

Church of Ireland Youth Department Report

Proposer: Simon Henry

In 2017 as I stood here, I asked the Synod to bear with me as I spoke, as I had just had braces fitted the week before. Two years later, to stay relevant to teenagers of course, I'm still wearing them ... however the end is apparently in sight. But as someone recently said to me, "your braces might come off soon, but you still can't do anything about your face!" This may sound like something Bishop Pat might say to me, but I can assure you it was not her.

The mission of the Church of Ireland Youth Department is to work with our dioceses, parishes and others in partnership to see young people come to faith and be disciplined into the church. That's our end goal, to see young people become disciples and for them to make disciples.

Last year's Synod seems about five minutes ago and it has been a productive and busy year for CIYD since I last stood before the Synod and I do want to thank the tremendous hard work and dedication of my colleagues Steve Grasham and Barbara Swann, they make me look very, very good and I would be lost without them. Thanks also for the constant support of our President Bishop Pat, Chairman Rev Malcolm Kingston and all the members of our Executive Committee and Central Board who are always helpful, encouraging and who beyond the call of duty to help facilitate the work of CIYD across Ireland. We are very grateful for the funding that comes in from Allocations and the Irish Government and we are certain that we are using the resources wisely to return much more back into society.

This year's Synod is exciting for CIYD as it sees us launch our "Young Leaders in Ministry Fund" – you should all have a leaflet about it on your seat.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Act of Disestablishment and to support Church of Ireland ministry in the future, CIYD has created a bursary fund with the support of Priorities Fund and Fabric and Church Development Fund.

This is an Ireland wide project that we hope will support many young people over a period of 3 years. Aimed at Church of Ireland young people aged from 15-25 years who are actively involved in church life, we want to offer grants to young people for training and development courses, mission teams, leadership opportunities and placements that can be shown to:

- Significantly develop the faith of the young person
- Grow the skills of the young person especially, but not confined to, leadership skills.
- Be of significant use to the ministry of the Church of Ireland following the completion of the opportunity.

The potential for a bursary of this kind could be evident across a number of outcome areas:

1. Leadership and ministry development: A bursary that awards even a small proportion of the costs can make the difference between a young person applying or not, leading to more young people with leadership skills.
2. Direct support for training: There are quite a few quality providers of training and other ministry development opportunities (including the C of I) for young people and young adults. Rather than trying to organise more of our own training provision to increase attendance it makes sense to provide financial support to encourage more individuals from the Church of Ireland to undertake these opportunities, both within and beyond the Church of Ireland.
3. Retention of young adults: Those aged 15-25 are the most likely to leave our church and this is also an age range least evident in church attendance. For young adults considering a role in leadership or mission, having the financial support of their church behind them would be significant in strengthening their relationship with the Church of Ireland.
4. The future involvement of young adults: Any bursary amount awarded will involve an application process that will encourage young adults to articulate how they will be involved in the Church of Ireland for the near future. At a time in and around the university years when many of our young adults will be consider leaving the church, this could be significant.

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5. The development of church leaders: Every young adult going through this bursary will be on a contact database for other opportunities. This will allow us to help young adults progress through other areas of training and mission with the hope that some would be encouraged consider lay ministry and ordination training.

The other thing I would like to highlight is our second CIYD Youth Forum took place in January past. The forum was attended by young people and youth leaders from almost every diocese and we were grateful that we had Archbishop Michael with us that day to launch the event.

Throughout the day young people debated issues affecting them and we looked at ways of encouraging and supporting youth participation. We looked at ways of facilitating change and taking action, as well as how young people can be supported on their spiritual journeys.

Archbishop Michael encouraged our young people with the slogan ‘free to shape your own future’, - this became the slogan of Disestablishment and Archbishop Michael had some very wise words for our young people which we would all do well to take on board.

Free to shape your own future - “It can continue to be taken by every generation of young people in the Church of Ireland as a strong encouragement to engage with the capacities, abilities, enthusiasm – your willingness to be included, your hope of not being patronised by tokenism, the gifts that you already have. Believe in God and believe in yourselves”.

We asked young people about any changes they experienced as a result of the 2018 Youth Forum, and some responses were:

- I have become more active in my church and built my faith.
- It gave us more knowledge on how we can support younger people with their faith.
- It gave us courage to go and start a Christian Union in school.
- I have been more involved with my youth group.
- Started a Christian Union in school.
- Built up my faith through a mission trip abroad

I, on behalf of CIYD, on behalf of the young people we engaged with at the Youth Forum, am asking you as Bishops, clergy, leaders and influencers in your parish and dioceses to get behind young people and give them more opportunities within your parish and your diocese.

We have to remember that Church is no longer at the centre of many of our communities. Young people inhabit a world that is increasingly diverse and morally bankrupt. Yet, they are more than ready to hear about Jesus Christ. It is vital that we do everything we can to direct young people towards God and to help them develop their faith and provide opportunities and not barriers.

Young people and children are often not taken seriously either in society generally or in Church. In the community young people are often perceived as a problem to be dealt with, or resented, and in church they may only be valued as “the Church of the future” rather than the church of the present. It is always worth considering how young people can gain a higher profile both in church and in the wider community.

It must be remembered that Christian young people are of equal value to adult Christians. The church has much to gain from all they have to offer.

I commend this report to you today and ask for you to kindly receive it.