

A VIEW FROM THE

YOUTH

Walton-on-Thames

St Mary's and St John's

2 Peter 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen

OVERVIEW

There is no doubting that 2020/21 has been an incredibly challenging year for the Youth at St. Mary's and St. John's. It is the young people within our church family that have been most impacted by the social and economic consequences of lockdown, but there are glimmers of hope.



'I enjoy this Youth because it is welcoming and kinda a safe place!'

In April 2020, Mandy, our Youth and Children's Minister was furloughed before sadly being made redundant in the autumn.

Immediately, our Curate, Alex Oehring was asked to supervise the over 11s youth work. We have been so thankful for the commitment and support from Sarah Dunn and Jewels Harrington who have also been helping since April. As such, we have been able to sustain a weekly gathering with 10-14 of our young people, which is still happening.

In spite of evidence nationally that this last year has been especially tough for teenagers including their mental health, churches have reported a drop off in Youth numbers, as interest waned in Zoom gatherings. Sadly, the fortnightly Sunday evening Solid Ground Youth group with about 25 young people, ceased during the first lock down and the termly Youth services, acclaimed in the Diocese as ground breaking "For the Youth by the Youth" services, have been unable to take place during the pandemic.

Youth Fellowship, under Russell Nixon, have continued to meet by Zoom whenever the pandemic rules have allowed. The leaders are in pastoral contact with some vulnerable young people from the parish.



WHAT WE HAVE DONE

Summer Term 2020 (Lockdown 1)

We had 8 young people complete the Youth Alpha Course on Monday evenings and over 20 attend a monthly quiz night on Sundays. All activity was hosted on Zoom.

'I think it helps that I can express what I believe in and be around people who understand. Also, Zoom church is mostly aimed at younger children and really church is aimed at the older generation. Youth group is perfect.'

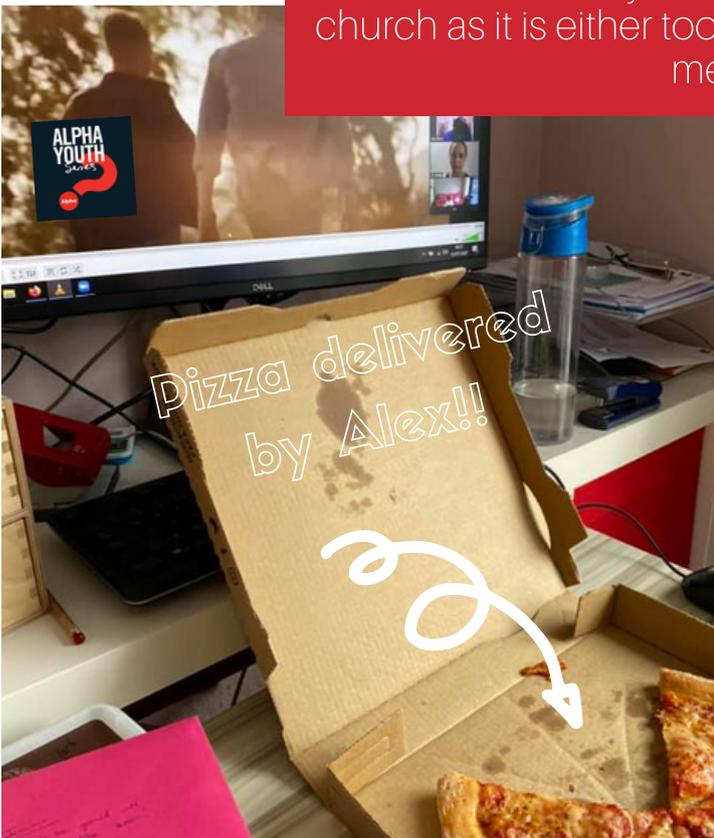
Autumn Term 2020

The Monday night discipleship group grew. We ran the 'Freedom in Christ for Youth Course' averaging between 10-14 young people (aged 11-14) a week. We have seen real progress in their faith journey, in this weekly gathering.

'If I didn't have a youth group, I would probably not enjoy church as it is either too young for me or too complicated for me to understand.'

Spring Term 2021

We finished Freedom in Christ and have studied the book of Ruth, helping the young people to read the Bible with Christocentric view of scripture. These evenings include games, chat, Bible Study and prayer. We have even delivered pizza and cake to add to the community sense of eating together. We have sustained our weekly numbers of (10-14) a week. There are young people who have not joined Zoom, but are looking forward to meeting in person in the future.



Strengths:

- Mandy and Jewels have built up a large network over the past ten years, so we will have a lot of young people to invite when we return to meeting in person.
- We have some willing and Godly volunteers, who really care about the young people's faith and well-being.
- We have a committed core of young people who are growing faith, asking big questions and seeking to follow Jesus.

Weaknesses:

- We have lost touch with some of our fringe young people due to the nature of Zoom and Alex's capacity to only run one group which was focused on discipleship rather than the more informal fun night.
- We have no dedicated youth worker, to foster relationships and take this group forward.
- We need a paid employee to cover all areas of safeguarding, risk assessment and volunteer oversight.

Opportunities:

- A committed core of young people have grown in faith this year. Alpha and Freedom in Christ have had a big impact.
- Camps. We have taken 9 of our young people on Christian camps in the recent past, these have a big impact on young people's faith.
- Investment. We have received grants to invest in our youth service from various charities. We have bought new games and music equipment which will help to attract people to the group as we come out of Lockdown.
- New Youth Leader. With finances freed from no longer paying for a full time youth worker and extra income from Misty's Field rental income, the church could choose to invest in a minister to carry on this vital ministry. The more hours we can afford, the greater the opportunity with the young people in the parish and beyond.
- There are longer term opportunities to become a Youth ministry Hub for the Deanery: supporting work in a local secondary school and developing a team with other Deanery churches taking on PAIS apprentices as we had hoped to do in 2020. (PAIS apprentices are about 20-24 years old, many from Brazil. We provide them with board and lodging and they go into local schools and church youth groups and show how cool Christianity can be. The impact is huge. They have been in Molesey and Thames Ditton over the last few years.)

Threats:

- No dedicated youth leader. Alex's curacy is due to end by July 2021 and we will have no dedicated person to this role. This ministry was seen as such a success prior to lockdown that the Diocese invested in our youth service. We now need to take a risk and invest in our young people's faith.



THE FUTURE

In a recent poll taken with a group of 33 church leaders, 94% of them stated that they came to faith before they were 18 years old. If we are to preserve our faith for future generations, then to invest in a youth leader is of paramount importance. As stewards of what God provides in his generosity, 1 year ago we had 28 x 11-15 year olds attending our youth service, now is the time for our church to seriously consider how we disciple these young people and commit to a person dedicated to this role.

Without a youth group I would feel restricted in my faith and would feel cut off from people who understand and support my religion.

WHO ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE?

One of the major challenges for a new youth leader will be to engage the young people with the wider church congregation. However, the responsibility lies with the congregation to welcome these young people into church, to take an interest in their lives and maybe even accept making the services more accessible to them. It may require a shift in priorities, from self to other.



'We think it would make us feel a lot less involved and connected to the church.'

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Our young people's well-being, the impact of lockdown has been hard upon them, isolated from their friends at this key stage of life.
- A new youth leader.
- That we will continue to build upon all that has happened in the past few years.

TESTIMONY

From one of our young people

The impact of having had a youth worker in my youth church groups was that it made you feel more comfortable, it's a stable person who isn't your teacher or your parent. They make you feel more included, as being a teenager is a scary time. We have fun and we are guided at our personal level instead of an adult level which is always helpful.

It's important to have a dedicated youth worker as they will need to build relationships with the young people. These relationships can only be built if they work with the young people regularly. They must make us feel comfortable so that we are able to talk to them about everything in our lives, even the bad bits. A youth worker must be dedicated enough to show that they care for the us but allow us to ask questions and this will help us to flourish in our faith. It's important that a youth worker will pray for us in our everyday.

Youth ministry has been an important part of my growth. As part of the parish youth I feel part of the community and the church. I feel I am listened too and supported and I have had some tough teenage years. I believe although I'm still working on this the depth of my faith has encouraged me to keep going and to try to overcome and love myself. I know that everyday someone has been praying for me and that sits on my heart. **Youth ministry is special and has formed a firm foundation in me.**

"I would want a fun and kind leader who involves everyone."

"I enjoy being able to have a youth group that really explains God and the Bible."

Without the group "I would be very alone and no leader means that it can be non-existent."

"It has given me space to be me and feel welcome. It is also a place where I can understand different Bible stories in the depth I can grasp. The leaders are welcoming and understanding. I would definitely recommend it to my Christian Friends who do not already attend."

FEEDBACK FROM THE

YOUTH

What has youth group meant to you?

"It has given me space to be me and feel welcome. It is also a place where I can understand different Bible stories in the depth I can grasp. The leaders are welcoming and understanding. I would definitely recommend it to my Christian Friends who do not already attend."

"It is a good fun way of spending more time with God that is easier to remember and go to."

"The youth group have made me feel really welcome because at the start of each lesson we all have a chat to see how people have been which kinda make me, and probably everyone else welcome! Also, before I joined this youth group I didn't believe in God and wasn't a Christian, but the group has made me really think about it and to start believing!"

"The youth group has been a fun and welcoming experience."

What do you enjoy most about youth group?

"Friends and games and learning about God."

"I enjoy seeing friends and playing games" 😊

"I enjoy being able to have a youth group that really explains God and the Bible."

"I think it helps that I can express what I believe in and be around people who understand. Also, Zoom church is mostly aimed at younger children and really church is aimed at the older generation. Youth group is perfect."

"I love that I can go into the Bible in detail, but that it is not over my head."

"I enjoy this Youth because it is welcoming and kinda a safe place!"

How would you feel if there was no longer a youth club at church?

"I would be extremely sad."

"We both think it would make us feel a lot less involved and connected to the church."

"Without the club it [sic] would be very alone and no leader means that it can be non-existent."

"If I didn't have a youth group, I would probably not enjoy church as it is either too young for me or too complicated for me to understand."

"I would feel sad and disappointed."

"I would feel restricted in my faith and would feel cut off from people who understand and support my religion."

What do you think makes a good youth leader?

What would you want in a new youth leader?

"Confident and good leadership skills."

"That they listen to me and other peoples' needs."

"I would want a fun and kind leader who involves everyone."

"A good Youth Leader should be very kind and should be very cunning to help the youth club grow! Also the person should be very thorough and have many ideas and also should support someone for who they are! And should be someone who you could trust and talk to."

"I would like a Youth Leader who accepts that we are not perfect and that (not to be rude) is not too old and serious, is fun and can (when we go outside) play and join in with us" 😊

"I would like a Youth Leader that will not treat us like we are younger. I would also like it if they could make sure that we stay in line (not too crazy) but still lets us have fun. As long as they are kind and accept that we are not adults, but not little, I do not mind."

