



**CAVERSHAM, THAMESIDE
AND MAPLEDURHAM**

ST MARGARET • ST PETER • ST JOHN

Strategy for children, youth and families ministry

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Findings from consultation with children and young people	3
2.1 The importance of Christian friends and peer groups	3
2.2 The importance of family and the home environment	4
2.3 The importance of the church community	4
2.4 The importance of role models.....	5
2.5 The importance of participation	5
2.6 Additional insights	6
3. Core values	7
3.1 Jesus-centred	8
3.2 Community	8
3.3 Holistic	8
3.4 Relational	8
3.5 Intergenerational	9
3.6 Safe	9
3.7 Team.....	9
4. Measuring progress	10
5. Summary	14
6. Concluding Thoughts	14

1. Introduction

When I (Ben) was younger, I used to go to a small family C of E church. Whenever I look back at my time growing up in the church, I do remember my time in the different age groups and the fun we had in them, however, one of my strongest memories was of Dennis. He was a retired man who sat at the back of church every week, wasn't on any team on a Sunday and wasn't involved in any of the governance of the church. Yet when I think about significant figures in my childhood, he makes the list! Dennis paid attention to me. Every week he would say "hello Mr Ben" and ask how I was. He would cheer me on as I played football after the service, regardless of how much damage I caused on the wall we played against. Dennis even once bought me a Christmas present, to the dismay of all my siblings!

The reason I share this story is because when we think of children's and youth ministry, we might think it only happens in the groups or at the projects we run during the week. Yet the person who made me feel seen and valued the most growing up was someone who was nowhere near a team or even close to me in age. Our strategy seeks to reflect something that is so apparent in this story; this is a *whole* church activity. Andrew Root in his book '*Congregation in a Secular Age*' says exactly this: a church is most alive and united when it cares for children.

Our strategy for children and young people is a strategy for all of us as a parish. And the beauty of this work is that you will find that we are already doing so much. So be encouraged as you recognise all that is happening in our churches!

The matter of fact is that we have been asked (by the diocese) to write a strategy that goes in line with their vision to see the number of young disciples doubled by 2030. What you'll find in this strategy, however, is that we don't focus on numbers/attendance at all.

We wanted this strategy to be faithful to scripture and to what God has called us to do in Caversham. And what we find throughout scripture is that God is not in the business of counting. In 2 Samuel, God's wrath comes upon David because he is wanting to count his army – which is a big red flag for not trusting in God's might. Even Joab, the commander of the army, says: "Why do you want to count?" Because the point is that God is faithful to His people regardless of how many you have. In the story of Gideon, God even narrows the number right down to a fraction of the number he started with.

So if we're not counting numbers, what will you find in this strategy? You're going to find us measuring a different kind of growth... one that focuses on our own individual spiritual journey to a life's adventure with Jesus, whilst also acknowledging our need for community and looking after ourselves holistically. We will focus on where God is at work in our parish, recognising too that there are times when a project has to stop in order for something new to be brought to life.

Most importantly, this strategy encourages us to reflect back on where God has taken us in order to discern where God is leading us as we move forwards. This means that this strategy is one that breathes. It's one that requires us as a wider community to engage with it so we can be accurate to where we are and where we need to go. This strategy encourages us *all* to play our part in the development of the children and young people here in our parish.

2. Findings from consultation with children and young people

In July 2024, a form was circulated to parents of children and young people in CTM Parish. This form consisted of numerous questions which sought to provide an insight into the faith of our children and young people, particularly what and/or who has played a key part in their faith journeys.

Most forms were completed by young people alongside a parent. From the answers on the nine forms that were returned, five themes emerged. Although only nine forms were returned in total, we felt that the themes we were able to identify from the children's answers reflected the bigger picture of what we know to be true of children and young people in faith development – both from our own experience of working with children and young people as well as national research and discussion around spiritual formation concerning children and young people.

The themes we identified give us some insight into what and who plays an important role in the discipleship of children and young people today. The five themes were:

- The importance of Christians friends and peer groups
- The importance of family and the home environment
- The importance of the church community
- The importance of role models
- The importance of participation

2.1 The importance of Christian friends and peer groups

This theme was evident through repeated references to groups that the young people are part of, as seen in the word cloud below. Groups referred to included church-specific groups, parish-wide groups, school groups and external groups (e.g. New Wine / Yellow Braces). This suggests that peer-to-peer relationships are important to young people and that the group setting is important in their discipleship journey.



Questions to consider:

- How do we continue to sustainably offer a variety of groups for children and young people?

2.2 The importance of family and the home environment

When asked “what and/or who has influenced and/or continues to influence your faith journey?”, young people frequently mentioned family members as seen in the word cloud below.

DISCUSSIONS AT HOME
FAITH-BASED BOOKS AT HOME
MY BROTHER MY PARENTS
TALKING AT HOME GRANDMA
MY PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS
READING BIBLE AND NOTES WITH MUM
REFLECTING AT HOME
PRAYER WITH MUMMY
PARENTS FAMILY

This illustrates the importance of the home setting as a natural place for discipleship (as described in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9) as well as the role parents have as the primary influencers in their child’s faith formation (Parenting for Faith). Based on children spending one hour a week in church groups, it would take the church 421 years to spend the same amount of time a parent/carer has with a child by the age of 10 (Care For The Family).



Questions to consider:

- How do we equip, support and empower parents to step into their role as primary disciplers of their children and confidently parent for faith?
- How do we support children and young people on their personal faith journey when they come from a home with non-Christian parents?

2.3 The importance of the church community

The word “community” regularly appeared throughout the forms, in particular in response to the question: “what do you enjoy most about being part of this church?”. The word cloud below reflects the answers given in relation to community.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT
CHATTING TO PEOPLE
SEEING FAMILIAR FACES
THE FAMILY FEEL
SENSE OF COMMUNITY
DOING FAITH WITH OTHERS
MEETING PEOPLE & SHARING A PURPOSE
CHATTING TO PEOPLE
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES
MAKING FRIENDS
GOOD COMMUNITY

Whilst some answers alluded to peer-to-peer friendships, the overall impression was that references to the community of the church referred predominantly to people of *all-ages*, i.e. the *whole* church community. This suggests there is something important about the intergenerational nature of church life and the role that we can all potentially play in nurturing our children and young people.



Questions to consider:

- How do we encourage more intergenerational relationships within our church communities?
- How do we help the wider congregation understand their role within the big picture of children and youth ministry?

2.4 The importance of role models

Respondents identified individuals within the church community who have played a part in their faith journeys, illustrating how “children benefit from being part of a wider web of relationship outside of the family” (Edwards, Hancock and Nash 2019: 12). Church, children and youth leaders all featured within this list. However, respondents also listed individuals *not* on the children or youth teams. These individuals were described by respondents as “adults who chat to them [the young person] in church and encourage them” and as “people who show an interest in them as a person”. These people play a vital role for CYP as research by Sticky Faith reveals that “contact from at least one adult from the congregation outside of the youth ministry” results in a greater likelihood of that YP sticking with their faith (Powell, Griffin and Crawford 2011: 78).

This shows how meaningful and impactful it can be for young people when adults (outside of their family network) take an authentic interest in them and form a connection. It also illustrates how genuine concern for the individual as a whole is important to young people (i.e. an interest in their whole life and wellbeing, not just their spiritual life).

Questions to consider:

- How do we encourage relationships like this to develop in a safe and appropriate way?
- How can we holistically invest in children and young people?

2.5 The importance of participation

When asked about key moments on their faith journey and what helps them feel close to God, the young people responding often referred to times of active participation in church life, as seen in the word cloud below.

DOING THINGS IN SERVICES
LEARNING TO SING AND PLAY A PART IN SERVICES
JOINING THE CHOIR
PLAYING DRUMS AND KEYS
READING IN CHURCH
BEING IN WORSHIP GROUP
BEING IN THE CHOIR
JOINING CHOIR

The answers from the young people suggested that active participation helps them feel a sense of belonging to the church as a whole. As one respondent articulated, “doing the laptop and playing drums *helps me feel more connected to the rest of the church* and not just Sunday Club” [own emphasis]. Valuing children and young people as active participants in our church community and enabling their involvement therefore not only blesses our church community as a whole, but also plays a part in the development and growth of the children and young people themselves.

Questions to consider:

- How can we encourage and enable our children and young people to use their gifts?
- How can we encourage the wider congregation to view and value children and young people as active participants and fellow pilgrims?

2.6 Additional insights

In response to “what helps you feel close to God?”, the respondents listed a wide variety of practices:

- Involvement in musical worship
- Listening to engaging talks
- Hearing testimonies
- Singing
- Reading the Bible
- Reading faith-based books
- Discussion groups
- Worship music
- Interacting with actions
- Praying with others / prayer
- Nature
- Listening to stories and psalms

The children and young people were asked what three words they would use to describe their church at the moment and what three words they would *like* to use to describe their church in five years time. The two word clouds below reflect their responses. Blue words indicate responses from St John’s. Green words indicate responses from St Peter’s.



3. Core values

Stemming from the findings from our consultation with children and young people, national dialogue on the topic of children, youth and family ministry, and our own experience of ministry with children and young people, we identified seven values (that also align with our parish vision of “becoming a Christ-like community”) that we believe are key to creating an environment within which children and young people can both come to and grow in faith. As seen in the diagram below, these seven values were:

- Jesus-centred
- Community
- Holistic
- Relational
- Intergenerational
- Safe
- Team

On the following pages, we will explore what we mean by each of these values, some of the biblical grounding for certain values, and why each plays an important role in this strategy.



JESUS-CENTRED

Aligning with our parish vision of "becoming a Christlike community", we want **Jesus to be at the centre of all that we do**. Whether it be teaching, socials or vision setting, everything must be centred on the person of Jesus.

As we journey with CYP we seek to accompany them on a **journey of spiritual exposure** (exposing CYP to the truths of Christianity and who Jesus is), **spiritual experience** (helping them know Jesus personally), and **spiritual adventure** (enabling them to live out a life of faith). All three elements are essential in growing **lifelong disciples** of Christ.

COMMUNITY

The Gospel is that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus announced this **out in the community**, and so we too must be out in the community helping people realise this truth. As Paul writes: "how can they believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed?" (Romans 10: 14b). This means we need to be **active in our community - witnessing and seeking to build relationships** with those we come into contact with in order to **share the gospel message**.

As a church, we also want to be **modelling community** - growing a **sense of family** as we **support, encourage and accompany one another** on life's journey.

HOLISTIC

We desire to nurture the whole person. This includes not just their spiritual, but also their mental, emotional and social health.

Jesus' ministry too was marked by holistic and inclusive care as evidenced through Him healing physical disabilities (Mark 2: 1-12; John 9: 1-7), addressing the physical need of hunger (Matthew 14: 13-21; Mark 8: 1-19) and ministering to those who were emotionally and socially marginalised (Mark 5: 25-34; John 4:1-26; Luke 5: 12-16; Luke 19: 1-10). Jesus' care was comprehensive, aiming not just at spiritual wellbeing, but at **restoring individuals to wholeness in every dimension**. We too, seek to do likewise by being inclusive and valuing every individual as a whole.

RELATIONAL

The five themes drawn out of the responses from CYP in our parish all relate to *people* - Christian friends, family, the church community, role models, the individuals themselves. This suggests that the question of *who* is involved in the faith formation of CYP is perhaps more important than the question of *what*. In other words, **relationships are more important than programmes or activities**.

This should not come as a surprise when we consider the fact that God created humans to be inherently relational - designed to live in community with each other¹ as well as in relationship with God Himself². Therefore, **if what we do is not bound in relationships then we labour in vain**.

¹ Genesis 2: 18; Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12; John 13: 34-35; Romans 12: 4-5; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27; Hebrews 10: 24-25

² Genesis 3: 8-9; Deuteronomy 6: 4-5; John 1: 12-13; John 15: 15; 2 Corinthians 6: 16; Revelation 3: 20

INTERGENERATIONAL

When God's people gather in the Bible, all ages are often represented¹. Such gatherings **reflect a more complete image of the body of Christ**, allowing us to **see a glimpse of the fullness of God's family**.

Intergenerational communities also **allow for the growth of a wider set of relationships** that are important in faith nurture - as identified by CYP in our parish. For this reason, **the whole community of the church play a part in the discipleship of CYP**.

Intergenerational communities also play a role in the faith nurture of CYP by being **spaces where CYP can actively participate as fellow worshippers and pilgrims** - as modeled throughout Scripture², and identified by CYP in our parish as important to their spiritual formation.

Adults can also learn from CYP, meaning intergenerational gatherings can be **places of mutual learning and growth** and therefore **of benefit to the whole church**.

¹ Ezra 10: 1, 2 Chronicles 20: 13 and Nehemiah 12: 27-43

² Deuteronomy 29: 2, 10-11; 2 Chronicles 20: 1-28; 2 Kings 12: 1; Jeremiah 1: 1-10; 1 Samuel 3: 1-18; 1 Samuel 17

SAFE

We are committed to **being safe for our CYP to worship and grow in Christ safely**. This not only means **recruiting safely** and **following good safeguarding practices**, but also means **respecting, valuing and caring for all our CYP** in a way that allows them to flourish and be all that God has made them to be.

TEAM

We need to **build and invest in teams** in order for our CYP's ministry to be sustainable. In order to be effective and allow for growth, **teams must be encouraged, equipped and released** to work and build relationships with CYP.

CYP in our own parish have highlighted the importance of Christian role models on their own personal faith journeys, often naming leaders of children and youth teams as being people who have impacted their journey. For this reason, **it is essential that leaders of CYP's ministry have a personal faith**.

Questions to consider:

- I wonder what excites you about any of these values?
- I wonder where you already see the values exhibited in our churches?



4. Measuring progress

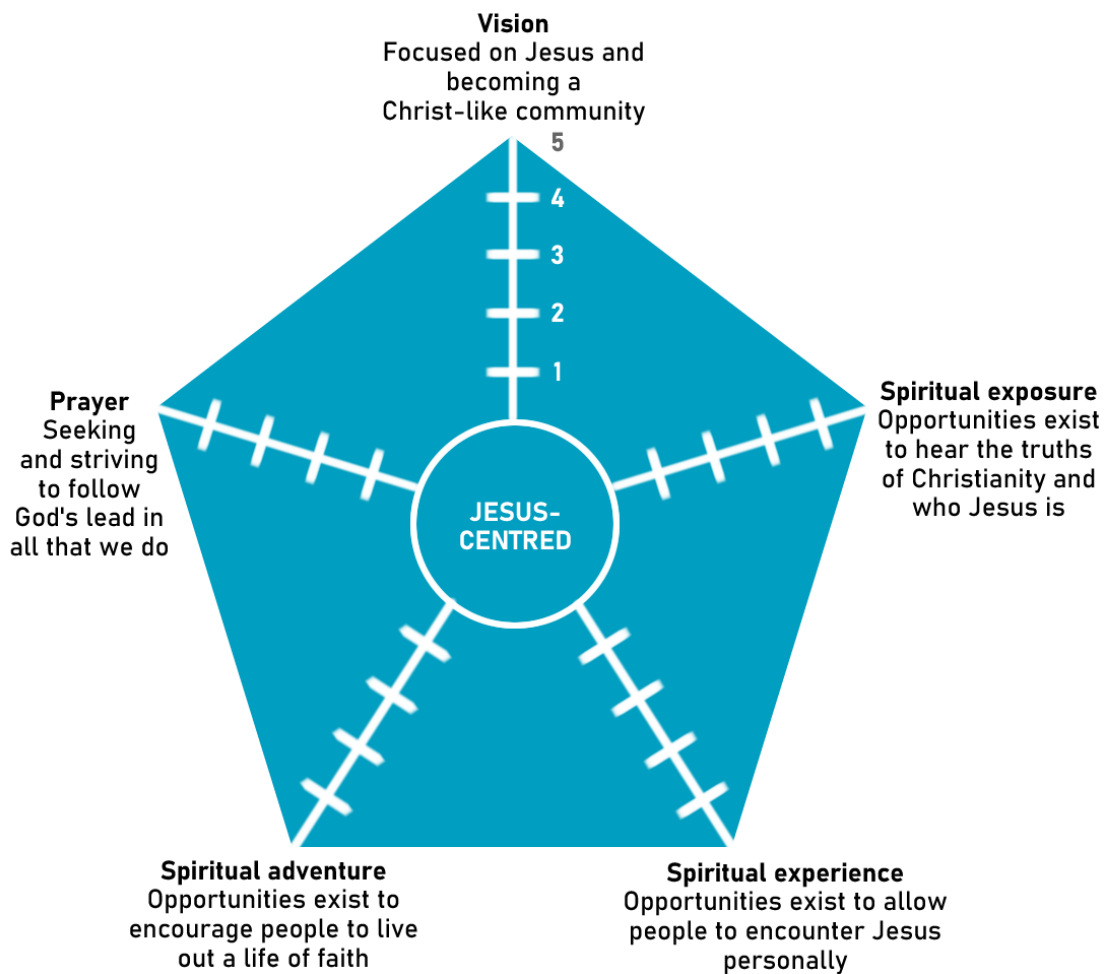
Our desire is that we grow in each of the values we have identified. But how do we measure growth with intangible elements such as values?

To do so, we have created value diagrams for each of the seven values. Each value diagram displays a number of soft outcomes which we believe are linked to growing in that value, i.e. what are the changes we may expect to see if we are investing in becoming a more intergenerational community?

We plan to use these value diagrams to review on an annual basis, identifying what it might look like for us to move to the next 'rung of the ladder' in certain areas. This will encourage us to be continually noticing the things that are taking place in our church community, to be having conversations with others and seeking their perspective, to be listening for stories of these values in action, and most of all, to be attentive to where God is at work. The diagrams allow us to respond to the moving of God's Spirit by not tying us down to plans for specific activities or programmes, but by allowing us to focus our attention where we see God already at work.

By using the same evaluation method over time, we will have the opportunity to celebrate as we see where we have grown, but it will also help us to see the areas where we could perhaps invest further.

On the following pages you can see the seven value diagrams that we have created.



Outward
Flourishing connections with and reputation within local community

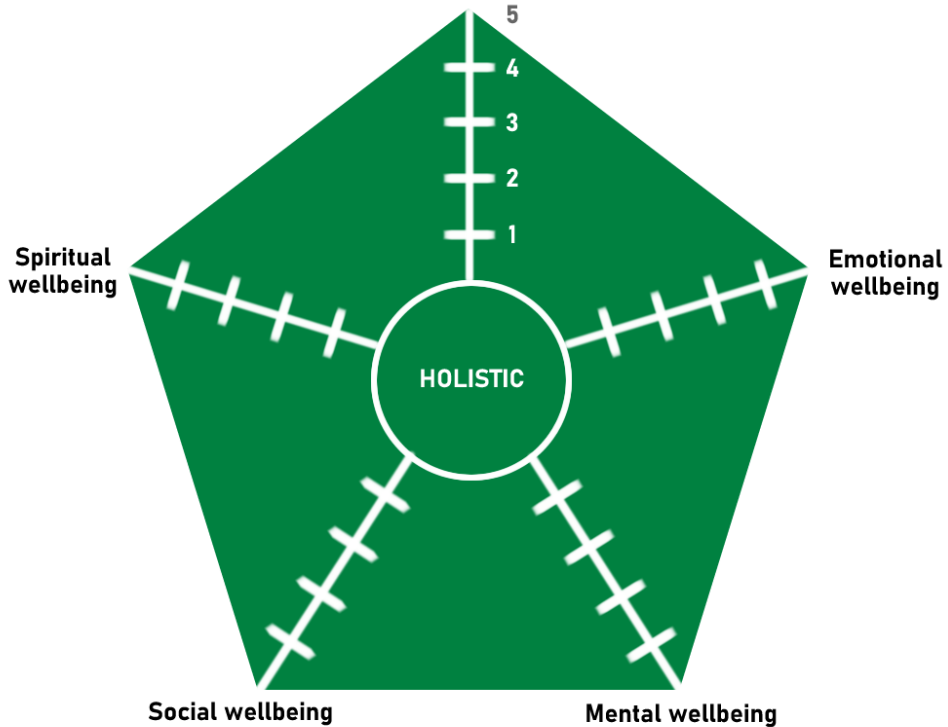


Inward
Sense of church family supporting, encouraging and accompanying one another

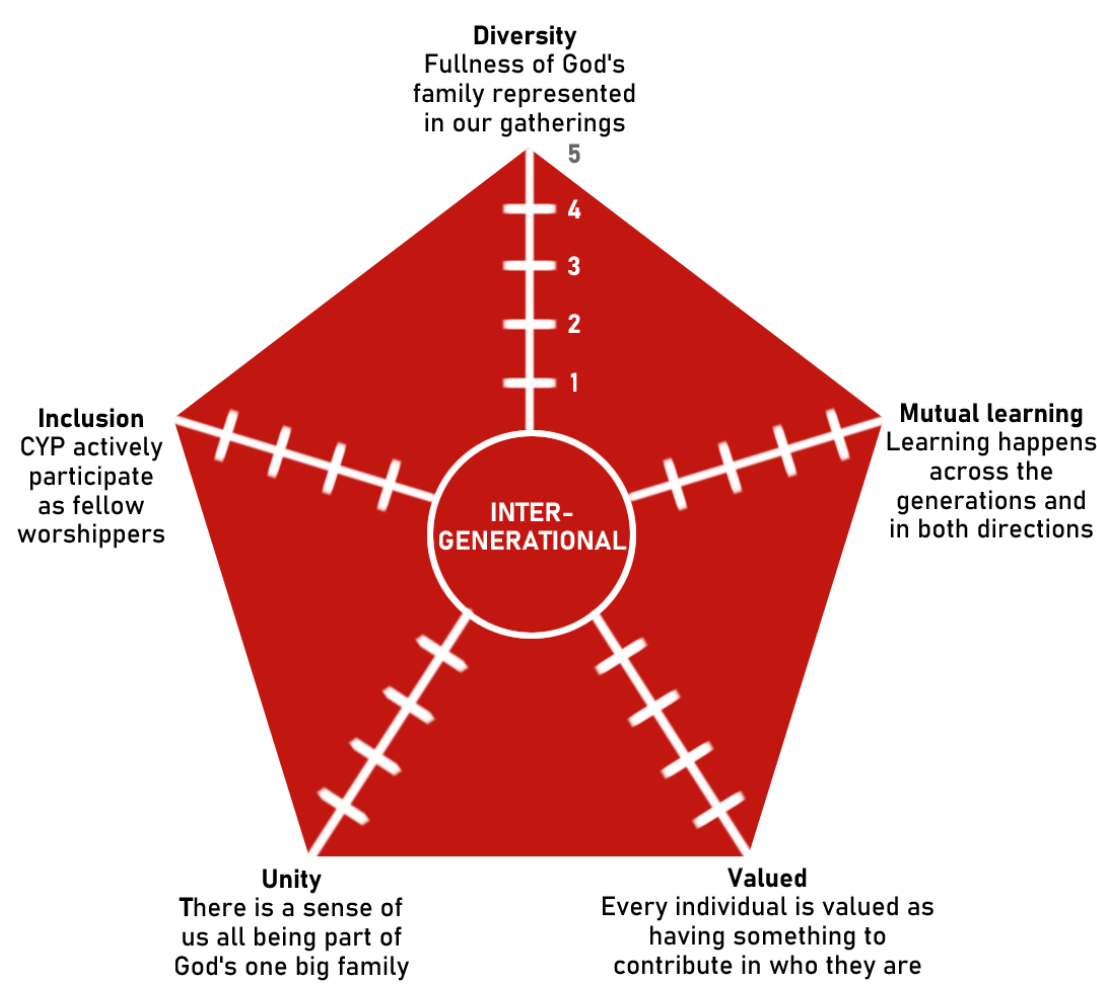
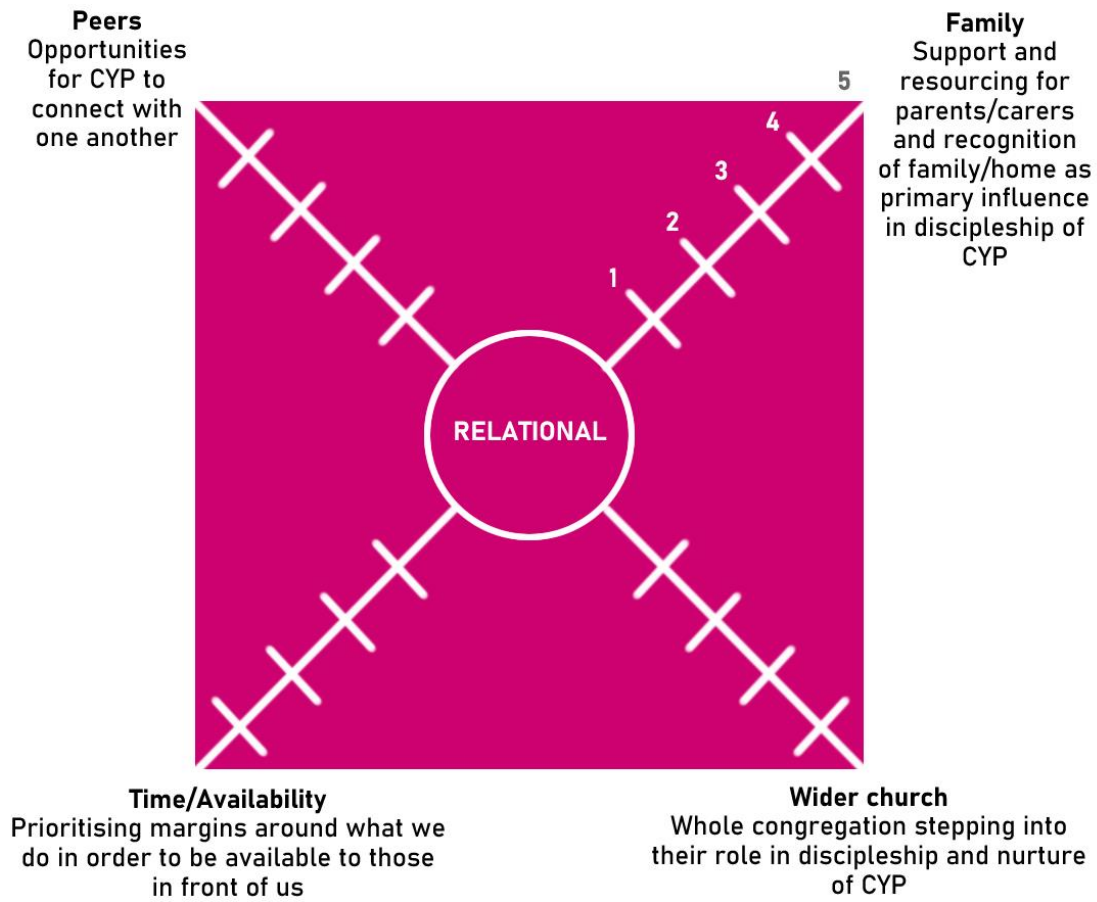
Educational establishments
Strength of relationships with schools, nurseries, teachers, pupils etc.

Other organisations
Strength of relationships with other CYP-focused groups/organisations, e.g. Scouts/Guides

Inclusive
Inclusive ministry welcoming those with additional needs



Mental/emotional/social/spiritual wellbeing
The wellbeing of CYP in each of these areas is considered and CYP have an understanding of how they are doing (including being able to communicate that) as well as having the ability to know what initiative they need to grow



Recruitment
Employees and volunteers are recruited safely

Practice
Good safeguarding practice is adhered to and respected



Culture
To be a safe space, we as a team must embody this safety

Flourishing
CYP treated in a way that enables them to flourish and be all that God has made them to be

Encouraged
Teams feel inspired and encouraged

Communication
Effective communication exists and team members feel heard

Equipped
Teams have opportunities to be equipped

Shared load
A sense of team and shared responsibility exists and is nurtured

Released
People have opportunities to use their gifts and step into areas of calling / vocation

5. Summary

Our consultation with children and young people in July 2024 led to the identification of five areas that play a role in the faith development of children and young people. These five areas were:

- The importance of Christians friends and peer groups
- The importance of family and the home environment
- The importance of the church community
- The importance of role models
- The importance of participation

These findings resonated with our own experience of ministry with children and young people and aligned with national research and current discussion regarding the spiritual formation of children and young people.

Stemming from these findings and with consideration of the vision of CTM Parish (becoming a Christ-like community), we identified seven values that we believe are important in creating a culture within which children and young people can both come to faith and grow in faith. These values were:

- Jesus-centred
- Community
- Holistic
- Relational
- Intergenerational
- Safe
- Team

Our desire is to be growing in each of these values, therefore we created value diagrams for each of the values as a means by which we can evaluate how we are progressing in areas relating to each value. These value diagrams used descriptors as a means by which we might recognise growth in a given area.

6. Concluding thoughts

We are passionate about helping children and young people grow into lifelong disciples of Christ. The various areas that we have identified as playing an important role in the spiritual formation of children and young people demonstrate that the *whole* church body has a role to play in their faith nurture. Whether you are a parent, an adult with no children of your own, an adult with grown up children, a grandparent, a member of our children's or youth teams, a member of our CLTs or PCC, *everyone* can play a role in helping our children and young people grow in faith. And so the question we want to leave every member of our congregations to consider is: what role will you play? How might you be a 'Dennis' to a child/young person today?



What role will you play?