**The Vine, Netherthorpe, Sheffield – journeying towards an intergenerational church**

Lucy Bolster, the Pioneer Curate, shares the story:

***The practical stuff***

I was given permission about 18 months ago to change the structure of our monthly all-age first Sunday of the month gathering.

We began using a very simple structure of Welcome, Worship, Word, Witness, passing out the Bible passage two week forehand and expecting anyone of any age to bring a contribution to one of those sections.

As facilitator, my role has been to prepare by doing my own thinking, reading and praying, but not to shape our learning together before the gathering. Therefore, I deliberately don't prepare too much to bring. The discipline is in holding back and allowing silence for others to bring their offerings.

***The journey***

There is an element of exploring all-age worship which requires any group of Christians to consider why we gather in worship. At The Vine, Netherthorpe, we’re working from the understanding that the heart of an act of corporate worship involves each of us bringing an offering, as is reflected in the broad sweep of scripture.

Meeting together with an offering to bless others and bless God is the attitude which has guided our explorations as a church over the last year. We have been well served by years of hard work from our Godly Play team, who have nurtured our children. For some, including my own girls,  this has been through their whole lives.  This input has enabled them to grow in confidence to offer their theological reflections and to respond in creative worship, within a simple structure based on the Eucharistic form of a Godly Play session.

As a small missional team meeting weekly in our family home, we have begun to learn how  to model church which is accessible to our community, therefore, bible study, prayer and meals are now intentionally all-age. This has been a relatively easy transition for us as a group.

In our wider church family, monthly all-age gatherings have required a more exploratory approach. For the last year and a half, we have attempted to apply the same principles on a larger scale.

Our young people, thanks to their Godly Play experience, model a natural confidence to offer something in worship, but have been slightly hindered by our expectations as adults. For example;  in order to engender an attitude of worship and not performance, we have had to squash our impetus to clap or laugh in response to something they shared. We are learning together how to simplify our communication, express our prayers and choose our liturgy carefully; something which brings benefits to us all.

We still need to learn how to grow our confidence to stand at the front and share, recognising that this is often a challenge for everyone.  Equally, some of our very young members are learning how to resist their natural impulse for movement and noise at more solemn points in our gathering.

Our journey continues to be one of learning together, often led by our children. A journey on which, we have experienced the beauty of diverse voices worshiping God and encouraging one another in our discipleship.

***Baptism***

The story of our baptism preparation group is quite fun too. I began inviting parents and their child/children to journey along together in preparation for baptism, as a way of encouraging whole of life discipleship.

We started as we meant to go on, expecting contribution from all ages, using a very simple bible study app which was led by children or adults from one week to the next. This group is continuing and growing, with one family about to take responsibility together for leading a months worth of sessions.

If you have a story to share about intergenerational worship, please do let us know.

Mary.hawes@churchofengland.org