

preparing YOUNG PEOPLE For the church meeting

Our story from Wokingham Baptist Church, by Clare Hooper

When someone is baptised, they're baptised into the church. As a Baptist, one expression of that membership is participation in the church meeting. At Wokingham it was never in question that, once baptised, a young person would become a member and discern the mind of Christ along others in the church meeting.

Yet I was aware our church meetings at that time were very adult shaped. For instance, we used business language, words and phrases they weren't familiar with. Empowerment is a key value in youth work, so to put a young person into a space where they'd be disempowered would not be fair or right. We wanted to at least give them a chance to have their voice heard.

Empowering them was a step-by-step process. We introduced having a meal together before a meeting. Here we would just look at the church agenda, making sure it was understood.

We changed the layout of the room for meeting, from rows to round tables, each with some food to create a more informal tone. We helped them sit together, because that gives a sense of safety.

We introduced more creative facilitation, and included someone actually named as a facilitator. There's quite an art to facilitation, to be able to hear what's being said and draw out the conversation, enabling all of the voices around the table to be fed back fairly. People have a right to have their voice heard.

It was very important how we held that space. It wasn't about leading them to a particular answer, but ensuring their voices were heard. It's their discernment that enriches us.

There are young people who really want to participate in the full life of the church*, in the decision making, in the pastoral care, in the mission and ministry of the church. They don't want to just attend, they want to belong. Making our church meetings places where they are genuinely empowered is one way of making that happen.



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* 'Young people want to be taken seriously and included in decisions, lead events and services, and see existing structures accommodating and empowering them', CYM (the Institute for Children, Youth and Mission), *Taking the Pulse of Ministry Amongst Children, Youth and Families* research, October 2024