

# Food, worship and chat to engage 11 to 16-year-olds



Food is an important part of what happens each month at Overflow

IT is a hard group to reach, and typically the age when children start to drop out of church. But one of our parishes has found a way to engage 11 to 16-year-olds.

St Peter's Church, Bishop's Waltham, launched 'Overflow' last year. It's a Sunday afternoon group, open to all, but aimed specifically at those who might feel too old for Sunday morning children's groups – as well as their families and anyone who doesn't normally go to church.

Each month, they gather at 4pm in the church hall to play table tennis, pool and computer games, with doughnuts and drinks provided. Adults can join in, or sip tea and coffee while reading the Sunday papers. Tables and chairs are set up in a café style to keep things informal, and there's even a toddlers' area where younger siblings can play.

After half an hour, a group will lead worship, using guitars and contemporary songs. The young

people are encouraged to join in, but there's no pressure. Then there's a short talk, which might include videos playing on screens overhead.

Then the young people get a chance to chat with adults in small groups about their reaction to what they've heard, before the session ends with hot dogs, burgers or some other hot food. This is followed by more fun and socialising.

The sessions were launched by worshippers Emma and Robin Andersen a year ago, as they could see that regular Sunday morning worship and children's groups weren't engaging those who go to secondary school.

It would also appeal to those who struggle with the formality of a traditional service, or struggle to get to a service in the morning. The aim is to provide a time to connect and a space to reflect in an informal and relaxed way.

For worship leaders Laura and

Michael Taylor, whose children are Seth, 10, Josiah, 9, and Annabel, 7, the sessions are a great family time.

"It's a nice atmosphere because it's a mix of children of all ages," said Laura. "The videos and discussions have engaged our children and prompted them to ask us questions about faith. It's lovely for the whole family to be together, and the kids love it because they are with their friends. It gives us space to talk about important stuff."

Team member Emma Kerby, who brings her baby daughter Scarlett, said: "For those people who might not normally enjoy traditional worship, this is the chance to try something new. We lose so many children when they hit 14 or 15, but this gives them space where they can still come and develop their relationship with Jesus."

Sam Smith, whose 11-year-old son Harrison attends, said:



Children split into groups to discuss the theme with adult leaders

"I've been to other churches with children before and felt they were frowned upon, and that's put me off. I enjoy this because there is a relaxed, social side to it. I don't go on Sunday mornings, but this is a great introduction back to church."

And her husband Nick said: "I'm more of a Sunday morning worshipper, but I recognise that to keep my children interested, there needs to be something different. This is something we can do

together as a family, and it's more relaxed, and allows them to think about issues for themselves."

He helps lead the youth group, which meets on Sunday nights from 6pm and includes Bible study. On Sundays when Overflow meets, several teenagers stay on afterwards for the youth group.

Overflow meets on the first Sunday of each month at 4pm in St Peter's parish hall. For details, see: [www.stpetersbw.org.uk](http://www.stpetersbw.org.uk)

As in many churches, Holy Rood Church also offers regular all-age services, where the children don't meet in separate groups, but remain in the church service with the adults. These 'all-in' services happen at Harvest, Mothering Sunday and within school holidays.

And its family fun days happen six times a year, from 2pm-3.30pm on Saturdays. The whole church and church centre is taken over with a challenge zone, glamour zone, craft zone, build zone, café zone and more, finishing with a family worship time - helping the whole family to have fun and learn together.

It's especially aimed at those who don't yet come on a Sunday morning - although several families have actually gravitated from those Saturday afternoon family days to attend Sunday morning groups.



Our diocese's youth and children's work adviser Bethan Fogell can provide the resources and support that your church may need if it is seeking to launch or develop the activities it offers for children on

a Sunday morning. That might involve using published material like Roots or Energise, or helping to create bespoke material.

Bethan has also launched an



Left: Children in the Climbers group at Holy Rood Church, Stubbington, with their leader Lis Olaniyan; above: Scramblers illustrate the Parable of the Great Banquet by using play-dough to create cakes

initiative for 2020 asking every church to nominate a Youth and Children's Mission and Ministry Champion. These champions will meet in deanery 'hub' groups to share good practice and

ideas and to find out about new resources to support their work with children and young people.

Bethan is planning to work with the newly appointed champions

to find out what training and support would be most useful for people volunteering with children and young people in their churches, and she aims to offer some specific training in leading children's ministry later this year.

She said: "We want to make church a place where all children and young people feel welcome to come and have fun, engage with the Christian in faith in exciting and innovative ways, and explore what this faith might mean for them."

"There is still a place for Sunday children's groups in many churches and we can be creative about what these look like! If you would like any support with rethinking and re-energising your children's ministry, I'd love to hear from you."

For details, see: [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/children](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/children)