

Children and Families worker

One of my jobs in my 20's was as a pastoral assistant at a church in London. There was only 40 adults but 4 families who had children from 8 - 12 years old. So I spent a year doing a younger youth club and an older one, a Sunday school, and a Young Disciples group. We did a Christmas show, an Easter club and a summer few days away. All normal stuff. But there was only 10 of them or less, and I was there for just over a year - but all of them have kept the faith in some way or another, some are serving in churches or just being Christians in their work, and it supported their parents too. I connected with them, I did what their parents couldn't and what the vicar couldn't - I was that outside Christian adult to nurture and challenge and encourage. I linked them in.

3 years ago you had a full time vicar - 40 hours a week. And a part Community worker - Lewis - 24 hours a week. You now have one part time vicar - 24 hours a week (plus Sundays). The job of vicar is all about relationships - getting to know people, being there, alongside and with them, and hopefully allowing my friendship with Jesus to become their friendship. The less of me there is, the less people I can meet, spend time with, point to God.

This parish has had a 2/3rd reduction in full time workers, but apart from the Coach, everything else is still going on - the cafe, recreate, school assemblies, school governors, Sundays, vestry group, Jim's Pilgrims etc etc. Because you are a great group of volunteers and give so generously of your time and talents.. which means you have a wide fringe to church - people who you're connected to.. but you have little means of helping them get closer in to knowing God.

An extra pair of hands would make a huge difference.

Imagine if the person doing the assembly once a week also did a prayer time in school for those interested. And then that person organised a Posada - like a knitted nativity - which went round the homes at Christmas, and who knows they helped link Jim's Pilgrims and Little Jims and the school kids to do a Christmas production. And they knew the families and were there for them. And they were in Recreate but also at Vestry Group. Or if they went younger, imagine this person visiting all the baptism families and really helping them to integrate into church life. And they could be doing phone calls and zoom chats if they were here already.

And you might say - why start here? with children and families. Why not Youth, or community, or early twenties or over 70's. And yes, you could do any and all of those, I am not saying that they don't matter. But my idea is based on learning from nature, from how things grow. If you start with the youngest, that will inevitably involved their parents too. If you keep the youngest, then eventually you will need to have a youth person as well. Once the youth get older, you work on keeping them. But you have to stop the leak at the bottom of the pipe, otherwise it can't fill up.

So I don't want to be too prescriptive about what this Children and Families worker might do - I think it really depends on who they are, and what their gifts and calling are. But it would be good to set some aims, or even to describe what the church might look like or feel like after 2 or 3 years.

And yes, I think we are talking about a long term appointment - any work like this can't be a tip and run kind of thing. Its about relationships and you can't speed those up - and they take time. When I was a pastoral assistant I'd been worshipping in that church for 2 or 3 years already.

So there's a couple of issues - one is money and the other is the timing.

I've addressed both of these in a leaflet which addresses these questions, but the quick answers are -

we have some reserves, and so far we have been making some surplus each year too. But its not enough. We've looked at grants, but we haven't found ones for wages yet, just equipment!

If we had 30 people giving an extra £10 a month, we could employ a worker for 3 years. That's all - 30 people, £2.50 a week. Imagine if all 50 of you gave a £5 a week!

The thing about giving regularly is that it makes you very connected personally to this project. It means you will care about what happens, that you will pray for them and their work.

And the other thing might be - why now? In the midst of all this.. can't it wait?

Firstly, this will all take time - to get congregation agreement, to find the money, to sort out job descriptions - will take 3 months, and to advertise and appoint may take 3 months too - so even if we agreed, we wouldn't be appointing until December!

Secondly - we are realising that there won't suddenly be a return to what things were - so if we "wait" until this is over - it could be next year, or later.. and by that time, our children will have grown up.

Thirdly - I want a hope for a better tomorrow, I want something to look forward to, I think if we are working on our future, we won't be so bogged down by our present. Jeremiah was told to buy land, even though he was in exile and couldn't use it - as a prophetic sign that they would return to the promised land. This is that kind of thing.

So to sum up. The PCC have so far decided that they think it is right to have a children and families worker at this time.

We want to check this with you - the congregation - to help us think more sharply about it.

So I've produced a little leaflet to help you think about the issues. And we're going to have a zoom meeting on Tues 2nd June at 8pm to discuss this further.

I know that many of you are already in full support of this, and some of you have even said you'd be happy to give towards it.

If we get an agreement then we'll start doing the paperwork and working on the details, and then we'll come back to ask if you feel called to support it in some way.

There will be uncertainties over money for many of us because of the virus, and we're not wanting people to make that risk greater, and if we don't get enough money then we won't go ahead. But we will ask.

And then, and only then, would be advertise.

But today is about first steps, and thinking about direction. Is that the heading we want to go for? To teach our children about God, to pass the faith on to the next generation?

I firmly believe that this **is** something God wants us to move towards, especially in this time of lockdown - to give us hope, so that maybe in a few months time, as the new season begins, St James might be even stronger to help support the community and grow closer to God - to love God and love our neighbour. Like he told us to.