

## Children, Young People and Families moving forward

Thank you for journeying with us over the past 18 months as we have adapted to the challenges of Lockdown and experimented with new forms of ministry in outdoor and online spaces. We have learned a lot, much of which will inspire our ministry with children, young people and families as we move forward.

We would, however, like to apologise for not doing a better job at communicating the transition process for children's and youth ministry once Fran leaves and we look to make a new appointment. We can understand if it seems as though we have not given due consideration to how support and discipleship among the children and young people in our congregation will continue, and would like to take this opportunity to explain where we are and how we are moving forward.

The impact of Lockdown caused us to pause or stop many of our usual activities and services. This has given us the chance to reflect on the kind of church God is calling us to become and how we structure ourselves to embody that. This has, and continues to be, a process of communal discernment as we prayerfully explore what church will look like as restrictions are eased.

Of course this has implications for the whole church community and our ministry with children and young people has been very much at the centre of this discernment. A small group has been meeting to reflect on this ministry and to consider what our key principles should be as we journey forward. These principles have been reflected on by the staff team, PCC and some of the older young people, and have also been informed by the Seeking God's Way Together process. I share them with you so can get a sense of what will be underpinning this ministry into the future:

- **Discipleship:** We want to be a church that nurtures the faith journey of children and young people across the ages and that has accessible provision for this to happen.
- **Intergenerational and age distinctive:** We recognise the need for provision that is age appropriate. We also recognise that a gift of the church family is the opportunity for those of all ages to worship and share together.
- **Participation:** We believe the priesthood of all believers includes children and young people. We want children and young people to contribute to and shape the life and worship of the church. We recognise that children and young people can teach and inspire adults through the way they worship and engage with God.
- **Equipping volunteers:** We want to be a church that supports and equips volunteers to feel empowered as they minister with our children and young people. We also want to create opportunities for our children and young people to develop their own leadership abilities.

We believe these principles need to be at the heart of our church and where our resources in this area need to be put. As we look to a future role we are not looking for a replacement Fran, but someone who can help us continue to create a culture in which these values are reflected. Equally, it is not simply about employing a paid worker to make this happen. If our principles are not starting to become embedded then any future worker will face an uphill struggle. With this in mind, there will be a gap of six months before we make a new appointment. As the easing of restrictions allow us to do more, we want these principles to influence the shape the church will take.

With this in mind, the plan for the Autumn term is to see a Sunday morning pattern alternating weekly between accessible whole church worship and specific provision for children and young people. Sadly we are no longer able to use the Guide Hut but are in positive conversations with various premises, including the Folk Hall, to use as a venue on those Sunday's when groups will take place.

We will also continue to think creatively about our provision on a Sunday morning for those that are under 5. We are keen to foster the innate spirituality of young children, whether that be with stories and activities in or around church and by involving them in whole church worship.

Other provision such as Church Tots, Refresh, Youth Event and Ragamuffins (our bi-weekly discipleship group for those in year 7+) will continue. Also, The Gathering will continue to play with forms of Outdoor Church and Messy Church as we seek to look outwards and connect with God and others in fresh ways.

Much of the journey ahead will be intrinsically experimental, we don't know what the final destination is going to be. The road will be made as we walk it and will be a continual process of action and reflection as we respond to God's call.

Please don't hesitate to get in contact with any one of the team if you would like to talk further about anything mentioned here. We hugely value (and need!) your contributions in helping shape Portishead Church of England into a community in which children, young people and families can flourish.

Mark, Rob and Laura