



children and young people, committing to hear more young voices as

Sam Atkins / Church of England

General Synod has called for a significant shift in prioritising the voices of children and young people, committing to hear more young voices as part of future discussions.

After leading a presentation showcasing initiatives supported by the Church's National Education Office, and by local dioceses and schools, students from Archway Learning Trust in Nottingham and Archbishop Holgate School in York received a standing ovation from Synod members.

The Bishop of Portsmouth, Dr Jonathan Frost, the Church of England's lead bishop for education, introduced the motion which commits Synod to well-planned and systematic engagement with the voices of children and young people in future sessions.

He explained that the motion stemmed from a 2023 synod vote advocating for greater engagement with the voices of children and young people. The focus was on work with children, with plans to build on this with initiatives for young adults in the future.

Students Hannah and Benedict from Archbishop Holgate School led a presentation focused on strategies for churches, schools, and families to collaborate in supporting and nurturing young disciples. They highlighted initiatives like the FLOURISH network and a digital evangelism partnership with 'The Way UK,' which has 4 percent of UK teenagers aged 13 to 17 following its channels.

The student presenters also referenced a 2022 study by the Church of England and Savanta ComRes, which identified characteristics of flourishing youth ministry in various settings, such as churches, cathedrals, chaplaincies, church plants, and new communities. These factors have contributed to the increase in children's church attendance since 2022, indicating a strong recovery following the pandemic and potential for further growth.

Students Isabella and Sam then shared findings from a survey of more than 600 secondary and primary school aged students, revealing that most had a positive perception of church, and felt that words such as 'welcoming,' 'Holy' and 'Spiritual' having the strongest association.

Young respondents said that ideal churches would be 'welcoming to all, accepting and inclusive,' 'peaceful calm and a safe space,' and 'fun, joyful and happy,' as well as emphasising the importance of community, engaging young people and reaching out to others.

Those completing the survey also strongly felt that it was important to include children and young people to help the church to flourish, and that older people would want to support this. A high number (91 per cent) also indicated that they thought their local church was already great for children, young people and families.

Prayer, helping others, reading the Bible, and reflection were the school activities that most respondents said helped them think about faith, with singing and crafts also being mentioned. Synod was informed that The Growing Faith Foundation is funding ongoing research to better understand the intersection between church, school, and home life.

Students from schools in Nottingham's Archway Trust then discussed local initiatives, including an 'After School Church' program that helped them connect with peers, family members, and God. They also spoke about a 'Youth Drop-In' for years 7 to 11, which provided a 'safe place and sanctuary' along with food and video games and frequently had 'hundreds of people still in the building when the church needs to close'.

After a standing ovation, the Bishop of Portsmouth said that while the practicalities of including the voices of young people were complex, it was time to "organise and get serious" about delivery.

Members of Synod warmly thanked the students for their contributions, with many expressing welcome for the intention of the motion to hear their voices more frequently on a range of topics.

The motion approved was as follows:

That this Synod:

- a. welcome the voice of children and young people as part of the church of today and commit to intentionally hearing and responding to their voice on at least one substantive item of business in future groups of sessions, employing a range of presentational activities, including surveys, reports, live presentations and videos
- b. welcome the work being done across the whole church to become 'younger and more diverse' ensuring every child in every parish has access to a flourishing youth, children and families' ministry.'

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