

## YOUTH, CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRY

### Welcome to Christchurch Hitchin

We are a large Methodist and United Reformed Church based in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. There are over 250 church members and two worship services on a Sunday. These are a mix of contemporary and traditional styles and we regularly follow preaching series. The church is involved in a wide variety of projects in the community, particularly through a Lunch Club for the elderly and our Open Church project which sees our building open and welcoming visitors every day of the week. Our facilities are well used by a variety of community groups. As a church we are growing together in faith and love, wanting to build on the great work God is already doing to have a transformative impact on our community.



### Introduction to Youth, Children and Family Ministry

This is a large and vibrant part of the church. We work directly with anyone aged 0-25 and indirectly with many adults too (as parents and leaders). This ministry involves over 70 children and young people and has regular contact with more than 300 others. The work is enabled by a capable team of over 50 volunteer leaders and many other adults are involved in this ministry in various capacities. This is a hugely important part of Christchurch and has the potential to make a significant difference in our town. Ministries evolve over time in order to better meet the needs of people within a changing societal context. We have two priority areas within the broader work of Youth and Children's Ministry at Christchurch. Together, they make up the core of the journey for our young people.

### FAMILY MINISTRY

This journey begins in our Family Ministry, growing in faith alongside their families and other children. They can grow together through sharing in fellowship, discipleship and memory-making activities that enable the whole family to be part of the church community. Family Ministry acknowledges that children are not independent but rely on others for transportation, permission and support. This area of ministry is led and grown by Louise, our Family Worker. She leads a team who offer a regular program of activities for families. Usually, at least twice a month, there is something for families to come and do together. We have a very popular Messy church, regularly attracting 80+ people, which runs every other month. On the alternate months, we have a free Film Club that families can come to enjoy a movie on a big screen in an informal setting – this is always well attended and has proven itself a great way to get non-churched people comfortable to join in with other events. We also run a family-friendly coffee morning, Coffee+, once a month. It is a relaxed morning event with toys for the kids and good coffee for the parents! We have also introduced an annual family-friendly retreat where we experiment with different ways to pray and to connect with God. We try to make sure the key events through the year (such as our Nativity Services) are well publicised and welcoming to new families. The new Youth and Children's worker would be work alongside Louise to ensure that their work is complementary to the Family Ministry, working together to create and implement consistent vision and strategy for children and young people. At Christchurch we

want to enable young people to take ownership of their faith, to work out what it means to for them to live as a Christian and to find the supportive community of peers and role-models that creates a strong foundation for their future. Currently this is achieved through the areas below, which would be overseen by the Youth and Children's ministry:

### **1. YOUNG PEOPLE:**

This is the main focus of the work. The Church's definition of young people is anyone under 25. Obviously, this is a wide age range and there are a lot of differences in the nature of the ministry in the different stages. We divide our work with young people into 4 age groups:

#### **+ Early Years: (Age 0-5)**

We provide safe places for young children to feel loved and encouraged. We spend time with them and as they grow we get to know them better and empower them to try new things and understand more about Jesus. We provide opportunities for children to experience worship and connect with God in relevant ways. We also use these events to support and encourage parents during what can be a very challenging period of life. The main activities for this age group are our Parents and Pre-school group, which is a large toddler group that meets on Wednesday mornings. Some of leaders for this come from Christchurch but the majority of attendees are non-church people. The other key groups in this age range are part of our Junior Church – Crèche (and we believe that a good crèche is just as important for parents as it is for babies) and Beginners, the 3-5s age group who learn through stories and playing together. *The Early Years work is overseen by our Family Worker.*

#### **+ Primary: (Age 5-11)**

Children in this age group are interested in the world around them and love to have fun. We empower them to explore faith and work out what it looks like in their world. We encourage them to build friendships through fun activities and excitement and engage in events that help them feel part of a bigger, loving church community. We enable them to be excited about church and offer teaching that aims to help them grow today. We exalt Jesus together through times of worship and prayer presented in relevant ways. The key group for Primary aged children is our Junior Church provision, called Pig. This is for years 1-5 and usually involves around 20 children each week. We offer them different ways to learn about Jesus, engage with the bible and experience God (mostly through Lego!) We have taken groups to 3generate – the Methodist children & youth weekend. We also run a popular Holiday Club in the summer which is one of the highlights of the year.

#### **+ Secondary: (Age 11-18):**

As adolescents, young people seek further independence from their families and we empower them to take on more responsibility and grow their personal faith. We encourage them to grow as a positive peer group that helps them to discover more about their identity in Christ. We share experiences together that bond the group together, praise Jesus in gathered worship and explore faith in other ways too. We journey with teenagers through the ups and downs of adolescence providing a trustworthy and reliable foundation to support them wherever their journey leads. Our youth ministry has the umbrella name of *All In* and we have various groups for this age group. On a Sunday morning our Junior Church group is aimed at 11-14s, although a

number of older young people attend too. This is mainly a teaching session where we engage with the series being followed by the wider church in ways that are interesting and relevant to teenage life. On Sunday evenings, we have our youth group which is a combination of fun games & activities with teaching and discussions. We also run single-sex groups for older young people to help them engage with faith in different ways. There are also a variety of occasional events: we have travelled to Soul Survivor in Watford to join in their Saturday celebrations; we've had sleepovers, movie marathons and fundraising events. We have been involved in developing 720, a new group run between the different churches in the North Herts Methodist Circuit. We've also run Youth Alpha in Hitchin with some success. We are lucky to be able to offer a residential event every term. In the autumn we attend 3generate with the Methodist church. In the spring we have the 'Big Weekend' which is Christchurch's own youth weekend away and, in the summer, we take a group to a week-long Christian youth festival. We recognise that teenagers are a distinct group with needs and attitudes that can sometimes put them at odds with the expectations of the wider church. This age group needs activities that are specific to their needs so that they can grow an authentic and personal faith that deals with relevant issues. They also need to be encouraged and challenged to play an active role in serving their church and community.

#### **+ Young Adults: (Age 16-25)**

We aim to empower young adults to take their faith to college, work or university through training opportunities and personal contact. We provide support and encouragement when they leave home. We will enable them to connect and share with their peers through their faith. We will find new ways to worship Jesus, together and apart. Currently this area is mainly focused on long distance pastoral care for students, as the vast majority of young people here go on to university. Our current Worker aims to visit each student at their university at least once a year. We run events during the holidays so that students can share experiences and support one another. We have run a Getaway residential for this age group in the summer. We aim to include university students in the life of church wherever we can.

#### **2. LEADERS:**

These are the volunteers who work to run groups and form relationships with young people. They need to be properly supported, trained and resourced to perform their roles. They are empowered to serve young people in faith and be good role models by trying to follow Jesus more closely in their own lives. We support our volunteer teams through offering regular training opportunities including the Methodist safeguarding course.

#### **3. PARENTS:**

Good relationships with parents are vital so we aim to offer opportunities for parents to be encouraged by sharing in fellowship together, building positive relationships between them. We will also provide regular courses and one-off sessions to help enable and empower parents to love, support and disciple their children. Over the last couple of years, we have run a series of Parentalk courses. We also aim to offer pastoral care and support to parents when needed.

#### **4. INTERGENERATIONAL:**

This area is aimed at bringing all-ages of church together in ministry. We want to do this

because it better enables youth & children's participation in their church's mission. It helps break down barriers and brings encouragement because it fosters a wider sense of family between the members of the church. It also helps young people to feel confident and empowered to serve and grow in faith. We are investigating new ways of enabling everyone to worship together.

#### **5. LINKS WITH OTHER AGENCIES:**

The final aspect is the work with external groups. The most significant link is with PHASE, a schools' work charity funded by Churches Together in Hitchin. They work in all three secondary and 12 primary schools in the local area. They employ five staff and do a tremendous job of supporting schools, teachers and individual young people through mentoring, delivering lessons and supporting work done by local churches. There are also good links with other churches in Hitchin. The Forum, made up of youth and children's leaders from various churches, meets every couple of months to support one another and plan events – such as Time Trek, the holiday club we run jointly each half-term. There is also a weekly prayer breakfast for anyone involved in youth or children's work and termly overnight retreats. We have two Guides and one Scout unit attached to Christchurch which attract almost 300 young people each week. We connect with them through parade services and sharing events. A number of the leaders are part of Christchurch too. We have a link with the nearest Primary school; Samuel Lucas JMI. They use our building for their special services, and we offer them assemblies and also prioritise supporting PHASE events at that school. Christchurch also supports the work of daisychains, a local charity that supports families with children with additional needs. They meet in our building and share equipment with our toddler group.

#### **What an exciting opportunity!**

As you can see there are lots of great things happening here, far too much for one person to manage so it's great to be blessed with some fantastic teams of leaders. The new Worker will need to find the right balance between getting involved and empowering volunteers to lead. They will need to love getting stuck in themselves but also be able to step back to take in the bigger picture. Christchurch longs to see our work with children and young people continue to thrive and to grow as we share Jesus love across Hitchin.