

LISTENING & RESPONDING TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Reporting back on Network Meeting 2

18th Oct 2022

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS (FEEDING BACK FROM OUR HOMEWORK)



"If we take Jesus at his word that the Kingdom of God belongs to the child and the child-like, then unconscious or consciously ignoring their prophetic insight, and failing to respond to the work of the Spirit in them is risky and foolish."

"God's Kingdom is for all and everyone in his Kingdom has a valuable voice and representation"

"The Church should listen to young people's opinions because Jesus came for everyone and we are one body through Jesus Christ".

*"I asked my Sunday School about theology and they said: 'Jesus said Love God and love others and we are the others.'" **Why do you think the church should listen to children and young people?***

TODAY'S BIG QUESTION



In our own contexts, how will we make the conditions right to hear from children and young people?

WE ARE TRYING TO ENSURE THAT...

- At local, diocesan and national level, the church hears from a range of young people who are representative of the demographic as a whole.
- There is a church-wide culture where young people are valued as spiritual beings who hear from God, are active agents in the faith, and co-creators of faith traditions and the future of the church.
- Diocesan synods, bishops' councils and PCCs and other arenas are spaces in which young people are valued, respected and whose questions and comments are engaged with in love.
- The church responds prayerfully, humbly and robustly to the voices of young brothers and sisters in Christ, leading to meaningful outcomes.

WHAT WILL THIS NETWORK LEAD TO?

As a network we have scheduled 4 initial meetings in order to think, pray, share and collaborate on how we can address the imbalance in the way children and young people are included in the life of the church.

By the end of this year, we will we each have done some significant thinking and taken action in our own contexts, and we also expect that sub-groups or streams will have emerged which have a specific focus and action plan for 2023.

One such group is already working hard:

- Bishop Paul of Durham is working with a group of members of the General Synod in collaboration with this network and others to facilitate the inclusion of children and young people's voices in the preparatory materials and debates at Synod.

BIBLE REFLECTION....

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by". Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

1 Kings 19:11-13

Shared by Owen Green

WE HEARD FROM...



6 YOUNG PEOPLE ON WHAT LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REALLY MEANS.

"It means you say yes....But sometimes you don't say yes....you just keep talking to the other person that you're talking to"

(age 4)

"The Bible says, a house divided against itself cannot stand. If you're pushing young people out the way...the church will crumble..." (age 12)

"It's easier to talk about the big issues with people who do the small stuff with you all the time...I feel more comfortable with people who know me and love me and do cool stuff with me" (age 11)

"Sometime I can read 20 or 30 pages of a book and not understand it....because I'm reading with my eyes and not with my brain. That also can happen in the church. It feels like they're listening but they're not understanding you or they're not hearing you" (age 13)

"It's never a must, that you must agree, but we are here to contribute, whether you agree or otherwise" (age 18)

"Sticking 'children and young people' to the end of this question is making it more complicated than it has to be. It should be just like any other conversation" (age 18)

"It means giving time for the young person to explain what they think. Even if the young person is bringing a new idea or a problem that the church hasn't explored before, the church is still willing to hear what they have to say" (age 13)

"I am very passionate about nature. I took this to my church and they encouraged me to share it with them and to teach them what it says in the Bible about creation. From there, as a church we now support the Wildlife Trust financially. I believe this is what being heard by a church is to a young person" (age 13)

"A lot of people just listen and don't take things into action....In the church, if you don't take things from younger people - who will be the next generation - the church will fall. (age 12)

What do you think it looks like when the church listens to children and young people?

FEEDING BACK TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS...

We write to the young people who have contributed to the network meetings, thanking them for their input, describing some of the discussions that their videos simulated, and keeping them up to date with the work of this network. It's very important to us that when young people have given of themselves, we enter into dialogue and are accountable to them. If any of our contributors (young or older!) particularly impacted you, please do email hannah.persaud@churchofengland.org - we would love to pass your encouragements and gratitude on.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...



Bola-Alysia Ayonrinde who is the National Lead for Racial Justice at the Church of England Education Office

Hannah Chukwu who is an Editor at Penguin Random House UK, and a Trustee at education equality charity The Brilliant Club - where she chairs their youth advisory board, the Experience Experts Panel.

Matt Long whose thinking has been really important in the pre-planning of this network - Matt is the Youth Engagement & Intergenerational Communities Enabler in the Diocese of Leicester

The Right Reverend Jonathan Frost became the Bishop of Portsmouth in January this year and is passionate about children and young people. Bishop Jonathan has been supporting us in the planning stages of this network and has been praying for us all since before we started meeting.

These four wise, kind and passionate people all work in very different contexts. They each shared what they are doing to make the conditions right to hear from children and young people - those with a voice and those without.

We then discussed in small groups, what our personal areas of influence are, and how we can make the conditions right in our own contexts for hearing from a range of children and young people.

How could the conditions to hearing from children and young people be improved in your context?

PRAYER

Bola-Alysia Ayonrinde is the National Education Lead for Racial Justice and she works in the Education Office at the Church of England. She prayed this beautiful prayer for us.



Dear Lord,

We thank you for this time where we have shared fellowship, knowledge, wisdom and humility.

We thank you for the contributions today, all of which are truly valued, appreciated and fundamental to this important work.

As we leave this session today, please help us to remember the importance of listening to our young people.

Listening without interruption, so that we create a safe environment.

Listening without judgement, so that we create a culture and space of empathy.

Listening with discernment, so that those who may not be able to articulate as they intend or may not be as loud as others are still heard.

Listening without the need to hear words, but to cherish the uniqueness of all our children and young people.

As we respond, please help us to do this with self-awareness. Self-awareness which will allow us not to respond with our initial thoughts, but rather to reconsider and evaluate what we see and perceive.

Through our listening and responding, please help us to encourage our children and young people to let their light shine.

In Your Name,
Amen

NEWS....

Stephen Beamond (Programmes Lead) is developing a Strategic Leaders' Programme for professional development of leaders and aspiring leaders in the Growing Faith spheres. Stephen.Beamond@churchofengland.org

Cheryl Govier (Partnerships Lead) has opened applications for Growing Faith Hubs - centres of learning where schools and churches are resourced to further embed creative practices that build the partnership between school, church and home. Cheryl.Govier@churchofengland.org for info.

You are warmly invited to the Church of England Foundation for Education Leadership National Conference on January 23rd - check out the webpage for details of the fantastic range of keynote speakers, practical workshops, networking and collaboration opportunities!

OUR HOMEWORK

It's important to us that we work on this issue practically between meetings. This month, we are each going to draw up a collaborative plan. We will be asking ourselves these questions: **How can I, in my own context, make the conditions right to hear from a representative range of children and young people? Who do I need to work with? What feedback do I need from children, young people or parents on this? What difference could it make? We will share our plans when we get back together next month.**



REFLECT

We listened to this song together for a time of reflection as we committed to doing this homework, and asked God to guide us.

Could you listen to this song and pray for the church?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sue Mitchell (Diocese of Liverpool) has kindly shared some work she did with UNICEF and the WCC a few years ago. *"I was invited to help develop "The churches' commitments to children" document which resulted in a big assembly in Geneva (I still feel very humbled and blessed to have been a part of it)"*

Below are the links to the parts of the document which Sue has highlighted as being of particular relevance to this network.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/churches-commitments-to-children>

<https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/wccs-engagement-for-children#resources>

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/engaging-children/youth-in-the-implementation-of-the-churches-commitments-to-children>

Emma Anderton (Diocese of Chelmsford) recommends the brilliant Learn To Listen website which has some suggestions for ways to listen to young people and children and to include them in decision making: <https://www.learn-to-listen.org.uk/>

NEXT MONTH...

Our big questions will be: How do we RESPOND to children and young people? What do we need to learn? What do we need to do in order to move forward together?



GET IN TOUCH!

Hannah Persaud is the Networks Lead at the Growing Faith Foundation. She facilitates this network. Hannah would love to hear from you! Hannah.Persaud@churchofengland.org