

Growing faith

Launde Minster Community
Diocese of Leicester
January 2024

This sketch is one 7yr old's response to listening to Jesus calming the storm in Mk 4. *'It looks like the storm is all around you, but really it is being pushed back when Jesus is with you.'*

Context

The Diocese of Leicester is developing how it provides ministry through adopting a Minster Community framework formed of churches and fresh expressions working collaboratively. Every Minster Community will see Growing Faith as part of its core leadership structure. In 2023 Launde Minster Community became the first to pilot this way in the Diocese.

Launde Minster Community consists of 18 rural parishes in South Leicestershire and is home to 7300 people, four Church of England Primary Schools and Launde Abbey Retreat Christian Retreat House. I am the Minster Community Oversight Minister (0.5), Growing Faith Enabler (0.5) and Co-Area Dean.

This blended role gives great insight into how we might adopt new ways of working and become a Minister Community in practice. Our schools draw on households from multiple parishes their catchments overlapping and when seen on a map, a different landscape to that of our traditional parish boundaries is revealed. This, combined with none of our churches having an active intergenerational ministry has pointed to the need to embrace new missional approaches and explore how churches may work with our schools.

My Growth Faith Research Project is seeking to explore the impact of investing in relationships and loving service. What we are learning will inform our future practice and how we structure future Minster Communities and the Growing Faith work.

Growing faith through relationship

The primary task has been to develop relationships of trust and loving service with the schools. There are well established Open the Book groups in two schools and regular Collective Worship in all four, but this report will focus on the work that is being enabled through the Growing Faith Research Grant, which would otherwise struggle to find its footing.



GOOD habits: Act

Look at some of different ways home is described in the Bible. The children then draw miniature homes and are challenged to make them as small as possible. Take the images home to place them in different parts of the house with a simple prayer to say every time they saw them (example below written by a class).

‘Dear God, keep us safe, help us love, guide our lives. Amen.’



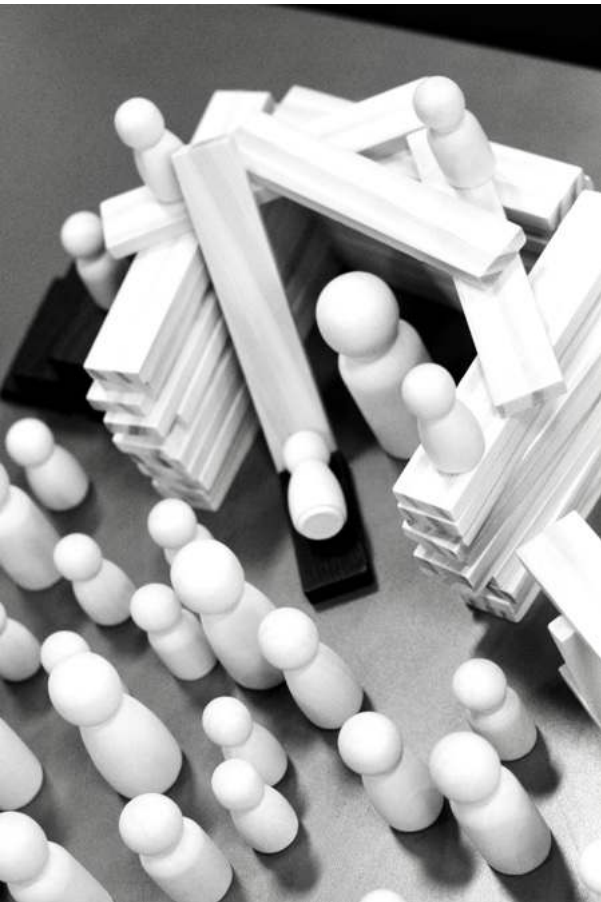
Growing faith through loving service

Seeing our schools as genuine communities of formation that we can serve, rather than ponds to fish from is vital. Our schools are places that we are called to love, support and seek their peace and prosperity. I have sought to do this through teaching in all four schools and investing in the spirituality and vocation of the staff.

Teaching

I work with each school for a block of 2-3 days every half term (I'm qualified teacher). Giving time to every class (Reception through to Year 6) I am developing a series of Holy Habits, which we call GOOD habits. Sessions with classes range from an hour to half day, depending on what the school needs. The class teacher is often then released for assessments, planning, curriculum leadership or wellbeing. I work with each class to explore different activities that foster the development and grow of faith and encourage the exploration of personal belief.

The faith research grant has enabled me to begin building a range of reusable resources to help children of different ages engage in exploring faith. The resources tend to be simple, long-lasting and adaptable.



GOOD habits: Listen

A technique developed from the practice of Dwelling in the Word. A passage from Scripture is shared (narrative passages work particularly well). The story is read twice and the class is asked to think of a word, idea, feeling image that grabs their attention. They share their thoughts in a small group, before the group is given wooden people and Kapla Blocks to recreate one of the ideas, words, feelings or images. These are then shown to the class and we explore why this spoke to the group.

Can you identify the story used here? Can you spot what part of the story the four different groups may have focused on?



GOOD habits: Notice

Using air drying clay and Psalm 139 verses 1-18 (in a form accessible for the age of the children). Listened to the Psalm, twice. Children are given a small ball of clay. After each stanza we pause and give 30 seconds to make a representation of what has been heard (a real challenge!). Kids bring back a ball and continue. At the end, make a representation of themselves. Explored what it might mean to be known by God completely.

Spirituality

The diocese of Leicester offers clergy and other ministers regular opportunities for retreat and spiritual growth. Launde Minster community is blessed to have Launde Abbey Retreat House as part of it, which is where much of our investment into our ministers takes place.

Each term I offer a retreat day for staff from our local Minster Community primary schools running between 9 am and 3 pm and we follow a similar structure to that offered to our clergy colleagues. Gathering between four and eight members of staff each time, they are encouraged to take space for reflection, to practice silence and take advantage of pastoral care should that be needed. We join with Launde for Midday Prayer and make sure everyone is well fed and comfortable. There is only one rule; *'you are not allowed to bring your work with you'* and one challenge; *'to spend at least some time in guided silence.'* Throughout the day retreatants know that they are held in prayer and that there is someone on hand to talk or pray with, should they need to.

Our schools have small teams which means it is not always easy for them to release members of staff and so as well as offering the day at no charge, I have set aside funds to enable a contribution towards any supply costs for this and next academic year.

These days are usually the first time any of our staff have ever been on a retreat or have experienced hospitality from the church in relation to their own sense of vocation or spirituality. Few who join the days would consider themselves practising Christians.

Using some simple stilling techniques, the day is introduced through a meditation based on Psalm 46 and the words 'Be still and know that I am God.' Our school staff are so busy that to simply be still is a rare gift.



Over this and the next academic year I will continue to use the Growing Faith Research Grant make these retreats available and monitor their impact. This will lead to a proposal that we should offer retreat days for all staff in our Diocesan Church of England Primary Schools in the years to come.

Not many parishes have a community like Launde Abbey nearby, but I believe that every church can support the local school staff in similar ways. How we love, support pray for and encourage our schools and their staff is something that should concern every church. For some staff, teaching in a church school may be as close as they get to church. Their spiritual growth, development and wellbeing is important.

- Our school staff are really invested in as spiritual, moral and vocational leaders
- Offering retreats is a relatively cost efficient way of showing love and support
- Offering retreats is a way of getting to understand the pressures placed on our schools today

GOOD habits: Act

The class explores, ‘what makes a good life?’ through Jenga towers. Each block represents something needed for a good life and the children are asked to name something when it is their turn to take and place a block. They can’t repeat what others have said. The comments deepen quickly, one six year old commenting that a everyone needs ‘a hope in the future.’ Eventually the tower collapses, it has had too many blocks pulled out and is unstable. Look at The Greatest Commandment Matt:22, Mk:12 or Luke:10) and explore what the 3 essential blocks of loving God, loving ourselves and loving others might mean. Jenga towers are based on 3 blocks bearing the load. Can we think of 3 things we could do to practice these 3 blocks?





Growing faith through partnership

Good partnerships emerge through good relationship. Getting to know the whole school community and working with it on how we grow and develop in faith, leads to confidence in the participation, preparation and the leading of worship and the expression of faith. Two examples of this work are offered.

Hallaton School

I work with a particular class to help them lead a church service every half term. Working with the class (usually as part of my 2-3 days in the school) we develop a service together. The class then leads the whole school with parents, carers and other family members in the church for a short service. The class will work out how it will welcome people, lead prayer, worship, and share scripture (a differentiated service structure is provided to help the class). The first voice heard will be a member of that class, welcoming everyone to the service, and the last voice will be a member of that class offering a form of blessing.



Hallaton School & church in partnership

- I. Tuesday morning sees Hallaton church host a thriving community café and so the class led worship services are also held on Tuesday mornings. After the service while the rest of the school returns to lessons the class that led worship stays with any guests for the café to share in hospitality. This provides a good opportunity for the school to mix with the wider community and as we grow in confidence, it is hoped that cafe regulars might come early on that Tuesday morning to join with the school in worship.
- II. After several years in hiatus, Hallaton Church has restarted a 'Teatime Service' every month. The gathering begins at 4pm in the same way that the cafe is so generously hosted. At 4.30pm we share a short meaningful service, using some of the same GOOD habits and resources we use in school. This community is growing, with households from school and other families seeking local connection with faith.



Our school services, the community cafe and the Teatime service, all have a similar feel and share common characteristics. Participation rather than observation is key as is a consistent and generous welcome and hospitality.

Teatime Service is becoming naturally intergenerational and serving as a connection between school families and the existing church congregation.

Church Langton School

Classes help prepare and lead a communion service every half term. This pattern has developed to the point where the class in question leads most of the service, from the welcoming at the door to the serving of refreshments. Giving the class, an overview of the whole service and valuing welcome and hospitality has enabled more children to be involved. Washing up and vacuuming afterwards are popular tasks!

A feature of this communion service is preparation of the bread. Recognising that most in the school are not communicants in the Church of England, we have developed a pattern where the leading class bakes a series of gluten-free oat cakes. One large oatcake is the bread that we break and every member of the class is invited to share some before it is consecrated. Smaller oatcakes also made which are offered to everyone at the end of the service. Since 2020 the number of children, staff and parents receiving communion at these services has dropped, though the numbers attending these services is increasing. The Headteacher, RE co-ordinator I are exploring ways forward.

Church Langton School & Church in partnership

- I. December 2023 saw the church host their first Christingle in many years. The work of Growing Faith in school emboldened members of the church to ask if a Christingle was possible and whether the school would support it. The school's Art Club created the visual aids and the school actively publicised the service. A few weeks later the school led an evening carol service in the church. This was the first time that the school and church had ever worked together in this way. These celebrations combined saw upwards of 380 people celebrate Christmas and neither service would have been possible if it were not for our growing partnership.
- II. The neighbouring village of Tur Langton, hosts, a monthly intergenerational Evensong. This contemporary service emerged through local families,(some linked to the school) expressing a desire for something reflective, spiritually deep, short and accessible for families. We gather for half an hour to reflect, pray and explore faith through a short piece of scripture. Evensong is supported by the school and has a small but growing network of families connected to it from across the catchment and local parishes. Most of those who join us are not part of any other church.

A monthly Sunday Brunch has emerged through local, school and church links. Following some of the same principles as seen in the Dinner Church movement, households gather at our house for brunch and a short intergenerational 'Thought for the Day' style reflection for a few minutes. This relaxed gathering goes on for several hours and those coming are wanting to contribute and even host.



School communion services are based on a giant (2m tall) communion jigsaw. Each service sees a class take one or two (when linked) aspects of the service to focus on. This gives the class a focus and over the academic year we look at every aspect of the service together.



Modelling the future through Growing Faith

Working to love and serve our local schools and to build a sense of partnership between households schools and churches models, may help us reframe how provide ministry within our parishes benefices, deaneries and in our situation the Minster community. Working in partnership with our schools naturally helps the church to work across existing parish boundaries. Although long-term commitment to serving and partnering with our schools will be needed, Growing Faith is allowing a freedom of innovation and can point the way to how we might work together more generally. For the next academic year involving more members of our local churches in the partnership with our schools is important, though won't be easy. We seek to build on the staff retreats and Launde and enable Evensong and Teatime Service to share resources while allowing them to develop in their own way and with local leadership. The churches of Billesdon and Tugby are looking at exploring similar initiatives.

GOOD habits

These are being developed to help children and households develop their own Holy Habits that build and deepen faith. The same principles and approaches are then being used at Evensong, Teatime Service, Brunch and when appropriate regular Sunday mornings. **GOOD habits**, shape our lives, give us direction, help us to work out our purpose, give confidence and build faith. We can hone deepen such habits, putting them into action in our schools, homes, churches and places of work. The **GOOD habits** being developed help us to, *listen*, to *notice* and to *act*.

Listen...We listen to the bible, to story, and to ourselves. What do we hear and what do we think God might be saying?

Notice...We give our attention to those around us and to the presence of God in the world. We seek to notice what is going on, how we feel and where God might be at work?

Act...Action stems from listening and noticing. If God is speaking and we have heard, if God is working and we have noticed, how could we join in?

GOOD habits: Listen...

Listen to a version of Gen1. Ask the class if they would like to see what God looks like? In a box is a small mirror and in turn the class comes and sees inside (they keep what they see a secret). Look at what being made in the image of God might mean and refer to being people of light (Matt5).

Everyone is given a mirror and asked to draw themselves. As they do this they are asked what is God saying about who you are and who he has made you to be?

Afterwards the class anonymously share their self portraits. Can the rest of the class guess who it is (usually they can)? Why makes each of us who we are and how can we treasure that?





GOOD habits: Notice...

We take a puzzle cube and groups of children are challenged to build it after seeing the image (far left) once. This is fun activity as they race to complete it and there are other images which may be given to them as clues. Once completed we look at why the class have been asked to do this!

Each piece of the cube represents a theme of the Lord's Prayer and they all link together. We look at what each theme means. 'Give us today our daily bread' is always a good discussion. What might it mean for us to follow God?

We notice what the prayer asks for, what it doesn't and who the prayer is really about. Groups then have a go at writing their own prayers using blocks that they have to decorate (see image).

If we notice things about God and our world (good or bad) how can we pray about them? How might these prayers lead us into our own action?



GOOD habits: Act...

Taking passages from the Bible where food is used as a blessing for others (especially Gen18, 1 Kings17, John6).

Using a bread suitable for everyone, each child draws out a name at random from a box for basket. They take the bread to the individual, break it, give it to them and say 'name, God bless you.' That child (or adult) then takes the bread, eats it and continues with a new name.

We rarely seek to ask God's blessing on one another. How might we deepen in faith and love if a class shared in this habit once every week?

How could they develop it to make it their own?

