

Garnerville Presbyterian Church

Youth, Family & Community Research Project

Jenny McGarvey

June 2009

"So my dear brothers and sisters, stand strong. Do not let anything change you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is never wasted."

1 Corinthians 15 v 58

Garnerville Presbyterian Church
Youth, Family and Community Research Project
June 2009



Summary Report

At present 94 children and young people take part in up to five organisations led by 14 volunteer youth leaders.

These current organisations within Garnerville are operating really well. There are some issues which need attention and ideas and suggestions in the strategy section of this document address these issues.

People aged between 18 and 40 who attend Garnerville enjoy their experience and come because of the people within the congregation and the relaxed atmosphere of Worship. Those who have recently left Garnerville did so simply because of other commitments such as work or sport and suggestions have been made to encourage attendance in a way that will be accessible to them and in ways they can engage with.

Other churches in this area and throughout NI appear to be in a similar situation to Garnerville regarding their service provision for people in the 18 – 40 age group. Again ideas and suggestions have been compiled in the strategy in order to enhance service provision and connections to young adults and families in this age group. Churches' working together appears to be a key success factor.

Community outreach is an issue in churches nationwide. Research has indicated that societies are changing therefore the church must react by meeting people where they are, building relationships, earning trust and hopefully through time and prayer spreading the gospel and bringing these people to faith. The aim throughout any community involvement should not be to bring people to Garnerville but to bring people to God.

Again there are a number of issues which need addressed regarding the congregations current community involvement. The community centre and primary school in the area are highly regarded and should be commended for the progress they are making in the community. As a congregation we need to show more of an interest and simply get involved to show we care.

Considering the research completed, I feel that a full time youth worker would be an asset to Garnerville to focus largely on the community aspect of the churches long term mission. A secondary role would involve acting as a facilitator or team manager amongst the existing organisations, maintaining contact, pastoral care, organising training and to help otherwise when needed.

Introduction

The Kirk Session held a conference on 31st January 2009 which considered four areas of congregational life (Worship, Fellowship/Pastoral Care, Mission and Discipleship) with an open ended meeting dedicated to mission.

The Congregation held a Vision Casting Day on 1st March 2009 which developed congregational priorities for the next few years.

Two major issues emerged from this meeting:

- the need to strengthen and improve our ministry within the congregation to those under the age of 40. This includes work with teenagers, those in the 18-40 age range and families.
- the need to connect meaningfully with the community around the church.

The Kirk Session therefore decided to commission research into these areas to assess the current situation and develop strategies and programs to address the situation. A major part of the research would be to ascertain if employing additional personnel would be beneficial and feasible.

In producing this report, the leaders, children and young people of each organisation were surveyed. Interviews and conversations took place with church members, key personnel within the community and key figures in the PCI and YouthLink boards. On each occasion the individuals were asked to be open and honest and indeed this occurred, however, while some comments appear to be of a negative nature they were intended as 'constructive criticism' and should not be taken as criticisms of any individual.

Section 1 – Strengthening and Improving Ministry within Garnerville

This section details and discusses current organisations within GPC; it summarizes discussions with current, new and previous members of GPC who fall within the 18-40 age group and also looks at what other churches are doing for people in this age group. Questionnaires and interview questions used are included in the appendix of this report.

1.1 Church organisations

At present there are five organisations with GPC which have been created for the children and young people. This section of the report analyses these organisations, strengths, areas suggested for focus and ideas for the future. The research was completed using focus group sessions and questionnaires with the leaders, and questionnaires and interviews with the children and young people. There was a limited response from the leaders questionnaires but due to the openness and honesty in the focus groups, the findings remain valid and reliable. The responses from the children and young people are valid but not entirely reliable as peer influences were apparent and a lot of children appeared to give the answer they thought you wanted, however their ideas and suggestions in the open-ended questions are definitely noteworthy and should be implemented as far as possible.

Table 1a - Number of children, young people and leaders connected to GPC.

| Organisation | Church attendees | Non church attendees | Number of leaders |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| FOG | 58 | 0 | 11 |
| GB | 13 | 13 | 6 |
| SN@G | 15 | 1 | 5 |
| CRECHE | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| CHILDSPLAY | 2 | 18 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 94 | 32 | 17 |
| | | 126 | |

The total number of children served through our five church organisations is 126. When duplicate names are removed from this list, 94 children are served. Of these 94, 19 attend two organisations and six attend three organisations.

Of these 94 children and young people, 58 are regular church attendees, 36 are not, some do attend other churches but the majorities have no church connection outside of Garnerville.

There are 17 leaders volunteering amongst our organisations. Removing duplicate names, 14 leaders serve our children and young people as three serve in two organisations.

With 14 leaders serving 94 children, this is a ratio of almost 1:7. Each leader dedicates on average three hours each week preparing for their leadership roles. This is massive commitment and should be recognised and appreciated on a regular basis.

Existing organisations:

Meetings were held with the leaders of each of the church organisations. They were asked to discuss and respond to 18 open ended questions. The overview of these meetings is detailed below.

241st Girls Brigade

The G.B in Garnerville Presbyterian Church has been in operation for over 35 years. The aim of the Girls Brigade in Northern Ireland is to teach the girls the advancement of Christ kingdom. The motto is to '*Seek, Serve and Follow Christ*'. However, the leaders commented that this is not really the core of Garnerville G.B; their objectives are to maintain fellowship with the girls, provide them with an opportunity to make friends in a safe environment, learn new skills and to teach about God and faith. There is also a focus on the display work which occurs each year.

There is room for development in further communications with parents, promotion of the organisation in the local area, and to enhance communication with other organisations within and outside of Garnerville.

There is a need for the Minister, Session and congregation of Garnerville to show a larger interest in the company. The church supports GB week and the display but could do more. There was also an idea to encourage members of the congregation to come to talk to the girls about their careers, give advice on health, faith etc.

The issue of Scripture lessons requires attention. At present the leaders do not feel qualified to take scripture lessons. This is an important area which requires immediate attention. The GB maintains contact with the largest number of non-church attendees which is great and must be built on to further their knowledge and experience of God.

There was a consensus of opinion that a Youth worker would be valuable to Garnerville GB to take care of the pastoral side of the company, with children, young people, leaders and their families.

The under elevens in the company were asked to answer 11 questions about GB and FOG (if they were members). In general the girls enjoy going to GB, they go because they want to, they enjoy meeting their friends there and enjoy the dancing.

Some suggestions to improve GB include:

- more games/group work
- to learn about God
- motivated leaders

The older girls of the company were asked to answer twelve questions. Overall feedback shows:

- the girls come because they want to
- 6 out of 8 think church is important
 - reasons included: to learn about God, because parents say so, for guidance, while one girl said that you didn't need to attend church to worship God.
- they would like more activities and to do scripture
- 5 out of 7 said they felt they belonged in church because of the other people there.

FOG

Sunday School within GPC or FOG as it is now known, has been running for over 40 years. The aim of FOG is to bring children to faith, teach them about God and to make church more appealing to children and families. Weekly objectives include: explaining faith, showing that Christians can be fun, and demonstrating that you don't need to be perfect to know God.

At present there is good communication with parents, for example: visits to those who have been absent, sick, contact during the annual beetle drives, fun days and BBQs, contact is also made with new children and their families at baptisms.

There is limited contact with other churches but FOG does try and is successful in supporting the other organisations within GPC. For example SN@G services and GB displays etc – leaders are often encouraged to attend.

There is a good support network among the team of leaders, with social meetings and encouraging text messages a regular occurrence. There is a general consensus that the congregation could have more communication and interaction with the leaders and children. Prayers specifically for FOG and even more support for FOG charities were some suggestions however the current support is really appreciated.

In discussing methods of improving FOG and the children's experience of church, the leaders suggested the following:

- more for the children at the start of church, for example choruses, simple prayers, readings and talks, more interactive activities.
- implement hand made charts to motivate children in having better attendance
- leaflet drops in local area and schools,
- promotion of FOG in schools
- get the children more involved in the service.
- mini bus to pick up children as well in the mornings

Again the under elevens in FOG were asked 11 questions about FOG. The majority of the children come because they want to, they enjoy being together as a group and learning about God. Suggestions to improve church and FOG included having choruses in church, simple prayers, more crafts and having a swimming pool!

The older children at FOG claimed that attending church is important to learn about God and because it brings them closer to God. 7/9 think they will still attend in five years time and 5/7 feel they belong in Garnerville largely because of the people who come and speak to them.

SN@G

GPC Youth Fellowship (SN@G) started five years ago. The overall aims include bringing young people to faith and teaching them how to approach faith without pressure. The main themes are discipleship, fellowship and evangelism. The 'motto' is Philippians 4 v 13 *'I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.'* The objectives include showing Christianity in a 'cool' way and to connect with the young people. No leader (except the minister) within SN@G can be over the age over 30! Thus ensuring that the leaders are close in age to the members, relating to them effectively.

Regular communication is maintained with the young people via text, announcements in church and personal invitations to new members. However, there is limited communication at present with all parents. Communication with other organisations in GPC is good but could be enhanced. There is also room for more contact with other youth fellowships in the local area.

Suggestions for the future of SN@G include:

- gain contact with other youth fellowships
- intention to get the young people to decide the mission plan
- *'Bring your parents to SNOG'* night

Feedback from the young people indicated that nine attend church weekly, 10 come because they want to and they all think that church is important. 8/10 feel that they belong in church, 2/10 feel they sometimes belong. This is due to how people treat them, simple smiles from people and being spoken to.

General consensus demonstrates that young people enjoy SN@G as they are encouraged to take part and as it teaches new perspectives on bible study. Suggestions for improving SN@G and church include:

- more youth
- more activities
- more community outreach
- more interaction with other youth groups

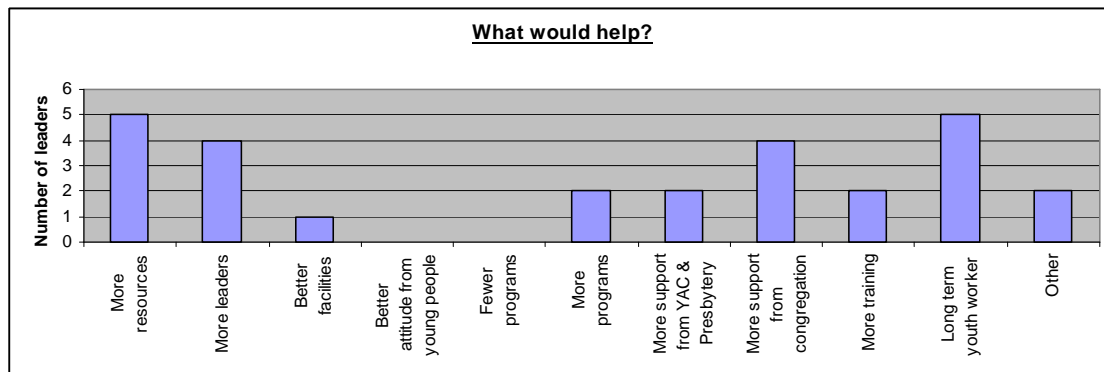
At present there is a lack of organizations available for young boys to attend. This is an area which has been explored in the past and may be worth another attempt as the number of boys in our congregation is growing. Ideas and suggestions to address this absence are included in the strategy.

Each leader was also given a questionnaire to complete anonymously. As explained previously these were not all returned, however those that were returned represented all three organisations and highlight some common issues.

At present leaders struggle with difficult lessons, finding new and fun ways of spreading the gospel and sometimes when other leaders are unwilling to change to make things better. Some recognise that they have a privilege in working with young people and would be upset if their organisation was to close. It is also often difficult to find the time to prepare lessons or talks.

The following table indicates the responses of the leaders when asked what would help them as a leader.

Chart 1a Leaders responses



As demonstrated by the above chart, more resources and a long term youth worker generated the highest response rate. Areas highlighted for a youth worker to focus on include scripture, youth talks and maintaining communication amongst leaders. Recruiting more leaders was also an issue and more support from the congregation was also emphasised. Some commented that in general the congregation does *'not seem to realise the work that leaders put in to these organisations'*. It was also stated that *'as a congregation we need to be aware that ministry as a whole is changing, we might not like some of the changes, but we need to accept it.'* This area does need addressed but it is important to note that people within our congregations can be very supportive, encouraging leaders and simple things like smiling and talking to the young people have been a huge encouragement and reason why they still attend Garnerville.

Leaders are encouraged through the children's regular attendance and in seeing some members growing through their organisations. Leadership roles are effective in focusing leaders on God, learning more about Him as they prepare lessons and talks. It is also an important role in their lives as encouraging young people in their faith is the future of the church and provides opportunities for them to make a difference in a child's life. Particular mention has been made to Margaret McGarvey and Suzanne Livingstone as they provide ongoing support to their leadership team.

While there are some negative issues highlighted and a number of areas which require improvement the fact remains that the organisations at GPC are effective and successful in the empowerment, development and in demonstrating God's love to the 94 children and young people who are part of this church.

The strategies outlined in the second part of this document outline methods to enhance numbers within these organisations. Recommendations have also been made to empower, provide support and appreciation for the group of volunteer leaders which we have at present and may have in the future. Young people attending Sunday School and church has dropped from 55% in 1900 to only 4% in 2000. (UK Christian Handbook, 2001) This emphasises the importance of the role of the youth leader, these individuals should be empowered and encouraged in their work. In 1st Corinthians 16 v 9 Paul explains of the opponents and people working against him but also states, *'because a good opportunity for a great and growing work has been given to me now.'* There are now many opportunities for the organisations of GPC.

1.2 Bridging the Gap 18-40

Interviews and conversations took place with a number of new, current and previous members of GPC who fall between the ages of 18 and 40. The aim of these discussions was to establish why people come to Garnerville, why they leave and to attempt to find out what people want from church.

New people in this age group generally come to Garnerville in preparation for a wedding or christening. For some, they leave once the event has taken place but over the last number of years a high number of young families have started coming regularly to church, with young children involved in FOG or crèche and with them attending small groups. A number commented on the friendliness of the Garnerville people which encourages them to come back. Personal invitations to events and small groups have also proven effective especially for new members as this is an effective method of getting to know a relatively small number of people but getting to know them well in a small group setting.

For those people who have left Garnerville the answers are relatively simple, other commitments for example work or sport take precedence over church. This is a common issue throughout the UK and Northern Ireland as Sunday becomes less of special day. Today's society has been described as 'post Christendom' with the decline of organised Christianity evident in Northern Ireland. In order to connect with people, churches need to find ways of meeting individuals where they are.

Small groups were a popular suggestion amongst those who no longer attend Sunday morning services as they can be flexible, occur geographically, at times and in places which suit a selected group of people. These groups could complete bible studies, social issue discussions and also meet for prayer. Evening services were also a suggestion for those who work on Sunday mornings or afternoons.

In drawing people to a church, music, children's programs and atmosphere were important factors. Comments were made about church being intense for those who have not attended before or have not been since childhood. Real and sincere messages are more effective than theological and intense lectures.

On discussing some of the ideas from the strategy recommendations with these individuals, many said that they may come to certain events and to let them know when small groups are meeting. This should be taken as a huge encouragement already.

1.3 Local church survey

A survey was completed in a number of churches across Northern Ireland. These included Methodist, Baptist and Mormon churches, to get an idea of what other congregations are doing at present for people in the 18 – 40 age groups. An overview is provided below.

| Denomination | Location | Activities | Age group | Number of employed staff |
|-------------------|--------------|---|---------------|---|
| Methodist | Jordanstown | Weekly Bible study | 15-19 | 2 (Minister and Youth Worker) |
| Mormon | Bangor | Young single adults – meetings with other churches in Belfast. Bible study – certificate gained on completion. Cinema, bowling and speakers on Sunday nights. Joint events with churches in Ireland twice a year. Formals and balls during holiday seasons, and a yearly convention in UK. Monthly meetings | 18-30 30 + | Pastor on a rotational basis |
| Church of Ireland | Holywood | Small groups, mothers union, coffee mornings, men's society and 'men behaving badly' which complete practical tasks in the church. | 18 + | 4 (Vicar, Youth Curate, Administrator and an Arts Development worker) |
| Methodist | East Belfast | Small groups | 18 + | Lots! |
| Presbyterian | Bangor | Bible study groups, young adult groups, women's bible study and men's breakfast. The church also has prayer breakfasts and CE. | 20-40 | 4 (Minster, 2 assistant ministers and Youth worker) |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---|------|--|
| Presbyterian | East Belfast | Small groups, prayer groups, recreational activities including bowling and badminton. There are also drama and lunch clubs. | 18+ | 6 (Minister, assistant, Youth worker, assistant youth worker, children's worker and family worker) |
| Presbyterian | East Belfast | Adult Christian Education, Prayer groups, art clubs, Women's' groups, Men's' Breakfast, Ballroom dancing, Horizons (20-40), Music and choral groups | 18 + | 3 (Minister, assistant minister and Youth worker) |
| Baptist | East Belfast | Small groups, women's and men's groups. | 18 + | 4 (Minister, Youth worker, Family worker, Pastoral care worker) |

Of the churches surveyed there are a number of common activities operating for people in the 18-40 age group. For example small groups, prayer groups and men's and women's fellowship groups are popular. However, compared to the number of activities operating for children and young people, these age groups are at a disadvantage. After speaking with members of these churches, the websites were researched (if available) and in each website there were specific sections for young people and children but none for the 18 - 40 groups. This indicates that for many churches including Garnerville, connecting with individuals aged between 18 and 40 is a challenge and must be focused upon with the same attention as is shown to child and youth ministry.

The Church of the Latter Day Saints has by far the most activities in operation for people in this age group. In discussing this issue further it was established that there were strong links with churches throughout NI, throughout Ireland and in the UK. These relationships were developed over time and individuals are encouraged to get involved, attending the different events and maintaining relationships with their peers nationwide. As these churches work together, numbers grow, variety grows and people can relate to different activities or with a range of people thus adding to the success and longevity of the activities.

Summary of Section One

The current organisations within Garnerville are operating really well. There are some issues which need attention and ideas and suggestions in the strategy section of this document address these issues.

People aged between 18 and 40 who attend Garnerville enjoy their experience and come because of the people within the congregation and the relaxed atmosphere of Worship.

Those who have recently left Garnerville did so simply because of other commitments such as work or sport and suggestions have been made to encourage attendance in a way that will be accessible to them and in ways they can engage with.

Other churches in this area and throughout NI appear to be in a similar situation to Garnerville regarding their service provision for people in the 18 – 40 age groups. Again ideas and suggestions have been compiled in the strategy in order to enhance service provision and connections to young adults and families in this age group. Churches' working together appears to be a key success factor.

Section 2 Connecting with the local community

This section discusses the current situation in the community around Garnerville Presbyterian Church. Again surveys were completed of what other churches are doing to connect with people in their communities. Interviews and conversations took place with key figures within the community. Brief research of community funding initiatives was also completed.

In preparation for this work, a number of books, articles and websites were consulted to assess the society today, trends, culture and needs. The situation facing churches in Northern Ireland is similar to that in the UK. 40% of the UK population are 'non-churched' with a further 40% 'open de-churched' i.e. they have previously attended and may be encourage back, however 20% are 'close de-churched' in that they have also previously attended but cannot be encouraged back due to past experiences. (Mission Shaped Church, 2004)

It is also a common issue when a church decides to complete outreach that they aim to reach everybody. Rick Warren explains that while it is the overall mission of the Great Commission to spread the good news of Jesus to everyone, no single church can reach everybody. He continues to explain that every single human being is different, every culture is different and the sub cultures and networks in existence today are all also very different. (Warren, 1995) It has become apparent that the job at hand is a difficult one, it will be a marathon, not a sprint but through prayer and following God's direction, His will, will be done.

I feel that the overall aim of this area should not be to bring people to Garnerville, but to bring people to God! I encourage you to keep that thought in mind as you read this section and the following strategies.

Current situation

Whilst completing the survey detailed in section one of this document, community contact and engagement was also researched. This research demonstrated that few churches are connecting well with individuals in their communities. One-off programs

are implemented and often successful but the success is short lived and few have long term strategies for community work.

One church which is having great success in community outreach is the East Belfast Mission. Following a conversation with Gillian Young, (EBM Youth Work Coordinator) it was clear that the success of this work has been largely due to building relationships with individuals in the community, developing programs and services to meet their needs and maintaining the contact and developing the relationships further. Several thousand people have contact with East Belfast Mission on a weekly basis, some simply needing a chat or basic human contact. This is a simple strategy, which while simple to implement could have a profound impact in our local communities.

Regarding Garnerville congregation, connection with our local communities is limited. A small number of people within our congregation have regular contact with community groups, for example Leonora Wassons continual contact with Glenluce Trust and the help she gives to Lynn Long on a regular basis. A recent partnership group has been set up between the School, Community centre, Glenluce Trust and the two local churches which has already seen communication increase and this should be encouraged.

Community Centre

An interview took place with Jan Costello, Community Development Worker in Knocknagoney Community Centre. She explained current activities and services on offer, and also provided access to a survey completed in 2002 regarding the current needs of the community.

It is obvious that the centre is highly regarded in the area, is well supported but could be further supported with more volunteers and through pooling resources with the school and surrounding churches. Activities within the centre include youth clubs, after schools clubs, cross community events and men's groups. Approximately 80 children and young people use the centre on a weekly basis. There are also some young volunteers from the local area who help out with activities, in turn developing their own social skills and self confidence. There is however a need for more experienced volunteers. Jan commented that a community worker employed by the church would be welcome to volunteer in the centre; training would be made available and funded by Belfast Education and Library Board.

The issues causing problems within the local community are highlighted in 'The Need to Know Program'. Problems including alcohol and drug misuse, housing, lack of activities and facilities for young people and children, vandalism, lack of a mothers and toddlers group in the area, lack of community spirit leaving people feeling isolated and more reluctant to get involved in activities. There were also issues with housing in the area. This document printed in 2002 also provided suggestions from relevant groups (police, city council etc) on how to improve things. For example, developing more activities within the community centre, providing educational talks to address concerns on drugs and alcohol. It should be highlighted that the young people surveyed expressed interest

in becoming involved with community projects. Education initiatives may also be welcomed – computer skills, ‘drug proof your kids’ and education on housing issues and policies.

Knocknagoney Primary School

A conversation took place with Mandy White, Principle of Knocknagoney Primary School. Again, the school is highly regarded in the area, receives support from parents and the Board of Governors. The school is implementing a number of initiatives which have been hugely successful in breaking barriers. These include:

- implementing a parents room which is used at leisure, for example whilst waiting for children after school
- health advice and smoking cessation sessions are provided in conjunction with McKay’s pharmacy
- essential Skills in English and Math courses have been offered with some parents gaining the equivalent of a GCSE pass.
- offers a course in basic ICT skills which lasts for 5 weeks.
- A home/school liaison teacher has been employed to provide a counseling service. Regular visits are made by parents or grandparents coming to discuss problems and issues.

Contact with the local community is currently a huge focus for Mandy and the teachers. Many groups come to take assemblies, for example a beekeeper from Knocknagoney Parish Church who also runs a bee club after school. Other community contact is maintained with local businesses; the school choir sings and maintains regular visits with the residents of Henderson Court. There have also been successful links made with Glenluce Trust and Knocknagoney Church.

Mandy was asked if there was anything Garnerville could do to help and get involved with the school. The simple answer was to show more of an interest. Mandy claimed that the most important thing for these children was for people to show an interest in them, chat to them and spend time with them simply because they care.

Suggestions of how this could happen include: implementing a homework club and getting involved with JAFFA (Jesus a Friend for All) Mandy stated: *“This in my opinion would speak volumes to this community showing that people want to give of their time and talents solely because they care.”*

The main issues facing the children include their lack of aspirations, poverty, drugs, alcohol and paramilitary influence. Issues facing the parents include poor self esteem, poor management of money and often lack of education themselves which makes it difficult for them to support their children in schoolwork.

Both Mandy and Jill were encouraged and excited by the work Garnerville is doing at present simply by implementing this research, they are keen to see the outcomes and how things may change and develop for the good of the community in this area and are interested in sharing and pooling resources to see this happen.

Whilst Glenluce Trust falls outside the remit of the age range of this report, it is worth noting the work it does in the community. Lynn Long is the key person in this centre and organises a number of activities and educational sessions for carers, older people and individuals with disabilities. Activities include reminiscence sessions, stress relief, home safety, befriending, exercise and also a drop-in service. There are also opportunities available for usage of the facilities at Glenluce Trust at 66 Knocknagoney Avenue. Any help from Garnerville congregation would be appreciated in this area.

Fresh Expressions

As highlighted previously in this section, few churches are connecting and engaging effectively with their surrounding communities, and this is a national issue. Throughout England a number of initiatives have been established in response to this issue and the changing patterns of society. These are referred to as 'Fresh Expressions of Church'. At the Session conference in January, Session was shown a number of these examples which included cafes, BMX tracks and home group meetings which have grown into 'churches' whilst remaining unconnected to the church building.. Further research demonstrates the success of these initiatives and the underlying concepts which have led to the success.

The 'strap line' of Fresh Expressions is, '*mission is about finding out what God is doing and getting involved*'. Fresh Expressions understands that cultures, Christian values and the way in which we relate to each other has changed, it is simply about going where people are and demonstrating Gods love to them. They recognise that people may be less 'Christian' but may be more spiritual, trust must be gained over time and people need to be assured that it is a long term initiative.

These concepts and possibly ideas should be considered for the future.

Community Funding

After completing some general research in this area it was evident that a lot of community grants are published in September with deadlines beginning in January through to March. This area should be given more attention and research in September. The main bodies to focus on are listed below.

- The Department for Social Development - Churches' Community Work Alliance Northern Ireland (CCWA NI).
- The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
- The Department for Education - Community Relations Core Funding Scheme
- Belfast City Council

A debate took place recently in the House of Commons (03/06/09) regarding the community work which churches do and their lack of opportunities for funding. It has been assured that churches will be recognised for their community work and with the help of the Government departments; application and awarding of funding will be more accessible in the near future.

Summary of Section Two

This section of the report has highlighted a number of issues again which need addressed and also provided insights to examples of success and concepts which we may implement in our aim to engage and connect with the local community. Again the aim should be to bring people to God, not Garnerville.

The community centre and primary school in the area are highly regarded and should be commended for the progress they are making in the community. As a congregation we need to show more of an interest and simply get involved to show we care.

Fresh Expressions demonstrate again that societies are changing therefore the church must react by meeting people where they are, building relationships, earning trust and hopefully through time and prayer spreading the gospel and bringing these people to faith.

The community strategies and goals are long term, based on prayer and careful planning and built on relationship and partnerships.

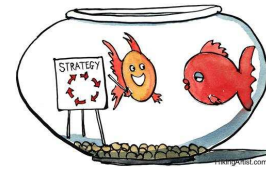
Conclusion

In conclusion to this report the question of additional employed staff was to be investigated. Considering the research completed, I feel that a full time youth worker would be an asset to Garnerville to focus largely on the community aspect of the churches long term mission. An in-depth research study should be completed to assess the needs, issues, and perceptions of church, ways in which we can help or provide support. Schemes, projects and initiatives could be set up in response to this additional research.

A secondary role would involve acting as a facilitator or team manager amongst the existing organisations, maintaining contact, pastoral care, organising training and to help otherwise when needed. The main focus of their work would be on facilitating activities for the 18 - 40 age groups, finding out when people are available and engaging at this time.

In September, Patricia Cope will arrive from America to act as a volunteer in our church for a year. It is suggested that Patricia's time with us should be used as a pilot scheme, to assess if in practice, the position of a youth worker would be a valuable asset to the Garnerville church family.

Garnerville Presbyterian Church
Youth, Family and Community Research Project
June 2009



Strategy Recommendations

Section 1 – Strengthening and Improving Ministry within Garnerville

The following recommendations have been made in response to the research completed, the session conference, the vision casting day and the PCI Mission strategy meetings.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Empowerment and support for all leaders amongst organisations | Ongoing from September | None | From Minister, Session, Congregation & Leaders themselves |

Methods of implementation –

Regular recruitment drives and contracts which show what is required of a youth leader, what they will get in return and stating ‘no life sentences’.

One initial youth council meeting at the start of each term with anyone involved in youth work in attendance – September and January to outline strategy, mission, discuss issues and fundraising/events. Maintain clash calendar and vow to support each other, pool resources where necessary, be visible amongst general church activities and maintain prayer life to include youth organisations, the youth in our congregation and community.

Youth council should meet regularly with two representatives from each organisation.

Dedication service in September and possibly January.

Visibility within service – maybe interviews about experiences of faith or about being a youth leader, updates on what is going on in organisation, simple readings or prayers.

Training opportunities for leaders for areas which include but are not limited to; giving children’s talks, planning lessons, creating lesson plans, engaging with children of different age, ability, engaging with their parents also. Training for young leaders, e.g. Training Trevor, to ensure we keep them active, involved and valued within our congregation.

The Church Congregation needs to recognise the work of these volunteer leaders through prayer, verbal encouragement and appreciation for their work. More support is also required from the Minister and Session within certain organisations.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|---|------------------------|---|--|
| Focus on family (i.e. Church family) and relationships in the church family | Ongoing from September | Minimal – craft resources, food & activities for fun days, picnics etc. | From Minister, Musical Director, Youth leaders to motivate, encourage & support children. Possibly implement a team of people to maintain a ‘family focus’ calendar. |

Methods of implementation –

Family services, all age worship and services where the children don’t leave. (maybe once a month.)

A kids club, after schools club or multi-skills sports club could be implemented to cater for primary school children, male and female, enhancing social skills, teamwork, confidence and this would be an organisation for boys as well as girls in our congregation.

Having more choruses, child friendly prayers and readings at the start of each service, more children involved – drama, readings, interviews, testimonies?!

Family days, picnics, fun days, camping trips etc.

More interactive worship, crafts, prayers together in groups, work stations, use technology more to gain interest of tech savvy dads, kids, young people. Could this happen in the hall! Ask for feedback, be sensitive to those who don’t like it.

However, don’t forget the older generation. Implement a mentor or buddy system, pair up old with young – build relationships,

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Bridge the gap – 18 – 40 age group | Initiating in September (possibly after ‘small group’ training) | Minimal – for bible study, discussion resources, equipment for sports clubs, funding for training courses for leaders & specific classes – e.g. Money matters.. | Small group leaders, other people in the congregation in this age group willing to encourage others to attend. Community/family worker to facilitate and develop new programs. |

Methods of implementation –

Encourage small groups, meeting when and where possible.

As people don’t like signing up for good, research 6-8 week programs and ask for people to engage for that period of time.

Build relationships, have core leaders who can encourage these relationships, communicate with everyone regularly.

Find ways to interact, engage and communicate with people within this age band. For example, running clubs, 5 aside, badminton, men’s clubs, coffee mornings while the kids are at sports clubs, Saturday morning etc. Find a time and a place that’s suits them and go there to meet them.

Have non Christian classes, parenting, marriage preparation, money matters. Ways to make initial contact where hopefully they will attend church, if not we will still have shown that we care.

Section 2 Connecting with the local community

In response to research, contact with relevant personnel and organisations external to Garnerville the following recommendations have been suggested.

The aim throughout these recommendations should not be to bring people to Garnerville but to bring people to God. If they come to Garnerville, great, but if they do not this should not be seen as failure.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|--|
| Become visible in the community | From August 2009 | None | From Session to lead by example & encourage others do so. From Congregation to get involved. |

Methods of implementation –

Before we can implement schemes, programs, or events we need to become visible in the community, showing we care, showing we are there to stay. This will be initially started through community outreach in August when practical help will be given to those within the immediate radius of our church. This will be followed by the fun day.

We need to earn the respect and trust of the people we aim to serve and can only do this by becoming visible, showing we care and getting to know them. Through careful planning and prayer this should lead to engagement then with projects we would then implement, for example Alpha.

Community service projects should be a regular occurrence at all times of the year.

Start an after schools club in the church, community centre or school itself where suitably qualified people help children with academic work while other volunteers help in other ways towards the development of the children, team building, confidence, etc.

People could also help out within the community centre as they are often in need of volunteers for youth clubs, outings etc. Training is also available for this through Belfast City Council.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Make people, new or existing within church welcome, valued and part of the family | Ongoing from September | None | From congregation. Development maintenance of an 'usher team' |

Methods of implementation –

For those who are looking for a church family to join we need to adapt our attitudes and behaviour to welcome new people from the moment they enter our church.

People could be shown to seats, introduced to people beside or near them and encouraged to get involved as much as they are comfortable with. After the service, people should get them tea or coffee and again introduce them to people near them.

The ushering service should be completed for existing members of the church. To show that we value their attendance also and that they are part of the church family.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 'Back to church days' | February 2010 | Minimal – advertising costs | From Minister, Session, Congregation & Community/Family worker (if applicable) |

Method of implementation –

These events are ways of encouraging people back to church who may have drifted off after childhood or sometimes negative experience. These should be advertised and explained to family members and amongst community in advance and promoted throughout the congregation for family members to attend. Casual dress code, lively songs, atmosphere, no offering, songs taught, told when to stand, sit etc, relaxed atmosphere with kids allowed to mess about etc. Simple, concise message with all ages involved. This should demonstrate perceptions of church may not be accurate and that it does not need to be intimidating etc instead that it is relaxed and fun.

| Recommendation | Timescale | Budget required | Commitment required |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| A Fresh Expression | Long Term 'Dream' | Substantial – approx. £30,000 (Mission Shaped Church, 2004) | Session, committee, Congregation, paid employees. |

Method of implementation –

While the previous suggestions are longer term, this recommendation is even more long term and may be the dream category but if it is God's plan it will happen. Glenluce Trust has vacant space within our community and may provide an ideal setting for a fresh expression of church. Possibly a coffee bar or drop in centre where people (anyone, age, ability, faith, background or need) can come to meet socially or for support. Christian music (modern classics and new worship) could be playing, goods could be fair trade and cheap, Christian literature too should be available. Small groups could meet here, youth groups, it should be non threatening, relaxed and welcoming for anyone who wishes to use it. (Glenluce is a possibility, other locations could also be investigated.)

Patricia Cope – Pilot scheme

Patricia coming in September should be used as a pilot scheme for some of the ideas suggested in this strategy. Using her strengths and interests, the following suggestions could be focused on in line with the recommendations outlined previously.

- creating dramas/dance for the children, young people and adults with a social/Christian message – working alongside leaders who already implement such dramas.
- getting involved with SN@G, FOG and GB – helping with talks, scripture and generally getting to know the kids and leaders, music at SN@G?
- get involved with homework clubs in Community centre and may want to initiate a homework club in the school with the help of other church members. Maybe taking some school assemblies.
- starting dance, badminton, 5 aside or running clubs within the church, to be advertised throughout the community – non church but through church.
- getting involved in the book club and developing this further for the 18-40 age groups.

At the end of Patricia's time with us feedback should be gained on how busy she was, what most of her time was spent doing, what are the core areas of need which will help us to examine further whether an employed person within our church would be beneficial.

Housekeeping – website online and up to date with the different activities taking place, maybe a way to set up email alerts for different categories so if people haven't checked in a while they don't miss out.

Anyone involved with children or young people need police checked.

Communications team needs regular updates of events within organisations, and throughout church for notice boards. Advance notice of baptisms, weddings and possibly funerals to ensure welcome packs are given out. Make more use of the notice boards in the halls to inform people of events, pictures would be excellent.

Update 'prayers' with events, outcomes etc.