

Suffer the Little Children

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that very few children and young people seem to be involved in the Church these days. I was very surprised at the lack of children in Church when I moved to Petersfield, but I put this down to the demographic structure of the local population. I have since discovered that there is a thriving local primary school with four classes of each age group so there must be some children somewhere in the local area.

Moslem children are brought up from an early age to be involved in their religion. When I was teaching, I remember a student having a day off to attend a Ramadan service. He was quite open about it in front of other students, and I remember thinking at the time how many Christian children in the group would have had the same attitude. In the college my daughter teaches now, a room is provided to have collective worship during Ramadan, which is used by many of the students.

In my experience, Catholic children of Asian origin were always more involved with church activities than their English contemporaries. Historically the church gave its parishes a sense of belonging to the community and families tended to attend church together. This family and community cohesion tends to be stronger in the Asian culture.

My grandson attends a Catholic secondary school, which recently organised a day of prayer and reflection. He hated every minute. My daughter and I both agreed it was the wrong approach for his age group. What was needed was something the children could relate to better, such as a day of charity work, setting up community initiatives and how they could become more involved in their local community.

What can we do to reach out to our young people? Some of my suggestions would be special services plus activities run by the Church such as a youth club. I don't profess to have the answers. They need to be able to see the Church as a centre of their community and part of their everyday lives that is relevant to them. They need to think of the Church as a welcoming fun place.

Something needs to be done if there is any future for our churches after our present elderly congregations have moved on!