and Plant Dewi offer an exposure to Christian values that for many may well be the first time they have encountered these.

⁴ Church attendance figures supplied by Church in Wales

⁵ School figures from <https://mylocalschool.gov.wales/> accessed 20/10/2021

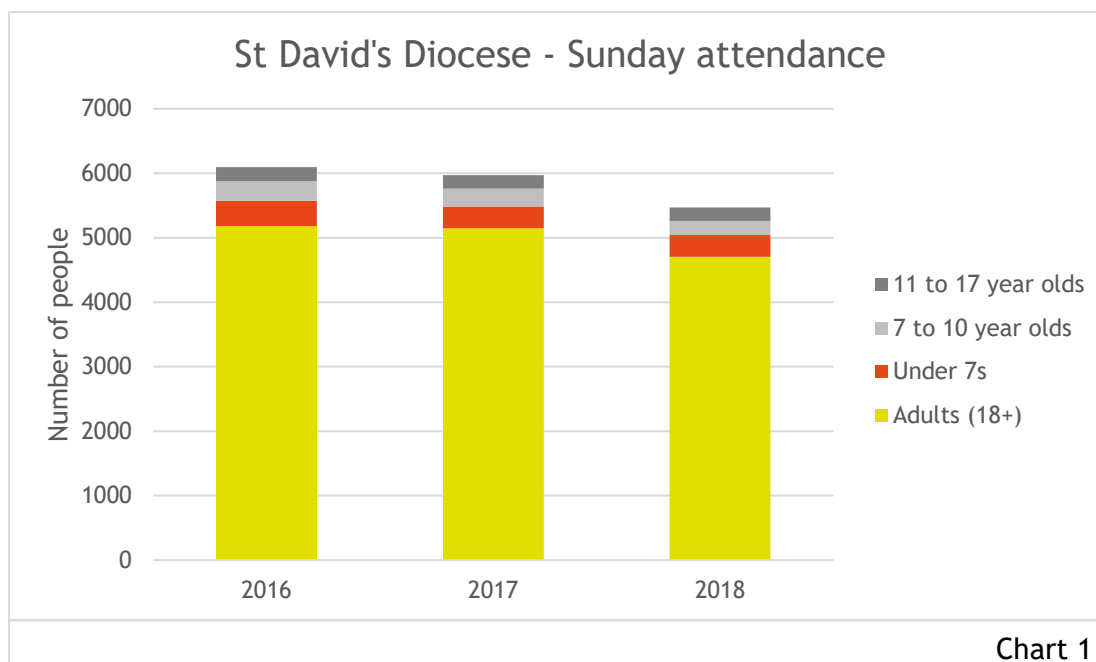
⁶ Plant Dewi Annual Report 2019/20

⁷ The diocese area is approximated to be the Unitary Authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire (population figures from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland> accessed on 15/10/2021)

⁸ This assumes that all children supported by Plant Dewi are under 12 which we have not been able to verify

Sunday church

In 2018⁹ there were 762 children under 18 years old in a church in the Diocese of St David's on an average Sunday (337 under 7s, 218 aged 7-10, and 207 aged 11-17).



As Chart 1 shows, the number of children attending church on a Sunday in the diocese has decreased over the years, but this is largely in line with the decrease that has also been seen in adult attendance.

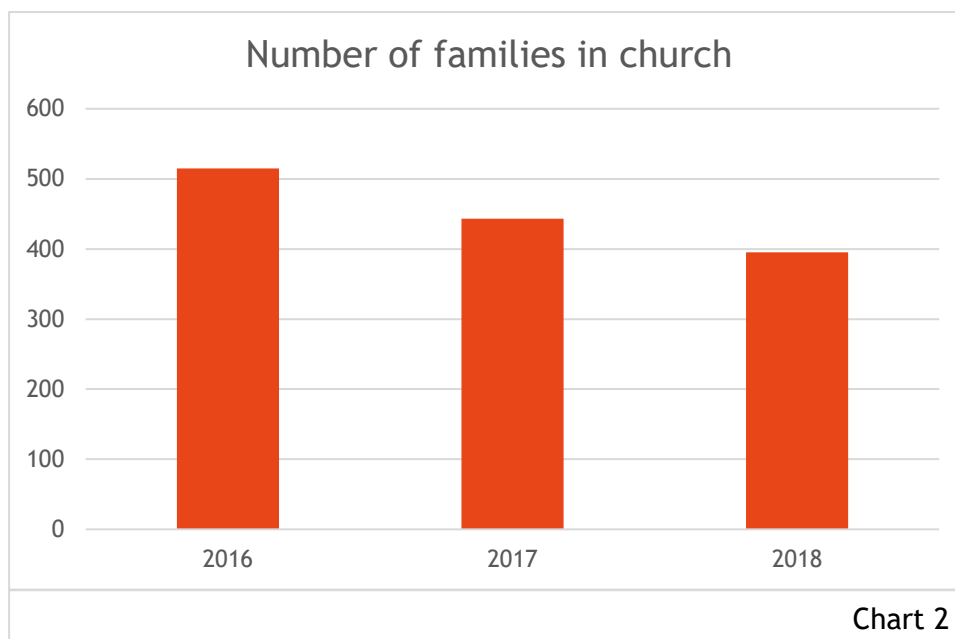
When we consider the proportion of Sunday church attenders who are under the age of 18, we find that this was 13.9% in 2018. In comparison, in the general population of the diocese area, children under the age of 18 make up 19.1% of the population in the same year. This means that children are much less present in CiW churches than would be expected from the general population. It should be noted however that there is a large amount of variation between LMAs (ranging from 5.1% to 34.7% of Sunday attenders being aged under 18). Anecdotally we heard that some LMAs believe there are simply very few children living in the general population of their area. However, LMA population data¹⁰ shows that while there is some variation in the proportions of children living in different LMAs, this does not account for the low proportions of children attending Sunday church in these LMAs. For the LMA that has the smallest proportion of children in its general population, they still make up 14.4% of people living in the area.

LMAs are asked to record the number of families who are a part of their churches and in 2018 there were 395 families¹¹. Chart 2 shows a very noticeable drop in the number of families being recorded each year.

⁹ We have used figures from 2018 as they are the most recent reliable data that was available to us. The collection of data for 2019 was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a number of churches not submitting data and therefore the figures for this year are unreliable.

¹⁰ Local Ministry Area dashboards created by Brendan Research, access granted by the Church in Wales

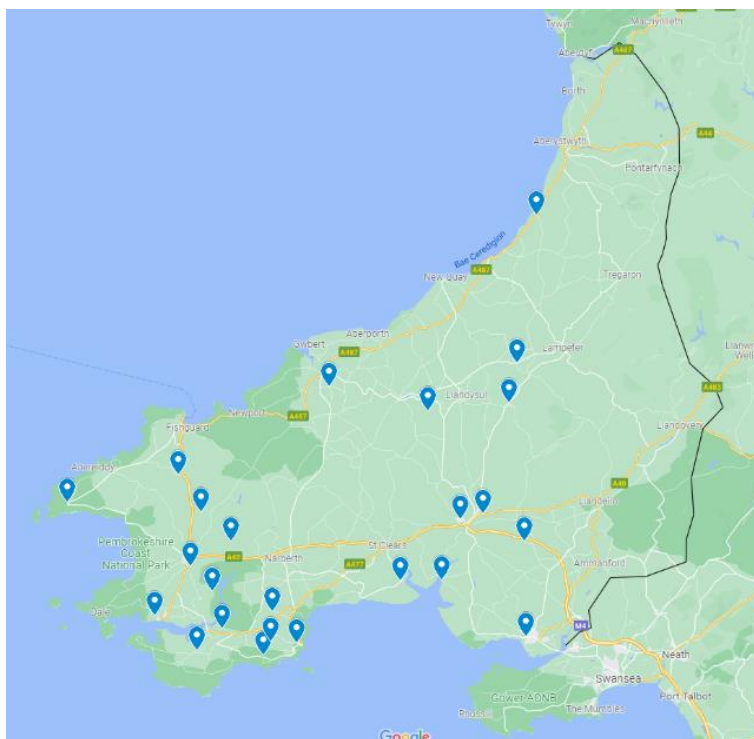
¹¹ It is left up to the individual churches and LMAs to define what is meant by 'family'



Church in Wales schools

There are 24 Church in Wales voluntary aided or controlled schools within the diocese, the majority being primary schools and one being a 3-16 through school (which includes secondary school age children). In 2021 there were 3834 pupils attending these schools with around 3600 of them being of primary school age¹². This means that 10.9% of primary school pupils in the diocese area attend a Church in Wales school¹³.

CiW schools are not evenly spread across the LMAs of the diocese and seem to be more clustered to the south and west of the diocese. Over a third of LMAs do not have a CiW school in their area, although all LMAs (that responded to the survey) did report engaging with some type of school.



¹² This figure does include younger children attending pre-school provision that is part of some schools

¹³ School figures from <https://mylocalschool.gov.wales/> accessed 20/10/2021

Over two-thirds of CiW schools described having regular clergy assemblies and a few listed other church-linked activities such as lunch club, after school club and Messy Church.

Church in Wales schools appear to have the same characteristics as other schools in the diocese in several aspects.

- Primary school pupils at CiW schools are just as likely to be in receipt of free school meals (FSM) as in other schools (CiW schools 17.6% of pupils, other schools 18.0% of pupils¹⁴).
- There is some variation between CiW schools and other primary schools in the diocese area in terms of their sizes, with CiW schools less likely to be large, but these variations are not statistically significant.

Number of pupils	CiW schools	Other schools
<85	8 (33%)	51 (31%)
85-219	11 (46%)	58 (36%)
≥220	5 (21%)	54 (33%)

A characteristic that is noticeably different between Church in Wales schools and other schools is the language medium¹⁵ that is used within the school.

Language medium	CiW schools	Other schools
Welsh medium	8 (33%)	96 (59%)
Combined mediums	4 (17%)	22 (13%)
English medium	12 (50%)	45 (28%)

The difference between the language medium at the CiW schools and at all primary schools in general in the diocese area is statistically significant ($p=0.0214$). This means that the language medium at CiW schools is not typical of the wider provision in the area. CiW schools in the diocese are significantly more likely to use an English medium than other schools.

Plant Dewi

Plant Dewi has centres and projects located within half of the LMAs (12 of the 24) in the diocese.

In the year 2019/20 they were supporting¹⁶:

Adults	2480 (at least)
Children	3054 (at least)
Families	2227

At the start of 2021 there were 27 Plant Dewi centres or projects located within the diocese. They reported being supported and engaged with by local CiW churches in a number of ways, from clergy sitting on boards of trustees to clergy attending groups or activities.

It should be noted that 30% of these centres or projects reported that they had no support or engagement from local CiW churches.

¹⁴ FSM figures from <https://mylocalschool.gov.wales/> accessed 20/10/2021

¹⁵ Language medium figures from <https://mylocalschool.gov.wales/> accessed 20/10/2021

¹⁶ Figures from Plant Dewi annual report and separate data submitted for this report.

LMA survey

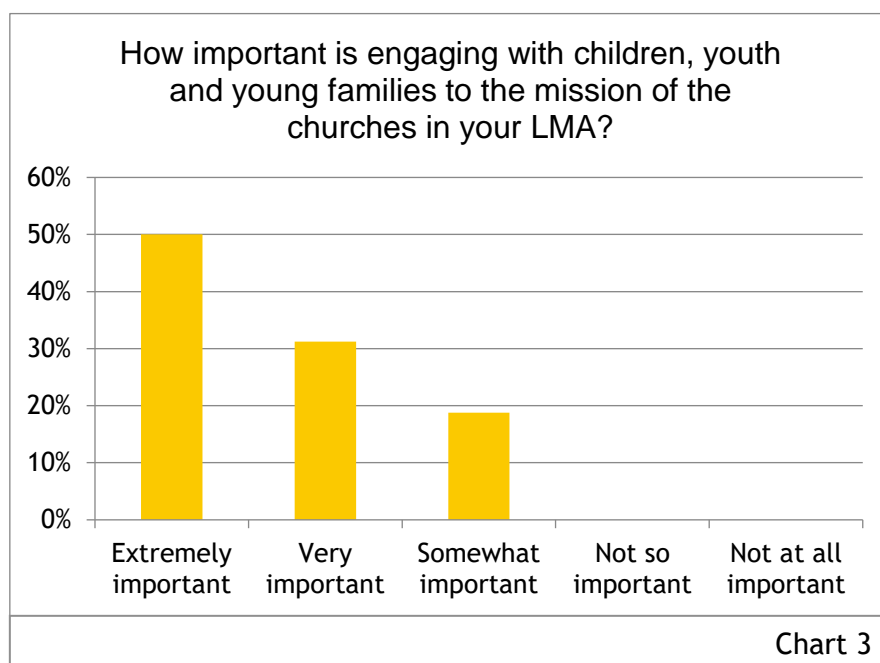
A survey was sent to all LMAs in the diocese asking a range of questions around the mission and ministry to children, youth and young families in their area. Two-thirds of LMAs (16 of the 24¹⁷) responded and these LMAs were evenly distributed geographically across the diocese.

It is not known why the remaining one-third of LMAs did not respond but it is not the case that these LMAs do not have children and young people as part of their communities. The church attendance figures show that the likelihood of an LMA responding to the survey was not impacted by the proportion of children attending church on a Sunday - in fact some of the non-responding LMAs have a higher than average proportion of children attending.

We are grateful to all LMAs that did respond to the survey, whether they felt they had much or little to say on the topic of children, youth and young families. We also want to acknowledge the challenging situation some LMAs find themselves in and are especially appreciative of the time and effort they put into their responses. As one respondent said: *'I have completed the survey. I am afraid it made me feel rather depressed. I hope that you will recognise some of the difficulties we face here.'*

Survey findings - church

Chart 3 shows that over 80% of LMAs identified engaging with children, youth and young families as being very or extremely important for the mission of their churches.



When asked the question 'hypothetically, what proportion of your LMA budget do you think should be allocated to ministry with children, youth and young families?' responses ranged from 5% to 62%. The average of these responses was 30% and almost all responses noted that this hypothetical proportion was very different to what was actually budgeted and spent within the LMA.

¹⁷ At the time of the survey there were 24 LMAs within the diocese; we understand that there are now 25

Outside on Sunday services LMAs are engaging with children, youth and young families in a range of ways. Three-quarters of LMAs have an all age or family service, more than half have a Sunday school and just under half have a fresh expression of church (most commonly a Messy Church).

Type of engagement	LMAs
All age/family service	75%
Sunday school	56%
Fresh expression of church (including Messy Church)	44%
Baby/toddler group	44%
Children's group	38%
Youth group	38%
Holiday club	31%
Church fairs e.g. summer	31%
Uniformed organisations	13%
Detached youth work	6%
Junior choir	6%
Server's Guild	6%
None of the above	13%

Survey findings - schools

LMAs were asked about their engagement with schools, not only Church in Wales schools but all types of schools.

Type of school	LMAs
State Primary school	94%
Church in Wales Primary school	69%
State Secondary school	56%
Further Education College	13%
Nursey/Preschool	13%
Other - special educational needs school	6%
None of the above	0%

Every LMA that responded to the survey is engaging with at least one school in their area.

While there isn't a Church in Wales primary school located within every LMA, of those LMAs that do have one, all but one are engaging with their CiW schools (there is one CiW secondary school within the diocese; however, the LMA that it is located within did not respond to the survey and so this does not feature in the table above).

Churches are engaging with schools in a number of ways, with the most common being leading assemblies and having classes visit churches. Over half of the LMAs reported that they had involvement with the governance of a local school.

Type of engagement	LMAs
Leading assemblies	100%
Church visits	94%
Membership of governors	56%
Involvement in classroom teaching	31%
After school clubs	31%
Lunch clubs	13%
Chaplaincy	6%
Christian Union	0%
None of the above	0%

Survey findings - Plant Dewi

Of the 16 LMAs that responded to the survey, 8 stated that they had a Plant Dewi centre or project located within the area. Unfortunately, one LMA that stated there was no Plant Dewi project in the area does in fact have one - it is unknown if this was an error in completing the survey or if the LMA is genuinely unaware of this project. Plant Dewi themselves say that this particular project has no contact with a local CiW church.

All LMAs that responded to the survey described supporting Plant Dewi in some way, even when there wasn't a project or centre located in their area. Almost all LMAs provide donations to Plant Dewi, either regularly or as special collections at Christmas or other occasions.

Method of support	LMAs
Donations made to Plant Dewi	94%
Plant Dewi posters/information displayed in the church	50%
Church attenders volunteer with Plant Dewi	31%
Plant Dewi group or activity takes place in church building	25%
Clergy or church attender on board of trustees for local project	25%
None of the above	0%

Views from people on the ground

The views of young people and adults were collected through discussions, interviews and the survey. Most of the young people who participated in this research were young teens. There was a young people's focus group hosted by the diocese, which three young people attended, but this was supplemented with reflections from others unable to be present that evening. Written responses were also received from eleven young people, meeting in groups facilitated by local clergy. In addition, eleven other people were interviewed, including those representing LMAs (clergy and children's workers) and those working with Plant Dewi and Church Army/Diocese of St David's Centres of Mission. This section summarises the key points made in these responses.

Growing up in the diocese is good for some but not others

The young people appreciate that they live in a beautiful part of the world, with scenic areas and the closeness of the sea. This is supplemented by a supportive local community: *'I have plenty of friends and there is a strong sense of community', 'this is a genuinely friendly place', 'there are plenty of things to do'*. Living in a tourist area has its advantages and disadvantages. It was felt it is good to be from a place which many people want to visit, and this provides seasonal employment, but the roads and other facilities can get busy.

For most young people, attending primary school was a positive experience on the whole. In the small schools there is a sense that everyone knows each other, and people are generally supportive: *'People give you a second chance because they know you'*. Others noted how school-centred young people's lives tend to be, particularly those who live in remote areas. A number of young people, possibly increasingly, are home educated.

Nevertheless, there was a sense of isolation and the need to travel to get anywhere: *'we are far for anywhere', we are stuck 'in the middle of Wales', 'sometimes it is boring'*. Those without transport are at a disadvantage. Much of what is on offer relates to sport, some of which clashes directly with traditional worship times. One person said, *'we compete with Sunday sport'*, and added that there was some resistance within the local church to holding worship at other times of the week.

With the exception of farming or other family businesses the prospects for employment are not good. Jobs for the less skilled are more readily available in some areas, such as working in supermarkets, but little on which to build a career. Local housing can be expensive because of the market for second homes in some areas. To continue in their education young people will need to move away in the future. Most of the young people we heard from did not think that they would still be where they are now in five years' time: *'I do not see myself staying because of the lack of opportunities.'*

This desire to escape may only be temporary, as some spoke of returning once they wanted to bring up a family or have the support of a local community. From the perspective of these young people, the area is seen as good place to grow up, at least for them: *'I would be happy if I was still living here, as it's a lovely place.'*

However, there was also a strong sense that they were fortunate and that other young people in the area do not have the advantages and opportunities that they have. One young person said, *'there are quite a few disadvantaged people'*. There was a sense that some other young people in the area are quite different: *'we don't hang out in the immediate areas because we don't want mix with some of the young people ...as they don't share the same values or life experience'*. Others noted the pockets of extreme deprivation, drug misuse, and general youth disaffection. One person said, *'young people wish they were elsewhere'*. Mission and ministry amongst children, youth and young families can only be fully accomplished if we understand issues of social justice and equal opportunities current in local communities.

Young people want to be valued in church

Individual and personal encouragement, as felt by young people, is crucial: *'someone at church says to me on a regular basis, thank you for being a young person in church', 'smiles, hugs, encouraging words, verbal affirmation, and unrelenting commitment, these things reel us in and make us feel safe and welcome'*. Some young people find themselves the only young person in their church. Involvement in family or all age worship is important, but although the survey showed that many churches are doing this, there was awareness that some adults deliberately stay away from such services, because they are not always clergy-led or not central to the pattern of worship.

Ensuring a sense of belonging is essential: *'young people are yearning to belong, and there is nowhere else where people are more seen and known and treasured than the Body of Christ'*. One church aims to create this through church family meals that encompass all ages. Without this sense of belonging, the commitment will ebb away. One young person in the survey said, *'my opinion doesn't matter anyway!'* Others reported that the local church was unwilling to adapt and had an attitude that was paternalistic and tokenistic: *'some churches are unwilling to change and will not try new services', 'they expect young people to conform to their ways'*. Interestingly, during the recent lockdowns, some young people have discovered online services provided by churches from outside the region, which are more attractive.

Mutual support from other young Christians is also seen as important so they do not feel alone. This could include attending Christian camps or joining a local meeting, such as a youth cell group or youth fellowship. Some children and young people within the diocese are isolated, perhaps even more so if they are Christian. It is good that an increase of online contact through recent lockdowns has gone some way to help with connections and support.

Reaching out to more young people involves raising the profile of the local church. One young person said, *'we're tucked away, and people don't know about us'*, and another wanted the local church to *'get involved with town events (carnival) and school events (summer fêtes)'*. Someone suggested a way to attract young people: *'food would bring a lot of people to church'*. Another said we should *'update our music, because hymns aren't much fun'* and improve the buildings: *'there is nothing inviting to a young adult about a musty smelling, cold, spider web covered old building'*. Drawing in more young people is seen as vital for the church: *'Honestly, it's quite depressing that there aren't more young adults, and I feel very sad about that.'*

Most churches without any youth work will be failing to reach a significant part of their local communities. In smaller churches it may be difficult to find people who can assist in this work, and the lack of suitable volunteers was identified as a major drawback to expanding youth work. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that youth work is a vocation, that it must be carefully resourced, and people involved should be adequately trained and supported. Most of all, they must feel called by God to engage with young people. However, every church can in some way be welcoming to young people, show that they are appreciated and offer them a place in the church. When young people are active in a church, they bring benefits. As one person said, *'They don't come with baggage and church politics. They come with gritty questions and real theology.'*

The local church also needs to think of itself as part of the wider church, where other churches in the area, as part of the Church in Wales or other denominations, can share this mission and ministry to children, youth and young families. Where there are other local churches with this particular mission, this should be supported rather than duplicated. It was noted in one or two LMAs that the larger better resourced churches take on this role, and in other LMAs the local non-conformist church has a vibrant youth club, which meant releasing other churches for other kinds of mission. Elsewhere the ecumenical work was less satisfactory, described as having *'mixed results'*. Understanding the local context is crucial here, and church leaders have an opportunity to show that cooperative and complementary is part of a wider vision.

Church involvement in primary schools is good in some places

Young people spoke of the positive experience of church involvement in their primary school. There are examples where the teachers are supportive, and the local clergy regularly visit to take assemblies and speak to classes. What was seen as important was addressing significant issues, such as the environment, which shows that the church is in touch with current concerns. There is a real need for *'being more relevant to young people'*, but at the same time live up the ideals: *'churches use lots of paper leaflets - a lot of waste'*. Even more important is authenticity: *'real authentic experience, even above relevance'* will attract young people.

There is some good practice to be shared across the diocese. LMAs reported significant engagement with church and state schools, through assemblies, classroom work, visits to church buildings and serving on the governing bodies. The local primary school is a natural focus for mission which churches are using, although engagement is largely determined by productive relations with the headteacher, rather than the legal status of the school as a church or secular institution. The engagement works best when linked to the curriculum or relevant issues: major input at Christian festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Harvest, and using the church building and churchyard as a resource for ecological studies, related to God's care for the environment.

The school can also be a way to reach children and young people outside the school day: for instance, Messy Church straight after school and across the road works well in one place, as with other after school and holiday clubs. Developing a good relationship with the school is crucial, although this is difficult with those LMAs with a large number of schools.

There is a significant change when young people go to secondary school

The young people spoke of the contrast when they become part of the larger school. To be a Christian in high school is *'awkward'*. There is a sense that being a Christian is to be part of a small minority or hidden faith: *'in my year of 200 there are only three or four Christians'*, *'there probably are some secret Christians at school'*, *'some people are scared to say they're Christian ... others around them won't think it is cool'*, *'it is difficult to admit going to church to peers, until you get to the age of it not mattering what people think'*. With those who are more open there is a struggle to keep the faith sometimes: *'I'm openly Christian and my friends try to catch me out'*.

In places where there might be support, it is missing: *'even the RE teacher isn't a Christian'*. Young people thought it would be positive if the church could have an input into such lessons, or where the clergy or other Christians just came into the secondary school. One young person responded to these ideas: *'I would really like that.'* There are attempts at this, such as the GSUS Live Bus which visits some schools periodically, and this is well received. Drop-in clubs in school with food was another idea put forward. However, meeting outside of school seemed to be a preference for some young people.

Different areas present different opportunities.

Understanding the local community, through official statistics and other material, remains an important way to know where to focus mission. We heard how one area of new house building has brought an influx of young families, and the church can respond by attracting such people through appropriate activities, such as parent and toddler groups, family services, etc. In another area, a non-Anglican church had a successful outreach to young people, so there was scope for a complementary approach to mission.

It is important to work alongside other agencies, both inside and outside the church. We noted excellent examples of the work of Plant Dewi, a partnership of the diocese with local authorities covering 27 projects located in 12 LMAs. The inspiration and sustainment of this work is Christian,

but not all churches know about the projects in detail. Nearly all the LMAs that responded in the survey helped to share knowledge of Plant Dewi through posters and leaflets and supported the work through donations. Between a third and a quarter provided volunteers or space in their buildings. When local churches are aware of the work of Plant Dewi they can more fully understand some of the specific needs of their communities and be ready to refer people on.

Working in partnership with others is vital, and in this way so much more can be achieved. For example, knowing how and when to refer people to food banks, health visitors, social workers or women's aid, is a necessary part of mission and ministry to children, youth and young families. Some reported on the excellent youth work provided by the local authority, particularly in sports and health programmes. As a church we care for the whole person, so we recognise others who contribute to this, even though our prime focus may be on spiritual health.

Understanding the individual lives of people and families is also important: *'If people's lives are busy, can we ask them to come along to another meeting?' 'How can the church compete with Sunday sport, or demand attention in the busy lives?' 'If young people live in a remote area how is the best way to get them involved?'* In one area mental health among young people was seen as a particular focus for mission.

We recognise but are not able to comment in any extensive way on one of the features of the diocese, that is the bilingual nature of many communities. Some of those called into ministry are actively learning Welsh, so that they can integrate with local people, while others feel it is less relevant to their work, depending on where they are based. Our contact throughout the survey with first language Welsh speakers has been minimal, although there was an opportunity for participants to complete the survey in Welsh. There will be young people for whom Welsh is the medium of any mission. We heard of one school where the minister of the local Welsh speaking chapel was the regular visitor, and it seemed appropriate to let this arrangement continue.

The influence of recent lockdowns

This survey has tried to establish how churches related to children, youth and young families before the pandemic, but we recognise that much has been affected by lockdowns over the last eighteen months. There is a real sense there can be no return to exactly how things were before, even if this were desired. Several people commented on the negative side of the lockdowns: churches closed, groups ceasing to meet, and access to schools greatly reduced. There were also some positive reflections, including the establishment of online services that reached new people and those who through accessibility issues had been excluded for years. Building on these changes most people want to continue with some of the new skills that have been learned. For instance, the blended approach of online and in-person will probably be a feature of future worship and meetings. The pandemic has been an opportunity to consider what is important, and as some things start up again to decide what needs the investment of time and effort.

'No more top-down initiatives, please'

Several people spoke of the cyclical nature of the enquiry into the mission and ministry to children, youth and young families in the diocese, and how there was a weariness of schemes and ideas that are not put fully into practice. We would suggest that what works best are local initiatives which arise from local needs and are designed and run by those who understand the local context. Churches working together in an LMA can provide a useful focus, particularly in the sharing of resources, as we have seen. The diocese has an important role in recognising and validating these local initiatives, providing training and support, and recognising a diversity of approaches to mission and ministry between and within LMAs.

‘Let us be open to change’

Mission and ministry to children, youth and young families has two important elements: it is part of our calling as we reach out to the whole community, and it is likely to lead to change because in many places what we do now is not working. Most people interviewed and surveyed were very conscious of this. There is a fear of change and the loss of aspects of church, sometimes expressed in the reluctance to reach out to young people or invite them to be fully involved. The understandable fear of change is lessened by a reliance on the Spirit of God who guides us into new places and ways of working. As one person put it, *‘If you are led by the Spirit, then the doors will open, and things happen!’*.

Previous findings

In 2012 the diocese commissioned a report entitled *‘Where are the children?’*, produced by Naomi Wood and Marianne Osborne¹⁸. This survey included more details about individual churches than we have been able to accomplish, and it provides an important review of the situation at that time. The report concludes that *‘the results were surprising, disappointing and encouraging all at the same time’*, and that there was significant diversity of engagement across the diocese, including several churches with no contact with young people.

We would note that over the succeeding ten years the situation has deteriorated, particularly as regards involvement of children in Sunday schools, although as before there is a wide variety of experience across the diocese. The 2012 report identified very little engagement with young people over the age of 11, a situation that remains to be addressed. We agree with the final statements of the report, and suggest that the urgency is even greater than it was then: *‘If we do not address the situation in a radical and urgent way, bringing more children and their families into the family of the church and helping them to develop personal relationships with Jesus now we must ask how long the church can continue to survive in its current form.’*

¹⁸ Naomi Wood & Marianne Osborne, *Where are the children? Ble mae'r plant?* A report on the Survey of St David's Diocese, 2012

Ways forward

Challenges

This is not the priority in mission for some

Of the LMAs that did respond to the survey, the overriding view was that mission to children, youth and young families was *'extremely important'*. However, about one-third of the LMAs did not respond to the request to complete the survey, despite reminders and encouragement. This may have been for a variety of reasons, including issues around communication and staffing, but it is reasonable to assume that in some cases, outreach to young people is not a priority. It would be useful to explore why this is the case, and although we have not been able to extract such responses, the diocese is in a better position to do so. Other issues may be seen to have a greater prominence in some local churches.

Absence of young people in many churches

It is well known that mission and ministry to children, youth and young families is more successful where there is a base of such people to build on. Where a church has young people, more will be attracted. Some of the young people surveyed revealed a strong enough commitment to the church even though they might be the only person their age there. Such young people are exceptional and not typical, as most are affected by peer pressure and common patterns of behaviour. It is important to support the young people already in churches through networks and fellowships, particularly those in isolated positions. They are a precious asset.

Lack of workers

The hope of a paid youth worker is a distant aspiration for most LMAs, although where this has been possible, it has produced good results even if restricted by short-term funding. Without the financial resources it is necessary to rely on volunteers, but most LMAs reported a scarcity of such people. *'We have so many opportunities, but a lack of capacity'*, reported one. It was strongly felt by some that work with children, youth and young families is a vocation, which the church has to nurture, train and support, as with all ministries. It is reasonable to assume that God is calling people to this work and the church has to respond appropriately.

Other attractions

The church has always faced competition, perhaps never more so than in the present era. Sunday sport was referred to by several as such an example. However, the flexibility of times and locations - as when activities happen in the week rather than on a Sunday morning or the venue is where people have already gathered, as in park or in a school - has been shown to produce results. An unwillingness to change in these respects only heightens the competition and reinforces the view that some churches are not willing to adapt to serve the communities where they are placed.

Many buildings not fit for purpose

A few of those who responded referred to buildings that did not have basic facilities, or were otherwise unsuitable for mission and ministry to children, youth and young families. This issue is unlikely to be resolved without considerable cost and a long-term plan, but part of the answer is to use alternative venues and work in partnership with others.

Signs of hope

Through our research we became aware of some examples of good practice in the ministry and mission to children, youth and young families. This is not in any sense an exhaustive list since there will many good examples that we did not come across in the short duration of our research, but we would like to commend the following examples.

Keeping the approach simple, only running one group that is sustainable, rather than several at a shallow level (Aberystwyth LMA).

Bringing young people together in support is vital, as in the Pembrokeshire Youth Fellowship which pre COVID-19 connected young Christians from different churches, some of whom might otherwise feel quite isolated.

Cross Hands Centre of Mission has been involved in ministry and outreach in both primary and secondary schools, setting up support groups for young people in need. There are plans to open a café where young people and the community can come together. We also hope that it will be a place that can create a space for volunteers to gain new skills and contribute to their community.

Churches benefit by pooling their resources to work together. In Daugleddau LMA, churches with young people are leading on the youth work across the LMA, inviting young people in the smaller churches to get involved.

Plant Dewi have found that co-production with parents leads to projects that are more likely to be successful and sustainable. When parents feel listened to and included with something they're passionate about, they want to see it through - an example of this is the dads' gardening project in Pembroke Dock which aims to support and encourage the relationships between dads and their children.

Finding creative ways to connect with young people, especially during COVID-19 restrictions, such as an Instagram page inviting people to post photos of glimpses of God in the natural world - @God.beyond.the.pews (Bro Sancler LMA).

Setting up a Messy Church-style group during the week that meets straight after school because that is a time when parents and children can attend. Families simply walk across the road from the school to church (Bro Caerfyrddin LMA).

During the lockdowns in Roose LMA, Muddy Church was set up as a way of reaching out during the restrictions and engaging people through material available on social media to get outside and see God in the world around them.

Engage with and champion the issues that are important to young people, such as a strong focus on the environment. Becoming an accredited Eco Church has sparked children's interests and often links to projects and topics being covered in school (Bro Caerfyrddin LMA).

Cross Hands Centre of Mission has set up Sunday Thing, a fresh expression of church where families can come as a whole family, relax and be themselves. It is about meeting people where they are, and thus creating a safe place where people can explore faith.

A mum and toddler group set up by the local church with connections to other organisations and agencies such as food bank, health visitors and speech and language therapists. This aims to allow parents ready access to help and support that may have felt harder to access due to the pandemic, and is believed to help address growing mental health needs in mums in a more rounded approach to mission (Aberystwyth LMA).

Potential areas for action

- 1. Church needs to be mindful of young people who have fewer opportunities.** Identify the areas where disadvantaged young people live and target support to help broaden experiences and increase life chances. Mission is about enabling people to have fulfilled lives and there is a God-given opportunity to reach out to those with reduced opportunities. These young people are less likely to be part of the church, so the imperative to connect with them is all the more pertinent.
- 2. Share good practice across the diocese of the effective work in primary schools.** Continue to celebrate and highlight where such a ministry has worked well, and connect those in every LMA who are called to such work, sharing ideas and good practice. School is a key focus of the lives of most young people, so this is a place where the church needs to place significant mission resources. Any changes to the curriculum at any age stage that encourage greater interaction with local churches need to be fully utilised.
- 3. Promote the involvement of young people in church.** This includes worship and other activities, not just family services, and participation in governance and decision making where appropriate. Baptised young people are full members of the church and need encouragement and support to get involved, and where this happens it is a sign of a healthy and growing local church. Young people need a voice that is heard in churches. They need to express what they think are the key issues, including ecology, diversity and inclusivity, mental health, and employment opportunities. Practice radical hospitality, making young people really welcome, so that they feel they are stakeholders and the local church truly becomes intergenerational.
- 4. Church needs to invest in chaplaincy and outreach to young people aged 12 and over.** This is needed to support young Christians in secondary schools and colleges in an outreach to all teenagers. This is a stage of life where young people will have their faith tested in the context of peer pressure and therefore building up connections with other young Christians is vital. This may have to happen outside of school and college, as some young people would prefer this.
- 5. Training days and networks for youth workers to raise vocation to this work.** The diocese, through the LMAs, can bring together people who are called to youth work to support one another and to be properly prepared for the role. The lack of volunteers may be due in part to unrealised vocations. Local initiatives can be supported through mentoring and the sharing of good practice.
- 6. Understand the local context.** The diocese has a variety of communities, and no one approach to mission and ministry amongst children, youth and young families would work in all areas. The local church has to identify the needs of their communities, based on people's experiences and backed up by statistics. This will enable the right approach to mission. For instance, if the area has many young families, a parent and toddler group or Messy Church might be right, or if young people face isolation or lack of transport the response is to try and bring young people together either in-person or online. Therefore, the diocese can provide the forum for discussions and the sharing of good ideas, but the detail will need to be worked out locally.
- 7. Plan and invest in the long-term rather than inadequate short-term measures.** Much of the mission work with young people in the diocese is only funded for a limited period. It

takes years to engage with a local community and results cannot be expected overnight. The investment into the mission to children, youth and young families is about outreach to a whole generation where the work needs to be faced on a firm footing of guaranteed financial support which will attract the most able and dedicated workers.

8. **Find partners to work with.** There are many examples of churches struggling to provide any work with children, youth and young families, because resources are stretched. Where churches have come together, including across denominational boundaries, more is often achieved. If another church in the area is already reaching out to young families, then there is an opportunity to work with teenagers to complement this. If the local authority is providing good secular youth work, the local church can supplement this with an emphasis on spiritual wellbeing. Outreach may need to be coordinated across LMAs and between denominations so as to gain greater access to funding, volunteers, and facilities which will help to strengthen mission.
9. **More integrated role for the LMAs and Plant Dewi.** Although Plant Dewi works through 27 projects, these are across only 12 of the LMAs, and more churches would benefit from a greater understanding of their work. Are there ways in which the diocese can encourage a closer liaison in those LMAs where Plant Dewi is less well known? There are practical ways to do this, as when a church is set up as a place of contact or distribution centre. This will help to underline the distinctive nature of Christian service in the community. The 20th anniversary of Plant Dewi in 2022 provides a good opportunity to develop such ideas.
10. **The mission and ministry to children, youth and young families should be re-affirmed as central to the diocesan vision.** It is good that that diocese recognises the importance of this mission. Some excellent work is already taking place, which needs to be celebrated and perhaps better communicated across the diocese, as an important practical outcome of the diocesan vision. However, the mission to children, youth and young families is not about preserving the institution or saving local churches. It is about reaching a whole generation who feel disconnected from the church, and thus disconnected from the experience of the love of God. The duty of the church is to shape and equip itself to fulfil the role of introducing them to Jesus.

Conclusion

We wish to record our thanks for all those who have been involved in the research for this report. We are very grateful for the encouragement and guidance of the Ven Mones Farah from the very beginning, along with members of the diocesan CYF committee and others with a keen interest in this focus of mission. As much of the research has necessarily required the anonymity of those who were consulted, it is not possible to include a list of contributors. However, this research would not have been possible without the responses from those working in LMAs, Plant Dewi and Church Army/Diocese of St David's Centres of Mission gathered through the survey, interviews, and written submissions. Most of all we thank those young people who were able to take part, sharing their understanding of growing up and living in the diocese, and in particular their experiences as young disciples of Jesus. In many ways their experience is a test of how well we reach to share with all people the love of God. As one contributor said:

'The church should be a place for all ages and the Gospel is there for all ages.'

Elspeth McGann and John Tomlinson, Church Army's Research Unit
November 2021

Appendix

Children (under 18) as a proportion of average Sunday church¹⁹

	2018
All LMAs	13.94%
Aberystwyth	16.3%
Bro Aeron Mydr	34.7%
Bro Aman	5.1%
Bro Caerfyrddin	25.3%
Bro Cydweli	21.4%
Bro Dinefwr ²⁰	12.0%
Bro Dyfri	11.2%
Bro Gwendraeth	6.8%
Bro Lliedi	9.7%
Bro Padarn	16.2%
Bro Sancler	8.3%
Bro Teifi	10.4%
Bro Wyre	9.4%
Daugleddau	11.5%
Dyffryn Teifi	15.3%
East Landsker	9.7%
Glyn Aeron (Coastal)	11.9%
Gorllewin Cemaes - West Cemaes	23.6%
Greater Dewisland	9.8%
Lampeter	6.9%
Narberth & Tenby	9.4%
Roose	17.4%
South West Pembrokeshire	16.6%
The Cathedral	no data

¹⁹ Church attendance figures supplied by Church in Wales

²⁰ Bro Dinefwr and Llandeilo Group LMAs listed as one as they were at the time of data gathering

Children (under 18) as a proportion of the general population of the area²¹

2019	Total number of people	Estimate number of 0-17 year olds	Estimate 0-17 as % of total population
All LMAs	392473	75203	19.2%
Aberystwyth	12795	2542	19.9%
Bro Aeron Mydr	5321	1000	18.8%
Bro Aman	28888	5786	20.0%
Bro Caerfyrddin	22021	4545	20.6%
Bro Cydweli	9213	1585	17.2%
Bro Dinefwr²²	7152	1229	17.2%
Bro Dyfri	8518	1355	15.9%
Bro Gwendraeth	43785	8379	19.1%
Bro Lliedi	47843	10450	21.8%
Bro Padarn	15503	2996	19.3%
Bro Sancler	9101	1550	17.0%
Bro Teifi	16468	2913	17.7%
Bro Wyre	5125	897	17.5%
Daugleddau	21119	4434	21.0%
Dyffryn Teifi	13728	2403	17.5%
East Landsker	11217	2016	18.0%
Glyn Aeron (Coastal)	7734	1116	14.4%
Gorllewin Cemaes - West Cemaes	12033	2165	18.0%
Greater Dewisland	5747	916	15.9%
Lampeter	13668	2570	18.8%
Narberth & Tenby	21599	3547	16.4%
Roose	29405	5982	20.3%
South West Pembrokeshire	22718	4563	20.1%
The Cathedral	1772	266	15.0%

²¹ Local Ministry Area dashboards created by Brendan Research, access granted by the Church in Wales

²² Bro Dinefwr and Llandeilo Group LMAs listed as one as they were at the time of data gathering