

“If the Church is to take seriously the larger context of its universal mission, it needs to note the cultural shifts and current background of life for children and young people, all the while remembering that they are human beings, made in the image of God.”

A Passion for Children

In February 2010, the report [Going for Growth](#) was presented to the Church of England’s General Synod. Just reading the initial portions of this document urges me to read on – as I believe it will to every person with a passion for Christian formation as well as how we support children and youth in a life of faith.

An excerpt from the first pages . . .

The task of Christian nurture must be seen not only in domestic terms, as something taking place within the families and generations of the Church, but also within the larger context of the Church’s universal mission to humanity.

Over a generation ago, the ground-breaking report ‘The Child in the Church’ urged the church to consider its engagement with children and young people in wider terms than simply those with whom it came into contact. In the intervening years, the numbers of children and young people in formal contact with the church has declined, but the Church’s universal mission to humanity has not changed. We need to reconsider how we engage with and express God’s love to this generation of children and young people, whoever and wherever they may be.

The world is changing – and with it, the experiences of childhood and adolescence. Since the Church of England’s National Strategies for Young People and Children were written, the focus on children and young people in the public arena has become more prominent. There is a concern for children and young people reflected both in Government agenda and in the media. Too often it unhelpfully polarises things, placing children and young people at one or other end of a spectrum from angel to demon.

The findings of the Good Childhood Inquiry have highlighted what children perceive as needed for a good childhood – relationships, environment and well-being are key. However, relationship breakdown, bullying and inequality of many kinds were indicated

as challenges to the flourishing of children and young people in our country.

If the Church is to take seriously the larger context of its universal mission, it needs to note the cultural shifts and current background of life for children and young people, all the while remembering that they are human beings, made in the image of God.

The Church is called to work well with all children and young people, but the demands of the gospel always lead to a particular concern for the most vulnerable. The Church's mission must not only take account of the context in which it finds itself, but also listen to children and young people themselves and take seriously what it hears.

If, instead of trying to teach good news to children (and young people), the Church tries to become good news, it will need such fresh eyes to see itself. Such a church would need the confidence to deal with questions rather than always having to find the answers. It would be prepared to surrender its life and let its institutions be transformed. The sadness is that churches rarely have the confidence which enables them to face the questions theology may ask of them, especially in the devastating directness such questions may take on in the mouth of a child (or young person). Churches lack the humility to face the truth about the quality of their life and worship and to set about addressing the needs, which are then identified.

A church which welcomes children (and young people), accepts their gifts and ministries, meets their needs, advocates justice, seeks new life, challenges evil with love and truth, and continues to learn the values of the Kingdom by living them, is a Church which is good news not only for its members but for the world.

A similar document from The Episcopal Church that call us to ministry with children is [The Children's Charter for the Church](#), adopted at General Convention in 1997.