

Church of Ireland Youth Department Report

Secunder: Ms Hannah O'Neill

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Archbishop/bishop and members of Synod, it is my pleasure to second the report of the Church of Ireland Youth Department.

We often think of our young people as the Church of the future. They're the future clergy, lay ministers, future vestries, diocesan councils and synods. But whilst they carry so much for the future of the Church, they are also the Church of today, with faith-filled and faith-fuelled ideas, creativity, and ingenuity. Many of you will remember the young people from Meath and Kildare Diocese who joined us at last year's Synod, and the impact their presence had. It is imperative that we as central church take seriously the need to listen to the voices of our young people.

The CIYD Youth Forum is one platform we use to do just that, aiming to serve God by actively representing, enriching and engaging with the young people of the Church of Ireland by discussing and debating issues that impact the lives of young people today. The importance of gathering young people from across the dioceses, to listen to what they have to say, cannot be underestimated. This year the Youth Forum ran over the course of two days, taking into consideration previous feedback where young people wanted more time to connect with their peers. This year's Youth Forum was once again facilitated by Susie Mapledoram, Diocesan Youth Officer from the Diocese of Manchester, along with special guests Mark Wells (Bible Society NI) and Ben Jones (Missional Generation).

The focus was once again on mental well-being, an issue that young people care about greatly. The young people were encouraged to make new connections, be a voice for change in their schools, parishes and dioceses, and to deepen their faith and learn more about Jesus and His Church, and the vital role they have within that. According to the young people's feedback this was the best Youth Forum yet. They commented on how helpful the event was in talking about and sharing their own experiences, and discussing what we can do in the church to support positive wellbeing. After the event one young person said, "Thank you for making us feel less alone."

As a leader at the Youth Forum, with a group from Kilmore, I was immensely encouraged as I listened to the young people. What stood out to me was the compassion and empathy these young people showed to one another. Their value system is one of kindness and love. And as they shared, it was clear to see how their faith informs their response to mental health. I was also excited to hear young people talk about their willingness and commitment to serve locally in their parishes and dioceses, recognising the vital role faith can play in affecting positive change.

An immense amount of work goes into an event like the youth forum, not to mention all the other ways that CIYD supports youth ministry, including providing sources of funding, creating resources such as *Fuel*, prayer journals, the Climate Justice toolkit and Exalt prayer app to mention just a few. As well as

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facilitating Connect days, training and retreats for youth workers and Diocesan Youth Officers. Not to mention the miles travelled to support the DYOs locally. So on behalf of all the DYOs and central board, I'd like to thank Simon, Barbara and of course Steve who has recently moved on, for all the help and support they give us throughout the year. Thank you also to CIYD President Bishop Pat Storey, Chairperson Mrs Brigid Barrett, and to all the members of the Executive Committee and Central Board who serve so faithfully and willingly throughout the year.

A huge thank you also goes to those across our dioceses who invest in young people face to face, throughout the year. Most youth ministry provision across the Church of Ireland is volunteer-led in youth groups, uniformed organisations, schools work, residentials and more. Thank you to everyone who serves on the coalface of youth ministry, inviting young people to encounter something of the love of Jesus.

When I think about youth ministry across our Church, I'm reminded of the verse in Matthew 9, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few..." Across the island there are eight Diocesan Youth Officers and roughly 35 paid youth workers, which works out at around one youth worker for every 13 parochial units. And when you remove the numbers for the diocese with the most youth workers, that number doubles to one youth worker for every 26 parochial units. There is a genuine need for greater investment in youth ministry across our dioceses, particularly in the South where there is greater disparity in youth provision.

It is worth noting that CIYD's only sources of funding are from central church and the Irish Government. We are incredibly grateful for that funding, but we must consider the possibility that the Irish Government funding could be pulled at any time. There is an increasingly urgent need for us at central church to think strategically and intentionally about future financial investment into youth ministry, that can sustain and grow youth ministry across the island.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few..." When it comes to young people in this land, the fruit is ripe for the taking. Young people are incredibly curious and deeply spiritual, searching for meaning, affirmation and belonging in all kinds of places. We as the church have an opportunity to open wide our arms to these young people, introducing them to the love, purpose and abundant life that is found only in Christ Jesus. As we ask the Lord, to 'send out labourers into the harvest', will we be the answer to our own prayers? Will we at synod and across our dioceses choose to invest in not only the future of the Church of Ireland, but in the future of our nation as we seek to reach young people with the love of Christ?

I commend the Report of the Church of Ireland Youth Department to you. Thank you.