

St Matthew's Junior Church Children's Mission Statement

Over the past few years, St Matthew's has fostered a growing Junior Church who meet on Sundays for activities and worship running parallel to the main Sunday Mass before joining the 'adult' congregation for communion. The children enjoy a range of different activities, facilitated by a diverse group of volunteers who organise relevant tasks, games and worship approaches for the children.

The rationale for the Junior Church can be typified into three distinct, but interlinked areas: Liturgical, Pastoral and Safeguarding.

Liturgical

Junior Church provides the children of St Matthews with the opportunity to engage with liturgical worship at a young age and serves to constitute a weekly act of worship in a manner that will enhance their experience of the main Sunday Mass service. The pastoral assistants have recently introduced a 'Junior Liturgy' structure which enables those leading junior church to guide the children through the key elements of the Sunday service. Additionally each session involves the Gospel reading for the day from a simplified version of the text, such as a children's Bible, The Good News Bible, or The Street Bible, followed by a creative activity which allows for engagement with and reflection on the Gospel Reading.

Recommendations:

- Greater cohesion with mainstream Sunday Liturgy: Currently it is perceived that the Junior Church operates as a distinct group to the main congregational worship. We would like to recommend greater integration with the main weekly liturgy through the following possible strategies:
 - Children join the main congregation for the first hymn and welcoming, thus integrating the Junior Church liturgy with the main liturgy in a streamlined manner.
 - Children join the main congregation to receive communion together (this currently happens) and remain with the congregation for the remainder of the liturgy (this does not always happen).
 - The opportunity, either frequently or occasionally, for their activities and creative work to be acknowledged in the main worship. This would also raise awareness of the work of the Junior Church to the rest of the congregation.
 - Occasional yet regular participation of the clergy in Junior Church. This also has pastoral implications.

Pastoral

Junior church provides an opportunity for fellowship and hospitality between the children of the St Matthew's Community and with those involved in facilitating. This is currently incorporated into the Junior Liturgy but is sufficiently significant as to warrant further exploration.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the Junior Church provides an inclusive and supportive setting for the pastoral and spiritual formation of the children and youth of the St Matthew's Community.
 - Begin to explore ways in which teenagers can be catered for: Several members of the Junior Church will soon be at an age which is not catered for by the style of the existing Junior Church structure. It is important that this particular demographic is also included.
 - Organisation of social events, parties and trips: This would enhance the positive side of Junior Church and the affirming experience we aim to provide for our junior community, in a similar way that such events are frequently organised for the adult community. Similarly existing events could, if appropriate, be enhanced to include activities for children.

- Involvement of children, either as a group or as individuals, in existing rotas such as serving, refreshments, reading and intercessions to ensure integration of the Junior and Mainstream church communities.
- Roles of junior church helpers to be clearly defined in advance, including who is 'leading' and who is 'helping'.

Safeguarding

All adults working with children in any capacity have a statutory obligation to ensure the safeguarding and wellbeing of the children in their care. Junior Church must operate within the guidelines and procedures set out by the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy.

Recommendations:

- Ensure all adults involved with Junior Church have received and read copies of the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy.
- Identify any other adults in roles which may also involve work with children (such as serving) and ensure they have received an enhanced CRB disclosure certificate.
- Identify areas in which training should be provided (such as safeguarding, or first aid) and providers of this training. Implement.
- The identities and roles of the Children's Champions, Safeguarding Officer and First Aiders to be clearly displayed in the church and all adults and children informed of the procedures for approaching these individuals (e.g.: for disclosures).
- At least two adult junior church leaders must be involved in each session. If two adults are not present then Junior Church should be cancelled for that Sunday.
- Explore ways of improving whole church safeguarding and security: Ensuring that the conference centre may be made secure (ie: Not accessible to strangers) during Junior Church and also that risk assessments are carried out and implemented for the rooms in which Junior Church takes place.
- All PCC Members and Junior Church leaders and helpers to be made aware of specific needs of the children so that safeguarding may be enhanced and provision may be inclusive.
- Parents/Carers to be made fully aware of the operating policies of junior church. In particular this would involve clearly defined start and end points for Junior Church along with the instruction that outwith these times, responsibility for the children rests solely with the parents or carers rather with the Junior Church leaders or named church officials.
- Named members of the congregation (e.g.: PCC Members) to be instructed on having a heightened awareness for the safeguarding and wellbeing of the children beyond the designated times for Junior Church.