



Hearing the voice of children and young people in the vacancy process

Growing younger and more diverse is a priority for us within the Diocese of Ely as well as across the National Church. A time of vacancy allows parishes to reflect on what is important to them, to identify and celebrate their strengths, as well as articulate the areas that they hope a new incumbent will help them develop and strengthen. Choosing the right incumbent, who will lead the parish into the next chapter of their life together, will be absolutely key. The PCC will want to consult widely, and we encourage the PCC to find ways of enabling children and young people to be heard and meaningfully input into that process. By doing this, it demonstrates that children and young people are an important part of the church, valuing their views, opinions and perspectives and acknowledging their role in discerning God's plans for the parish and local worshipping community.

This toolkit is designed to help parishes and benefices consult with, and include the voice of, children and young people in the vacancy process from parish profile through to appointment.

THE PARISH PROFILE

Information to include about children and young people in your parish:

- If any children and young people attend church or you have regular contact with them. Even if the numbers are small, this is something to celebrate
- Work and relationships with local schools including Parish School Covenant
- Events and holiday clubs for children young people and their families
- Links with uniformed organisations
- Toddler groups
- Youth groups/cafes/services
- After school clubs
- Sunday School/Junior Church provision
- Choirs
- Intergenerational worshipping communities/Messy Church/Forest or outside church
- Where young people and children serve, lead and are involved in decision making in the church
- Whether there are any employed workers or ministers (volunteer or employed) dedicated to children or youth ministry
- The involvement of lay members of the congregations in the running and leadership of ministry with children and young people - it speaks of how these groups/events are supported by the whole parish
- Whether there is a PCC resolution to admit children to Holy Communion prior to confirmation (if no resolution has been passed at this point, you should wait until a new incumbent arrives)



PAYING ATTENTION TO THE VOICE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



As you prepare the profile and seek to plan the consultation process, consider how the voice of the children and young people will be heard, particularly when creating the list of what is hoped for in a new incumbent.

- Consider carefully who should hold those conversations.
- Draw on the expertise of those working with children and young people – but don't leave it to them alone. There will be an important message, that values the role of children and young people as full members of the community and part of the process, that is communicated if a member of the PCC (alongside the children/youth leader/minister/worker) seeks to engage with the children/young people.
- Decide how this will be communicated and acted upon and ensure the children/young people know the importance of and the role their contribution will play as well as the timescales for this.
- Manage expectations by ensuring the children and young people are one of a number of voices and contributions being heard as part of the consultation.

THINK ABOUT:

- Which children and young people you want to include:
 - members of the church community
 - those in local schools
 - those in the wider community
- How will you have that conversation?
- How will you help draw out information?
- Some children and young people may find it hard to vocalise their thoughts. Try to give them prior warning which will allow them some time to reflect and formulate in their minds some ideas. It will also give them time to talk it over with a 'trusted-other'.
- Using activities and physical objects in the conversation can really help. Objects such as Lego figures, large paper and pens in a group contribution context can also help to create a secure environment where children and young people feel able to engage.
- Some children/young people will find (for a wide variety of reasons) contributing within the large group more difficult. How will their voices be heard?
- Can the materials used for consulting adults be used with, or adapted for, the young people in your church?
- Is additional consent needed for children or young people to participate?

How?

Some of the suggestions below could be adapted for your context and further examples are available at: www.learn-to-listen.org.uk/appointing-a-new-vicar/appointing-a-vicar-ways-to-involve-children-and-young-people.

QUESTIONS:

FOR USE WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

- What do you enjoy or like about the church currently?
- Why do you come?
- Explore some 'would be better if...' statements which can be turned into hopes for the future.
- What sort of church leader do they think is needed next?
- What makes a good church leader?
- What do they want the church leader to be able to do? What should they focus on?
- What should the new church leader focus on when they arrive?
- What should the new church leader be like? Why?
- What have you noticed God up to at [name of church]? What do you think God is doing at [name of church] at the moment?

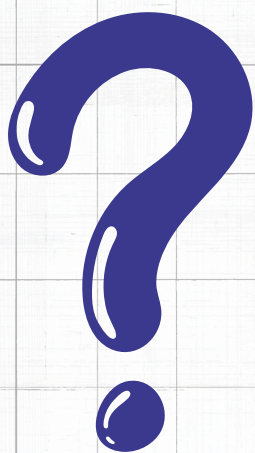


QUESTIONS:

FOR USE WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY INCLUDING SCHOOLS

Be careful not to use 'church jargon' such as PCC or parish that the children may not understand and explain why their input is important to the church.

- What sort of leader do they think the church in the community needs?
- What sort of church leader does the wider community/school need?
- What different ways could they imagine the new church leader supporting the life of the wider community/school?
- Do they think the church is important - if so why, if not, why not?
- What do they think is good about the church?
- What do they think the church could do differently?
- What would you like the new church leader to do in your school?



WONDERING QUESTIONS - USING GODLY PLAY OR SIMILAR

Wondering questions are a good way to ask children to contribute. This activity could be done during a normal session with children in the church or in a time after a service. Before starting ensure you have somebody to record the children's wonderings.

- Gather the children in a circle. Explain why we you are doing this and how the wondering will be used to share with the PCC to help them find the new vicar for the church. Explain that [representative] will be recording what they say so the PCC can hear what they say. Introduce this person.
- Lay out felt underlay and put down the model of a church (from Godly Play materials or you could make your own simple representation).
- Point to the model and say:
 - Here is [name of church]
 - There has been a place to worship God on this site for [] years.
 - Very many people have come here to meet with God in prayer and worship and friendship and very many other ways.
 - Put down some People of God figures (from Godly Play materials or again you could make your own) and invite the children to place others.
- Today we are part of that great family of people who have come to [name of church].
- Pause before beginning the wondering and then accept whatever is said:
 - I wonder what you like best about [name of church]?
 - I wonder where you find God?
 - I wonder if there is anything else that is important that we could do here?
 - I wonder what the difference is to people who come to [name of church] after they leave?
 - I wonder what sort of things a vicar here at [name of church] needs to be able to do or be good at?

USING ACTIVITIES OR GAMES

One way to help children to contribute is to give them permission whilst providing a space for others to listen. Using a variety of games or activities can help. Examples may include*:

PASSING AN OBJECT/CATHING A BALL

- Gather the children in a circle.
- Provide an object to pass around the circle or a ball to throw and catch.
- Explain that you are going to pass the object/throw the ball around the circle.
- If you are holding the object/ball, and only if, you can add an answer to or a thought about the question.
- Ensure you have someone to record the answers
- Pass the object/ball round the circle a few times as it may take the children several goes before they are ready to add their thoughts.
- Questions you could ask:
 - Can you think of something you like that happens at [name of church]?
 - Is there something you would like to change at [name of church]?
 - Is there something you would like to do more of at [name of church]?
 - Is there something you would like to do differently at [name of church]?
 - What is the best thing about [name of church]?
 - What would make [name of church] better?
- Between each question change the direction you pass the object in

USING PROMPTS:

- This could include prompt cards, or cards to fill in or a template of a 'new vicar' or a church to write or draw in. Post it notes work well to write one thing on and add to a collective sheet.
- Asking the questions over food
- Moving to different parts of the church or venue to think and pray about different questions with space to pin or stick up answers or thoughts
- Inviting children and young people to attend intergenerational focus groups

What should a new church leader be good at?

What should be important to our new church leader?

What should a new church leader have done before?

LISTENING WELL TO YOUNG PEOPLE

As young people grow from childhood to adolescence it can be harder to create an environment where they feel they can speak freely. Don't be afraid of asking young people big or difficult questions, they live in a world of questions and are constantly sense making. What might feel like a big question for leaders, might be easier for young people and they often want to have deep conversations when given the right space and enough time. Young people value relationships & authenticity, take the time to build the relationship and be honest with them.



SHARING FOOD: This can be a useful way to help create an atmosphere where young people feel safe, it can create community and also communicates value to the young people. It is important that the adults share in the meal too.



SPACE: Create an inviting space for the session to take place in, would the young people feel more comfortable sitting on cushions on the floor or prefer tables and chairs? Can you use lamps and lighting so it has a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere and doesn't feel like a classroom.



BREAKING THE ICE: Help young people understand that there isn't a "right answer". The church is interested in their views. Starting with icebreaker activities that don't have a right or wrong answer can be helpful and help the young people being to share with each other and leaders. "Would you rather" or the YETI game (yfc.co.uk/yettigame) can be helpful ways to do this.



VARIETY: Some young people will be confident and happy to share their thoughts, opinions and experiences, others might be more hesitant. Providing a range of ways for young people to participate helps all their voices be heard:

- Provide ways for young people to contribute anonymously, maybe writing thoughts on paper and putting them into a box
- Use dot voting or monopoly money so the young people can express how "valued" an attribute in a church leader might be, by allocating a number of dots or monopoly notes to it, but without the need to share why they think that.
- Ask young people to share stories of their experiences or perceptions of church and church leaders. After a few stories ask the group some of the following questions:
 - What did you notice in the stories that were shared?
 - What stood out to you?
 - What surprised you?
 - What challenged you?
 - What questions has it made you think of?

INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SELECTION PROCESS



Just as involving children and young people in the writing of the parish profile is a vital part of the consultation, the voice of children and young people is also important in the selection process. This demonstrates to the children and young people that their voice is important within the whole church community but also demonstrates to any applicant that the voice of children and young people is recognised within the church.

There are a number of ways this can be done:

- Including one or two young people as part of the interview panel
- Including a round table discussion with some children and young people as part of the interview process (the children and young people should decide collectively, with representatives of the panel in advance, what questions they would like to ask). Members of the panel should also be present.
- Basing some of the interview questions around the things raised by the children and young people in the consultation with them (this could be linked to the discussion above)
- The applicants could complete an activity with the children in school with members of the panel and teachers also involved. Schools will be used to involving children in recruitment processes.

In all cases it is really important that there is an opportunity for the children and young people to meaningfully feed back to the panel what their thoughts are. Please also remember that safe guarding policies must be followed in all situations.

FURTHER HELP & SUPPORT:

The Children, Youth, Families and Schools Team within the Mission and Ministry Department are available to support parishes through this process.

- Development Officer: Children and Families – ruth.new@elydiocese.org
- Development Officer: Youth and Families – mike.kelly@elydiocese.org
- Development Officer: Schools Mission – mandy.flaherty@elydiocese.org

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- www.learn-to-listen.org.uk/appointing-a-new-vicar/appointing-a-vicar-ways-to-involve-children-and-young-people
- [YETI game \(yfc.co.uk/yettigame\)](http://YETI_game(yfc.co.uk/yettigame))

