

# *Life and faith in rural Britain...* COUNTRYWAY



## Learning to Lead: Engaging young people in the local church

Teenagers. They can be elusive and mysterious, apparently living life glued to screens and electronic devices. It sometimes seems as though there's no way to interact with them, or engage them in church life and faith.

From an early age, we teach children to make decision about their own lives, from what clothes they wish to wear to their favourite yoghurt. Fast forward a few years and from the age of thirteen young people are making life-changing decisions that affect their future. So how can we make church a place where young people can begin to exercise responsibility and leadership, and play their part in making decisions about the mission and ministry of the local church?

Giving young people opportunities to use their gifts can be a powerful way of keeping them engaged in church life. Teenagers are amongst some of the most entrepreneurial, enthusiastic, creative, and up-for-anything people I've had the pleasure of working with. They're willing to take risks and find new ways of communicating the good news of Jesus, even when they're still working out their own faith.

Sometimes we assume that our young people don't have the necessary qualifications or experience to serve on the welcome team, to take part in or lead worship, to write and deliver a sermon, to serve teas and coffees, support outreach events or even sit on a church council. And yet when we look at the disciples called by Jesus we see a motley crew of individuals, very few of whom exhibited what we might describe as ideal leadership skills! And yet, after three years of spending time with Jesus, learning from him and following his example, they were sent out to change the world.

Some of my best moments in youth work have been when I've had the privilege of supporting and mentoring young people in planning and leading Sunday School for those younger than themselves, taking on roles as Junior Leaders and attending leadership training with adult leaders in church, planning and leading outreach events at Easter, Christmas and on summer residentials, and taking an active part in services. Through that process, I have seen young people grow in confidence, find their identity and come to know Jesus and their place in the body of Christ.

When we train, empower and release young people to take responsibility, allowing them to try new things and make mistakes along the way, not only are we teaching them valuable life skills they can transfer to other areas of life, we're also giving them the opportunity to own their faith and take their place within the Church.

Is it risky? Definitely.  
Will they make mistakes? Absolutely.  
Is it time consuming? You'd better believe it!  
Is it worth it? **Yes. Every single time.**

When we make space for young people to serve alongside us, when we release them to use their gifts in all areas of church life, when we take the time to show them how to serve and lead, we're giving them opportunities to encounter Jesus and hear his call.

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