

# // GROWING YOUNGER STRATEGY //

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

The aim of this strategy is to set out the practical actions we can take to seek to see the church grow amongst young adults, youth and children.

What follows is a plan to enable culture change within the church in Cumbria to best support it to proclaim afresh the faith to young people and, to support it to regain confidence that Jesus can (and does) transform the lives of young people. This is a larger task than simply trying to get a few more young people in our churches, but it is an approach that aims to see a lasting permeant Kingdom change.

For a full understanding of the multitude of ways that that the church will engage with young people in Cumbria, in homes, as church communities, in school and online, the different component strategies should be read together. Therefore, this approach is designed to complement the six other component strategies. There are specific links to the School, Digital, and Planting and Pioneering strategies.

### 1.2 Background

As part of the Vision Refresh consultation (2020) a significant amount of feedback highlighted the necessity to prioritise our work with young adults, youth and children. During the envisioning process (2021) this same theme was repeated. There is widespread agreement that seeking to see the church flourish amongst young people is part of our calling and an urgent priority for the church in Cumbria. This priority is critical for three reasons. Firstly, as the hope that we offer in Jesus is for all ages, the age profile of our churches indicates we are failing to reflect the diversity of ages that exist within Cumbria. Secondly, young people bring a different perspective to the church in Cumbria, without it we are all less than we could be. This is not only about the existence of a future church, but about the life and vitality of the church of today. Finally, due to the cultural changes in wider society it seems especially challenging for the church to engage with young people, this demands a disproportionate investment to see meaningful engagement.

### 1.3 Strategic Context

Cumbria is home for significant numbers of young people. The county is sometimes described as an 'aged county', and this can be used as a justification for the low numbers of younger people in churches in the county. Whilst true that Cumbria does have a slightly higher rate of over 65's than both the national and Northwest average, as Figure 1 illustrates the differences are not vast and certainly do not explain the low number of young people in our churches. 40% of the county are under 40 years old, 52% are under 50 years old, 18% are over 70 years old. These percentage are not reflected in our congregations.

In 2018 within the Church of England Sunday attendance for 0-16's dropped below 100,000 for the first time ever, 38% of churches had no 0-16's whatsoever, 68% of churches had less than 5 0-16's, 44% of children are found in just 6.4% of parishes. The decline in young people attending church has been faster than in adults. These trends have been accelerated by the pandemic. The Diocese of Carlisle has a relatively aged demographic in comparison to the national picture. In 50% of our churches more than half the worshipping community is aged 70 and over. (London is lowest with 2%. Bath and Wells is highest with 58%. Church of England average is 37%). This situation is replicated across the covenanted ecumenical partners.

Over the last ten years or so the approach has been to: encourage local churches in this ministry, training and support has been given, for example through Messy Church days; significant investment

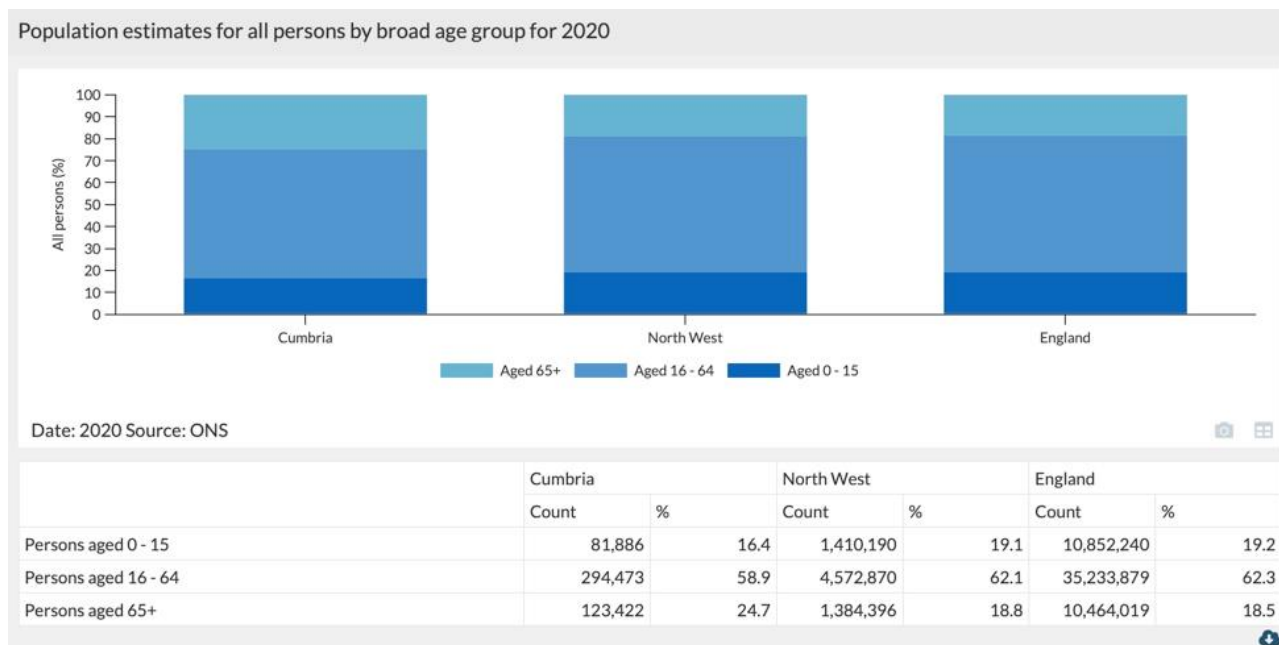


Figure 1. Population Estimate in 2020 for Cumbria. <https://www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/population/>

in staffing of Network Youth Church; one-off mission initiatives, for example Moving Mountains Mission. Feedback received indicates that each of these have had a positive impact, yet the overall county picture remains stubbornly and increasingly challenging. More work is needed.

## 1.4 Overview of changes to original strategy

This is a new area of strategy development. Work has been done in this general area, but as a specific area of strategy development this is entirely new.

## 2 Strategy

### 2.1 Summary of strategy

1. **Start new worshipping communities** that culturally are able to welcome young people.
2. Continue (and increase where possible) investment in **Network Youth Church (NYC)** as a tool for church engagement with youth.
3. **Support and invest where it is already working** - Using all the tools we have available to resource the contexts that are working well with young adults, youth and children. This will include: expansion of the Growth Fund for GY work, investment in interns; creativity in using these contexts to train the next generation of leaders (inc curates and ordinands); continue to listen to the evolving needs in these contexts and to take seriously what is needed.
4. Invest in church **leaders who are adept at leading among younger people**. This includes development of the selection, training and their future deployment. In addition creative and purposeful recruitment of such leaders to the county is required, especially in strategic locations.
5. Use all means possible to **encourage the culture** in the church in Cumbria to develop the needs of young people into focus and support them

### 2.2 Exposition of Strategy

## 1. Start new worshipping communities

Start new worshipping communities that are specifically to engage with young adults and families (note this includes revitalisation). This is perhaps the main tool available to seek to see the church grow amongst young adults and families. Other Diocese GY strategies have this as the core of their approach. In our strategy process church planting forms part of the 'Church Planting and Pioneering' strategy. It is therefore not discussed in detail in this paper. The aim is to develop five well-resourced church plants in Cumbria, in both urban and rural contexts.

## 2. NYC

NYC aims to be a church for young people in Cumbria. We hope to see NYC further develop, both in depth, but also to reach new areas of the county. It currently exists in nine deaneries, with a NYC lead in each of the contexts that it operates. Some NYC leads are part time, others full time. To further develop NYC across the county it is recommended that we work towards a full time NYC lead in each deanery. We will also seek to appoint a full time NYC lead to offer leadership, training, support and sacramental ministry to NYC as an emerging church community. The expectation is that such a role can act as Team Lead for the existing NYC workers, resulting in greater effectiveness across NYC leads, better collaboration and improved line management. The role would facilitate a more coherent approach to future appointments, more robust and consistent safeguarding and clearly defined leadership. This aspect also links to the Growing Faith Hub pilot strand within the School's strategy.

## 3. Support and enhance where it is already working.

This strategy aims to encourage and support those churches that are already working well with younger people. National research indicates such an approach is perhaps the best chance of growth.

- For work that supports the GY agenda the growth fund maximum grant level should be doubled. Currently the maximum grant funding is: year 1 £5k, year 2 £4k, year 3 £3k; this should be increased to: year 1 £10k, year 2 £8k, year 3 £6k. The overall fund should be increased to reflect the increased cost of the higher grant level available; this will ensure the total number of grants available does not decrease. In addition to the current growth fund criteria, applications for the increased maximum grant level will be assessed that either: the community is culturally able to support younger people to be a full part of the church or; the practical actions they will take to facilitate such a culture change.
- Curates, ordinand's placements, and interns should be used to bring further capacity to support the growth and development of contexts that are engaging well with younger people. Less emphasis should be placed on 'fairness' across churches, more on how we can bring increased capacity to where younger people gather. This has a dual purpose, it brings capacity to contexts where we have best chance of welcoming more young people, but it is also a fertile training context to train leaders to engage well with young people.
- A member of each denominational senior team, who has a county wide brief (Anglican context Bishop or DS) should convene a working group for the leaders of churches with significant number of young adults, youth and/or children, to meet two to three times a year. This serves two purposes: firstly to communicate (on an ongoing basis) the strategic importance that these few churches have on our regional work with young people; secondly, that there is a forum for the regional leadership to hear and (most critically - has the authority and influence) to act on what these churches need from the Diocese/District/Area/Division to support their GY work. This senior leader should act as GY advocate, to support both implementation and accountability of this work (See below: 2.4 dependencies).
- Whilst such an approach may seem unfair, national research suggests that despite this it is the better approach. There are a number of reasons for this. Often, those churches which are working effectively with young people have already made the necessary changes to facilitate and encourage children, young people and their families to come. They will also often, therefore, have the critical mass which encourages others. As a result, they also have the structures and facility in place to grow further. To do otherwise risks spreading limited resources too thinly. We would hope that stronger centres can in time act as support and resource for new, more local ministry both within their own Mission Community and in neighbouring ones.

## **4. Leaders who are adept at leading amount younger people**

Ministers who are able to lead young people and have a particular gifting and calling to do this are crucial. We want to work to significantly increase the number of ministers who are exceptional in leading young people. This involves both finding (and training) such leaders from within county and recruiting them into Cumbria.

Cumbria is a unique place, with great diversity including: post-industrial towns; ultra-rural dispersed communities; market towns; a city with a growing student population. Leaders who are gifted with young people will themselves be diverse, reflecting the diversity of contexts we need them to serve in; what they have in common will be a passion, desire, and gifting to make Christ known to the next generations.

- We want to significantly develop our young vocations work, to ensure that as many young people as possible who God is calling into ministry are supported to train for ministry. This must include: young vocations days; support groups for under 30's exploring a call to ministry; encouraging and resourcing the leaders of the churches where there are young people to prioritise this (using the forum discussed above); ensure our training provisions are flexible enough to support the particular needs of young people; ensuring those within NYC who are called to ordination have suitable training pathways to do this; ensuring we have suitable leadership development and vocational discernment for young leaders within NYC. We then must ensure that we have (suitable) first posts for ministers we train in county, as many as we train we need to deploy. This must be done much earlier and in a more coherent way than currently. This will need to include support with training of the vocations team, ensuring the vocations team has capacity for this work and, an increased prominence of our Young Vocations Champion.
- We need to continue to invest in interns through the Ministry Experience Scheme (MES) to further support those 18-30 explore a call to leadership within the church.
- We need to ensure that church leaders who are exploring a move are encouraged to come to serve the church in Cumbria. Our main recruitment approach is 'application led', this needs to be supplemented with a 'search led' process, whereby we actively use existing networks, contacts, and relationships to recruit younger candidates. Outside of a church context this would be best understood as an 'executive search' type of approach. We will seek to commission someone in each denomination who is well networked, who is given clear authority to speak on behalf of their Diocese/District/Area to actively seek to recruit people who are beginning to explore a move, this could be the GY Enabler, or another nominated individual. Encouraging such a person to build on their networks would be central to this approach.
- We need to ensure that as many posts as possible are shaped to be attractive to younger ministers. There is often a disconnect between the sorts of posts that younger ministers would be attracted to and the sorts of posts that are advertised. At the point of vacancy, we will ensure that serious consideration is given to make posts attractive to younger candidates.
- As new leaders begin to emerge, the GY Enabler should host a learning community to ensure such leaders are supported, encouraged, and retained within the county.

## **5. Use all means possible to encourage the culture in the church in Cumbria to develop the needs of young people into focus and support them**

We want to ensure that the voices of younger people are heard, in our communications, in our leadership and our governance. We also want to ensure that young people in contexts where there are few in number are given opportunities to connect with others at a similar stage of church in other such communities. We want to use every tool possible to help the culture of the church be 'home' for younger people. This will include:

- Ensure our internal and external comms represent the age profile of the county (figure 1) rather than the age profile of our churches. This is vital, and links to our Digital Strategy because young people and young adults communicate in a very different way to many in our churches. For instance, a church notice sheet is alien to many younger people.

- Ensure our 'brand identities' and marketing is appropriate for the age profile of our county. Note this is the responsibility of the whole team, and is part the necessity for culture change, it is not solely the responsibility of our Comms Officer.
- Ensure that the voices of younger people are heard in our regional leadership forums, including in our senior leadership.
- Explore co-opting young adults (18-39) onto our regional governance structures (Diocesan Synod or equivalent). Encourage a similar approach in mission community and local church governance structures (PCC or equivalent).
- Explore opportunities to network younger people across the church in Cumbria. The research indicates young people respond well to 'going on adventure together'. Examples could include a county wide Taizé pilgrimage, inviting groups of younger people to get involved in our global partnership links (e.g. Stavanger, Northern Argentina).

### 2.3 Current Assumptions/Theory of Change/ Rationale

This is a deeply challenging task. The report GS2161 discussing the churches engagement with young people: 'remember that there is no simple solution to address all the issues that we face'. Therefore this strategy has sought to use multiple approaches, each seeking to set out the practical actions we can take to encourage the church grow amongst young adults, youth and children.

This strategy has primarily focused on the 'levers of change' that can be taken by the county wide church (District/Diocese etc). Emerging from the pandemic many local churches are reconfiguring ministry with less resources than ever (both finances and volunteers). In addition feedback from local churches suggest many contexts are tired of county or national initiatives. Simply asking local churches to do more with fewer resources risks achieving nothing. This strategy has intentionally avoided writing a universal local church strategy to be rolled out in parish/circuit/mission community, or forcing mission communities to take a particular course, or write a particular policy, rather it focuses on the things that can be done county wide to see churches engaging with younger people.

The approach seeks to begin new communities engage with young people and to support contexts that are already able to support young people explore faith. It is not primarily focused on inspiring existing older communities to commit fresh energy to something they are consistently struggling to deliver. Part of the rationale is to ensure that there is a viable church community that can support young people within reach of every young person in Cumbria. However, the expectation is that this may not be possible in every parish, nor even in every mission community.

### 2.4 Key Dependencies

A number of the aims are dependant on significant financial investment, especially the investment in church plants. With current limitations in finances these proposals require significant **external funding**, either from national church bodies or from external grant providers. It is hoped that the Anglicans will be successful in Strategic Development Fund (SDF) bids to support this strategy, other denominational partners will have different routes to external funding.

There is an ongoing review into the NYC leadership, governance and structure. As part of that review it is expected that NYC will seek to become a Bishops Mission Order (BMO). The outcome of this review, following **consultation on a BMO** and the final decision by the Bishop of Carlisle on a future BMO will impact this strategy. NYC urgently needs a county wide NYC lead, funded either through external or DBF investments.

This strategy is dependant on the **creative deployment of stipendiary ministers** to support its aims, this will require support from those involved in this process (SDO, Archdeacons, Circuit leaders etc). Equally, to attract more younger leaders will require a different approach than currently exists, we cannot expect to continue with the status quo and achieve different results. This will require those who hold positions of authority to share the task with those in the county who are well networked with younger leaders. It involves risk taking. This aspect also links to a strand within the Church Planting and Pioneering strategy.

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If the Growing Younger work is a priority this needs to be reflected in how it is prioritised by those tasked with implementation. Younger people will tend not to be quite so persuasive with demanding their needs are met, so a purposeful ongoing focus is needed to keep the GY agenda in view. This agenda has quite deliberately not expected our local ministers to significantly adjust their approach, instead placing the emphasis on the 'levers of change' at County level, it therefore does require a different approach from those who hold regional or county responsibilities. The key dependency is on a **willingness** for those with these responsibilities **to implement** the strategy. It requires the GY work to be kept in focus, and for there to be accountability for this work across the regional teams. To achieve this, the same a leader with county wide responsibility (Anglican= Bishop or DS) that convenes the working group (2.2.3) should act as GY advocate/champion. Their role would both be to support implementation when needed, advocate for the practical suggestions in this report and, to lead on facilitating the cultural change that this strategy necessitates.

This strategy is dependent on those **in training being placed in contexts that have a track record** of GY work. This will require support from those involved in this process (Director of Ministry Development, DDO, other denominational equivalents, etc.)

There is limited capacity in the central team to enable the different elements of this strategy. Implementation will require an **increase in the GY capacity**, either as paid roles, or as part of existing roles, to have necessary capacity for implementation and accountability.

This is dependent on the **existing Comms teams** (with wider team support) **implementing** the suggestions on the age profile of our comms and on all supporting them to do so.

### 2.5 Other options considered

Stop NYC, and use the significant investment to fund other GY missional approaches.

Seek external funding to employ a number of Children and families workers in parishes, similar to the "Centenary Project" in Sheffield Diocese.

Invest heavily centrally in training to equip and inspire local churches in GY work.

Focusing on the changes that local parishes or mission communities can make to bring this about. Carry on as we are.

### Cost implications for Growing Younger Strategy

**Increased capacity** at county level to draw together the different threads of this strategy, to implement where possible, but also to hold others to account. This is both in terms of direct staffing and admin support for the work (to enable a greater efficiency).

Ongoing (and as appropriate increased) **funding for NYC**, to ensure a FT NYC post in each deanery. More urgently, a FT role to bring county leadership to NYC. As the team has grown, the necessity for good county wide leadership has become more urgent, this post needs responsibility for appointments to NYC, to ensure appointments fit well into the wider team.

**Increase funding for the Growth Fund** to ensure if grant levels are increased for GY work, that the total number of grants remains the same.

Possible **small-scale funding** (project rather than staffing level) for things like **youth exchange**, partnership visits, Taizé pilgrimage etc. I do not think this necessarily needs to be in the annual budget, but an increase in the G4A budget, with an expectation that it would be used for this, may be sufficient.