

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 2017

INTRODUCTION

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” 1 Tim 4: 12

The National Youth Assembly (NYA) is a platform for young adults to voice their opinions and actively participate in decision making within the Church of Scotland (CofS). The annual event runs over the course of a long weekend, and offers young people with a connection to the CofS the chance to come together to explore their faith and tackle issues they feel are important to the Kirk.

Gartmore House once again played host to NYA from 21st – 24th July 2017. 78 delegates aged 17 – 25 came to Stirlingshire to gather in worship, discussion and fellowship. There were delegates from 26 presbyteries, including one delegate from the International Presbytery who is a member of The Scots International Church in Rotterdam. We were also joined by 2 Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs) from the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA), and delegates from the United Reformed Church (URC).

The welcoming atmosphere and ease with which we got to know one other was something a number of delegates (particularly first time attendees) commented on. Engaging with other young people within the CofS is vital in the development of our faith; hence NYA is an important and unique opportunity.

DISCUSSIONS

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Col 4:6

Delegates eagerly anticipate each Youth Assembly with the drive to have their voices heard and make a difference to their church. Over the course of the weekend, there are three main topics of discussion (each of them chosen by the young people at the planning weekend earlier in the year) which pertain to current events and issues within and out with the church. This year, the three topics were Young People and Discipleship (YPaD), Interfaith, and Priorities of the Church.

Each discussion benefitted from an input session from a guest speaker who provided some background information and some guidance as to how the delegates might be able to contribute effectively to a productive discussion. During discussions minutes were taken, the outcomes of which were passed on to the team of youth reps who, led by the NYA moderator and clerk, work through the year to turn the talking into action and pave the way for an active, engaged church.

More information on these discussions and what the youth rep team have been working on through the year can be found in our supplementary report.

Young People and Discipleship

The YPaD discussion focussed on questions of defining discipleship, recognising marks of discipleship and looking at ways to involve, encourage and nurture young people in their faith journeys that they might forge an active discipleship. A World Café style session was utilised for this discussion with delegates spending five minutes in groups of four and five before moving on and further developing the ideas put down by others before them, thus providing an opportunity for more of a consensus decision to be reached.

The initial discussions focussed on ways to share faith, and influencing factors of faith with delegates exploring questions of “How we show our love of God and our neighbours”, “ways in which we share faith”, “How can we use our gifts” and “who, or what has helped us grow in faith?”. Following some input on the findings of recent research around young people and faith development the question posed to delegates was “How do we create a culture of discipleship in our church? (and what can the Mission and Discipleship (M&D) council do?)”.

From this it became clear that the delegates want the church to take an active role in developing discipleship, not merely creating resources to dribble down through presbyteries where they can get lost or forgotten, but by holding interactive experiences where the M&D council can make themselves available for conversations about how to approach discipleship and to engage with young people on a

personal level. In general delegates felt there would be a benefit from the council taking a more active role, visiting those presbyteries who don't engage with the national church so much, and looking at creating accessible tools to equip the people of the church better for discipleship, with something as simple as a clear cut definition of what is really meant by discipleship, and in what different ways people can become disciples.

The sum of this discussion ended with the idea that intergenerational ministry is important in developing discipleship, with people of all ages learning from each other and sharing in their faith journeys together. A personal approach from the M&D council to encourage and equip young adults was highly sought after, and a push for the council to make the most of social media channels and the CofS website to spread information on defining discipleship and advising on different roles a person can take on to become an active disciple, perhaps even turning M&D into the "Google" of discipleship!

Interfaith

The evening before our interfaith discussion an enlightening and hugely informative human library was held. For this, guest speakers from Islam, Baha'i and Sikh faiths and Interfaith Scotland spoke about their beliefs and practices to give delegates a deeper understanding of other faiths, and to spark some thought as to how the CofS can forge better relations with other faith groups.

The discussion began with Mirella Yandoli, Interfaith Programme Officer for the CofS providing some insight to current interfaith projects and upcoming opportunities. Delegates then explored in their small groups key questions surrounding what good interfaith relations look like, how we can improve our interfaith relations and what the CofS can and should be doing and what we can all do as individuals to strengthen interfaith relations. This topic was met with much enthusiasm, and it was noted that the interfaith human library had been really helpful giving valuable insight.

With regards to what the young adults believed good interfaith relations look like, the concepts of openness, cooperation, understanding and a willingness to get involved and hold conversations surfaced as key points. These ideas came up more than once during the discussion, and when talking about ways to improve our interfaith relations,

delegates were keen to start up conversations with our neighbours, and to recognise that school chaplaincy is not only a good place to bolster interfaith relations, but a simple way to educate young people of a variety of faiths.

Much of the conversation centred on sharing our faith, our time and our resources with others for example opening our doors to our neighbours of other faiths and going into our communities and working together on outreach projects. Another simple thing delegates wished to see more of at a congregational, and indeed at an individual, level was visiting local Mosques, Synagogues and other places of worship to get to know our neighbours. It was felt that these simple acts can go a long way to create lasting relationships and strong interfaith practice.

From this, the outcomes were that the Church needs to put our faith into action, to start up conversations and lead on to practical means of working together. In addressing the perceived discomfort which can be portrayed by the media in relation to non-Christian faiths, delegates felt strongly that the Church has a duty to lead by example and stand with our brothers and sisters in faith and live out the lesson of love that Jesus taught. Hosting interfaith events, the possibility of a CoSY (Church of Scotland Youth) guide to interfaith relations and a social media campaign to highlight the practices of other faiths during Interfaith week were all ideas brought to the forefront of the discussion to be carried further through the year.

Priorities of the Church

The final discussion on Priorities of the Church saw delegates inspired by the invitation to provide insight to the Council of Assembly on what young adults feel are the areas of greatest importance within the Church of Scotland. Another lively discussion was had with debate focussing on the following questions:

- How do we express our love for God and our neighbours?
- How can the church better meet on going leadership needs?
- How can the church better meet the needs of young people?
- Where do you see yourself as part of the future of the mission and ministry of the CofS?

- How best can the institution of the CofS listen to their young people?

A topic clearly close to the heart of many delegates, there was much discussion around practical ideas to take to the council. Firstly, delegates noted the importance of active listening – attending events for young people and listening to what they have to say – rather than the apathy which accompanies passive listening, that comes through simply reading reports. Many of the delegates felt real frustration at not being listened to time after time. There was an obvious passion for the church taking action and seeking out its young people – attending youth events, visiting local youth groups, asking questions to hear about what young people need from the young people themselves.

In terms of the ways the church can better meet leadership needs, delegates talked about the way “ministry” is presented; that there needs to be more information about different types of ministry and the recognition that not everyone who has a calling to leadership has a calling to the ministry of word and sacrament. Many felt there was a problem with the way leadership roles are presented in the church; that membership can feel exclusive, and in some cases, the criteria for membership can be clouded and leave people uncertain to what it really means. Therefore, there was a cry for the council to better define and explain the different roles within the church, so that people can learn about them and pursue a path which best fits them, as opposed to feeling pigeon-holed into certain roles “because we’re young”.

Overall, the delegates felt hopeful for the future of the church, and that young people can be afforded greater opportunities to have their say and to develop their skills in a variety of leadership roles. Once again, ideas for creating simple resources to give information on different roles and different types of ministry were put forward with much enthusiasm in the hopes that the council will hear these ideas and work with us to create a promising future for the church.

WORSHIP

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” Psalm 95: 1-2

Worship at NYA is an outstanding experience, indeed for most

it is the pivotal part of what NYA is. Coming together as a body of young people to share in praise for our Lord is an essential part of everyone’s faith journey, and having a room full of people of this age demographic to share in that is extremely powerful and spiritually uplifting. While everyone’s NYA experience is different and every delegate is at a different place in their faith journey, it is without doubt a weekend which inspires and empowers the young people of the Kirk.

This year our worship team centred the various worship sessions around the theme of gifts. For the opening worship we celebrated the story of Christ’s birth - God’s gift to the world. Gathered round a manger, the worship space illuminated by candlelight, delegates rejoiced for this gift with some well known carols.

Saturday morning saw delegates gather on picnic blankets around the hall and listen as a few of the young people delivered a portrayal of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with loaves and fish. Baskets of food were shared among the crowd, thus giving a personal feel for what it would have been to sit among the number Jesus fed. This act was followed by discussing with neighbours the act of sharing in food and fellowship, with delegates reflecting together upon the symbolic meaning and the spiritual impact of this simple act.

In a style slightly removed from the usual, there was a powerful time of reflection on Saturday evening after hearing stories from four different people in four different circumstances, each with a different message to share. The first, a story about a refugee inspired the young people to reflect upon how to show welcome; the second was the story of female genital mutilation (FGM) and had people reflecting on ways to work towards justice; the third encompassed the theme of loneliness and inspired the group to think about giving time; and the final person suffering poor mental health questioned how to show awareness to others. Each story helped illustrate issues of the day which affect many people from all walks of life, and had a response surrounding the ways in which individuals can put their gifts to practical use to tackle these issues, giving their time, awareness, justice and welcome to those in need.

As in previous years, we attended Sunday morning worship at Gartmore Parish Church, and we would like to extend our gratitude to the minister and congregations of Gartmore and Buchlyvie for their very warm welcome.

On Sunday evening, the delegates came together to hear of the story of Jesus at the well, with a visual representation of the well around which everybody sat to hear the story of Jesus, the living water. Having the well as a focal object helped to guide contemplation of the gifts each person has and the ways in which these gifts can be shared among others.

Our closing worship had delegates participate in communion, where everyone sat in their small groups, the elements of bread and wine which were shared from gift bags, symbolising the gift of Christ's body broken for us and His blood spilled for us. In the intimate act of serving one another bread and wine, the message of God's love and salvation for all was truly brought to life.

Much of the feedback regarding the worship was extremely positive with delegates praising the work put in by the worship team. It was noted that the variety in styles of worship were particularly appreciated. Given the large number of young people in attendance who come from congregations with very few other people their own age, the chance to come together as a large body to worship is an incredibly special experience.

WORKSHOPS

"let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" Prov 1: 5

Over the weekend delegates attended a range of different workshops led by a variety of people who shared their expertise and experiences. Delegates attended the first workshops in their small groups and learned about forces chaplaincy, the CofS response to the refugee crises, and had an interactive explanation of the structures of the church. Later in the weekend there was an opportunity for the delegates to discover practical ways of praying and reading the Bible to get the most out of these worship tools, as well as a chance to explore mindfulness in relation to expanding their spiritual experiences.

On Sunday some delegates chose to attend a workshop on the Church and Society's 'Speak Out' campaign, which encouraged practical steps to help engage with communities to tackle the big issues within society, while others were afforded an opportunity to gain training in mental health first aid. Workshops enabled the young people to gain knowledge

and skills which empower them to actively engage with the church in new ways, and equip them for discipleship.

MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."" Mt 14: 27

On Saturday, the NYA was pleased to welcome the Rt Rev Dr Browning. Delegates were grateful to him for taking the time to visit the assembly, participate in worship and share his experiences. He spoke passionately about his work for the Church and gave insight to his faith journey and the events that led to his induction as Moderator of the CofS.

The young people were encouraged by his words of appreciation and respect for the CofS youth, and his words regarding the importance of asking questions, listening to and observing others were taken on board by all. Indeed, many of the delegates took his advice immediately and asked him questions around his faith, the work he will be doing and the opportunities his year in office will present.

In addition to his engagement with the NYA Moderator going head to head with a short challenge, many delegates noted their gratitude for him taking the time to connect and engage further with individuals during the refreshment break. That he brought with him gifts, not just for the Moderator and Clerk but for all the delegates and the staff team, was especially fitting given the worship theme for the weekend.

The NYA as a whole is delighted to be afforded the chance to work with the CofS Moderator throughout 2017-2018, and further details of the co-operation of the two Moderators can be found in our Supplementary Report.

FELLOWSHIP

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thess 5: 11

During NYA there is a real community spirit among the young people. This stems from the delegates' passion for the CofS, their drive to get involved with the issues of the day and the love and support they find in one another. At a time when young adults are often the distinct minority in a congregation, having a weekend to share with others in fellowship is of utmost importance. Across the weekend delegates work in

their small groups which builds relationships and allows them to grow and develop their faith in a safe and relaxed environment.

Social activities such as the ceilidh and the quiz night also give the chance for delegates to unwind and further strengthen relationships with one another away from the intense discussions of the day. As such, friendships formed at NYA are incredibly strong, and the sense of belonging is keenly felt by the young adults as the weekend progresses.

Many young adults meet others from their presbytery for the first time at NYA, and the weekend demonstrates that while an individual might be the only member of their congregation under 40, they are not by any means alone. It is this sense of belonging and the innate desire to give back to the community that inspires many of the young adults to get involved with the Church across all levels.

For some of the delegates, the community spirit continues through the year as they work as part of the youth rep team to further the discussions and work together to implement action at local, regional and national levels. Others find the fellowship with their peers in CoSY gatherings which run in some presbyteries throughout the year. One way or another, creating opportunities to meet with one another in worship and fellowship is of vital importance, and with the Year of Young People 2018 approaching, it is hoped that the national Church recognises the value of its young people meeting together and can support and nurture the young adults of the Kirk.

CONCLUSION

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.” Mt 18: 19-20

There was a noticeable enthusiasm for the weekend as a whole, with many delegates commentating on the friendly atmosphere, accessible topics and the community of friends they found. At a time when Church attendance is on the decline and the future of ministry a challenge for so many, it is heartening to see that the young adults of the Kirk meet in good spirit and with hopefulness of a bright and active future. Engaging with topics which were relevant and important to everyone made discussions flow easily and helped the young

adults to engage with one another with ease.

NYA continues to work with a number of bodies within the CofS, and are as always instrumental in growing and developing the faith of many young Christians across the country. As we have seen, the passion, knowledge and experiences the young adults have to offer the Church is inspiring; it is something the CofS can be proud of.

Through the year our youth rep team will have been working hard to develop the key points taken from the weekend and have turned the discussions into action, and it was heartening to have a record number of delegates apply to be a part of the youth rep team. A deeper insight to their work and further information on NYA, our Moderator and Clerk’s year can be found in our supplementary report. This and information about the NYA can be found on our webpages www.churchofscotland.org.uk/nya.

Next year’s National Youth Assembly will take place at Gartmore House from Friday 17th to Monday 20th August 2018, and is open to anyone aged 17 – 25 with a connection to the CofS. Our topics for discussion will be end of life issues, being ecumenical, and social media. It is hoped to continue the trend of welcoming first time attendees to add to the large number of delegates who come year after year.

ROBIN DOWNIE, *Moderator*
CATRIONA MUNRO, *Clerk*