

## GENERAL SYNOD

## PRIVATE MEMBERS MOTION

## Encouraging Youth Evangelism

**Summary**

This paper affirms the importance of evangelism to and with younger people and recognises the good work being done across the Church, but also recognises the urgency the Church faces. The Church of England needs a renewed focus and energy to make evangelism to and with young people a key priority. This paper gives General Synod the opportunity to encourage dioceses and parishes to have the courage to make more resources available for youth evangelism, and to encourage new initiatives to help reach more young people with the good news of Jesus Christ.

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**Affirm the importance of evangelism to and with younger people, recognising that many parishes and fresh expressions of church are doing excellent work with young people.**

1. The Psalmist writes *“we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders He has done”*<sup>1</sup> We affirm that evangelism to and with younger people is important because we yearn that young people know that God loves them and that choosing to follow Jesus is the best thing they can do with their lives.
2. This is not about shoring the church up from decline, it is about communicating the gospel in word and action so young people can hear the good news and respond to it. It is about helping them be the best they can be and helping the church be a place of home and nurture for younger people. Evangelism involves incarnating God’s love into youth culture; helping young people make connections between faith, prayer, scripture and their daily lives. As one young person put it, *“when I came to faith in Christ, life changed from black and white to colour. I saw life in a whole new way”*<sup>2</sup>
3. We recognise that many parishes, cathedrals and fresh expressions of church are engaging with young people in creative ways and are taking steps to reach out to younger people in their local communities. Brilliant youth workers and clergy, along with thousands of committed volunteers, are making a difference. We celebrate this. Good relationships are at the heart of good youth work and this involves listening to young people, loving them and ensuring we provide safe places with excellent safeguarding standards and practice.
4. Synod will know of examples where churches are making a difference in communities, through schools, youth groups, uniformed groups and in many more ways. We know young people are coming to an active faith. There are amazing stories of young people coming to a living faith in Christ and making a difference in their local church communities. This is wonderful and to be encouraged. This motion

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 78:4

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Mark Russell at the Church Army Centre of Mission in Bradford

and this debate however, acknowledges that despite this excellent good work, we know that over half of our parishes have fewer than five young people in them<sup>3</sup>. For many parishes it is simply too scary to start something new to reach young people.

5. Often the best evangelists to young people are young people. Many young people gain the confidence for this through retreats, youth weekends and outreach events, often done ecumenically. This is really important, along with the development of worship which helps young people feel welcome and involved.

### **Commend the work of Diocesan Youth Officers and the staff of the National Church institutions in inspiring the wider Church in youth evangelism.**

6. Across the Church of England, a network of Diocesan Youth Officers keep the challenge of evangelism to and with young people on the agenda of their diocese. They work with parishes and deaneries to mentor and support leaders as they start new things, they produce training resources and they encourage the parish youth workers on their patch. Over recent years a number of these important posts have been cut, and those that remain often have more to do, with less resource. This debate gives the Synod an opportunity to thank this network of people for their hard work across the Church of England, and thank Mary Hawes, the National Children and Youth Adviser for her work in resourcing this network.
7. The Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group made evangelism with younger people one of its six priorities and, flowing from that the Archbishops asked the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham to become the Bishop for Evangelism To and With Younger People. Jimmy Dale was also appointed as the National Youth Evangelism Officer, sitting within the new Evangelism and Discipleship Team of the Archbishops' Council. This is good news, and this debate gives the Synod a chance to welcome these appointments which strengthen our national church commitment to resource evangelism to and with younger people.
8. Over recent years our NCI staff have worked on a series of exciting new initiatives in youth evangelism, in particular *Mission Academies* and *Mission Academy Live*; a partnership between the Church of England and a number of other leading charities, such as Youth for Christ, Scripture Union, Soul Survivor and Church Army. Within this initiative young people work through 10 interactive sessions which inspire them to pray for their friends to come to faith and helps give them the confidence to share their faith with these friends. These initiatives are enabling and inspiring thousands of young people to share their faith with their friends.
9. Encouraging evangelism with younger people needs to be a priority in every area of the church's life. Many of our clergy and lay ministers are not trained in children's and youth work; if evangelism with younger people is optional in training, it ought not to surprise us that many see it as optional in ministry. Our clergy need training in the spirituality of younger people and how to engage younger people with faith.

### **Support dioceses in investing resources to create more youth ministry posts across the Church**

10. The Anecdote to Evidence report shows that churches that employ children and youth worker posts increase engagement with younger people and are more likely

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<sup>3</sup> Anecdote to Evidence report

to grow.<sup>4</sup> However, often these posts are in areas where parishes can afford them. This motion encourages dioceses to strategically allocate resources to encourage the appointment of youth workers in areas where existing parishes haven't got the financial resources to make such an appointment. Synod members are encouraged to study the pioneering work of the Diocese of Sheffield Centenary Project, using some reserves to pump prime a fund to support youth work in parts of the diocese where they struggle to reach younger people.<sup>5</sup>

11. This motion encourages dioceses to make more youth work appointments, but these new posts should be paid a decent wage, have job security, training opportunities and proper terms and conditions. We should encourage the development of youth work as a vocation in its own right, rather than see these posts as stepping stones for ordination. Youth Workers need to be supported professionally and spiritually.

### **Encourage dioceses and parishes to consider fresh ways to reach young people with the good news of Jesus Christ and to nurture them as Christian disciples**

12. Look around many congregations on a Sunday and you immediately see the average age of worshippers looks high, and children and young people are often conspicuous by their absence. Statistics tell us that our churches are often not reaching or discipling young people and that those we do have connections with are leaving in alarming numbers. As Anecdote to Evidence put it, *"it is clear that engaging young people...is crucial. Evidence shows that those who belong in their 20s will probably stay for the rest of their lives – but if they don't, it will be hard to bring them in"*<sup>6</sup>
13. Whilst we recognise that we shouldn't be driven by a sense of fear or anxiety, we need to be very clear. The future health of the Church of England depends on a renewed sense of urgency to engage with children and young people. Often parishes are anxious to try something new because they fear they might fail, or they haven't the right premises or people. Yet, Church Army research on what is effective for evangelism with young adults concluded *"it is not as difficult as you think"*.<sup>7</sup> The same is often true for evangelism with young people. In rural areas the traditional youth club can often be effective in providing safe places for young people to build relationships and explore faith.
14. Prayer is critical. When we pray about things, we care about things. When churches pray for young people they become more concerned with serving young people. At the same time, young people find prayer an accessible way to begin to explore faith. Creative prayer movements such as 24-7 and Taize have found prayer to be deeply evangelistic for young people.
15. Transformation in our church is unlikely to be through a few big exciting projects. Wonderful as they are, transformation comes when most of our parishes attempt to do new things to reach younger people. These small actions together will make a big event. The Archbishops Evangelism Task Group Report to Synod in 2016 encouraged deaneries to take a lead in developing Mission Action Plans for

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<sup>4</sup> Anecdote to Evidence page 26

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/centenary-project>

<sup>6</sup> Anecdote to Evidence page 26

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.churcharmy.org/youngadultsresearch>

reaching young people. This would allow parishes to partner with resources, spot needs, work with schools and develop new fresh expression of church. The Diocese of Carlisle is doing interesting work growing new network churches for young people.

16. Young people are often idealistic, passionate and radical. A recent DEMOS report shows that young people want to make a difference and want to change the world.<sup>8</sup> Churches can engage young people in this work, helping them make connections to the teaching of Jesus Christ.
17. As dioceses and parishes do new things to share God's love with young people we need to ensure that all those working with young people are trained appropriately, DBS checked, and operate in an accountable way in accordance with the Church of England safeguarding policy. It is critical that safeguarding is at the forefront of all we do.

### **Synod has said good things before, now it is time to act**

18. In 1996 the General Synod approved the report *Youth A Part*, it began with this quote, and it seems the right place to finish this paper.

*The vision is for a Church which takes young people seriously. It is a church where young people fully and actively participate at every level...It is a Church where there is a good theological understanding of why and how it goes about its work with young people. It is a Church which recognises that work of this quality needs resources and has the faith and courage to commit significant resources to the young people in the Church<sup>9</sup>*

19. Let's make evangelism to and with younger people a priority at every level of Church life in the years ahead. In doing so, not only will we see the Church grow, but more importantly, we will help build the Kingdom of God in this land in a whole new way.

Canon Mark Russell

General Synod (Sheffield 408)

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<sup>8</sup> Demos "Introducing Generation Citizen"

<sup>9</sup> Youth A Part, General Synod 1996