

GENERAL SYNOD

Welcoming Younger People into the Heart of Decision-Making?**Summary**

The dissolution of the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC) has been noted by a number of young people who feel that they are not included or valued in the whole life of the Church.

This is unfortunate given our commitment to become "Younger and more diverse". This background paper includes material written by young people, and other supporting references for the Private Members Motion which calls for the creation of a Church of England Youth Synod (CEYS).

Motion

'That this Synod:

- (a) acknowledge the national strategy to 'grow younger and more diverse'
- (b) take note of the report 'Rooted in the Church' (2016) which observes that young adults feel a sense of belonging if they i) are included within the whole church family, ii) are treated as equal members of the church, iii) are supported by leaders who act as bridges or mentors, and iv) are given a safe space to ask questions;
- (c) re-affirm the importance of having young adults directly involved in decision-making and strategy;
- (d) recognise the valuable contributions made by members of the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC);

and therefore call on the Archbishops' Council to:

- (e) establish the Church of England Youth Synod (CEYS) or similar, to replace the recently disbanded Church of England Youth Council (CEYC), as a meeting of young Anglicans between the ages of 18 and 25 who meet prior to each meeting of General Synod to discuss and debate the motions of General Synod;
- (f) invite each Diocesan Synod to nominate two young adults as members of both their local Diocesan Synod and the Church of England Youth Synod;
- (g) arrange for the co-option of 5 young adults elected by the Youth Synod as members of General Synod with the right to speak and vote;
- (h) appoint a part-time post with responsibility for democratic engagement with young people;
- (i) ensure that a sufficient budget is made available to support the work of the Youth Synod; and
- (j) ensure that the Youth Synod has representation on the Archbishops' Council by co-opting a member of the Youth Synod as a member of Archbishops' Council.'

A Letter to the Church Times

- 1) In July 2023, an anonymous young person wrote a letter to the Church Times. A few members of General Synod were able to speak to her, and to other former members of CEYC. These conversations shaped the creation of the Private Members Motion.

"I grew up in the Church of England, and remember a big children's programme, youth group, and choir during the week, and a children's group during services.

All of this I actively took part in and enjoyed: it was an integral part of my upbringing. As I became a teenager, however, the provision decreased...

Outside of the C of E, I found other young adults through other Christian organisations, but felt myself being distanced from church, because I didn't see myself reflected in congregations. Speaking to friends in other denominations, I felt disgruntled with the difference between their teenage experiences and mine. My friends in the Methodist Church attended a youth conference every year, taking part in discussions, sending the young people's perspective to the main church conference, which was read and acted upon, and having prominent parts to play within the church body as a whole, as part of a series of youth reps...

Recently, I attended the SCM National Gathering, and had a wonderful weekend. I was sitting around one evening with friends from the C of E, and a couple of people from other denominations, and we got on to the topic of feeling included in the Church, both locally and nationally. All of us present from the C of E discussed that we did not feel represented, seen, or prioritised in the Church, and had contemplated moving away to other denominations where the young people were more included.

If I have children, I want them to have the experiences that I missed out on in my teenage years. I don't want to leave; I grew up in the C of E, I feel happy in the church buildings, and I enjoy the liturgy. But, if it keeps going the way it is, where many young people are excluded and their activities are underfunded, I will have to. And then what will become of the C of E..”

Excerpts from the letter to the Church Times, July 2022

Youth Involvement in other Denominations

- 2) Many of our partners report the positive impact of higher involvement from young people.
 - a) **The Methodist Church:** The Methodist Church has an annual youth conference called 3Generate. There are 3 Conference reps aged 16-23, and 1 Council rep aged 18-23.
 - b) **The Church of Scotland:** The Church of Scotland currently has four youth reps per presbytery, aged between 18 and 25. These reps can speak but not vote. They previously had a Youth Assembly which was significant in the development of young leaders.
 - c) **The United Reformed Church:** The URC has a separate Youth Assembly for under 25s which has a high profile and positive engagement with the life of the Church.

Youth Involvement in British Politics

- 3) General Synod prides itself on our democratic model and good practice. There are a number of political models which we could learn from:
 - a) **Youth Parliament:** There is a UK Youth Parliament organised by the Youth Council with 369 members who are elected to represent their local area. Members engage with MPs and service providers.
 - b) **Young Conservatives:** The youth (under 25s) wing of the Conservative Party has nurtured many future leaders.
 - c) **Young Labour:** The Labour Party has a youth (14-26) wing with an annual conference.

- d) **Young Liberals:** The Liberal Democratic Party has an organisation for students and under 25s which provides two conferences per year plus support for new leaders.
- e) **Citizens UK:** Many dioceses have active partnerships with Citizens UK which provides training and support for young people and opportunities to engage with those in power.

Key Policies and Reports

- 4) We have already indicated the need for greater involvement of young people at the heart of our decision-making, for example:
 - a) The current *'Priorities for the Church of England'* call for a Church that is 'younger and more diverse' with an understanding that this is about discipleship not merely attendance.
 - b) *'Rooted in the Church'* (2016) which observes that young adults feel a sense of belonging if they i) are included within the whole church family, ii) are treated as equal members of the church, iii) are supported by leaders who act as bridges or mentors, and iv) are given a safe space to ask questions.
 - c) 'Youth and Children Growth Research' (GS2161 2020) noted that i) growth is the result of intentional choices, ii) 'Perceptions of the church need to be tackled head on and involving young people in the discussion can help'.
 - d) *'Love Matters'* (2023) notes that we need to 'empower children and young people' and involve them in decisions about their future.

Issues for the Debate

- 5) Those who helped prepare the motion and this accompanying paper, were keen to initiate a debate about the inclusion of young people in the decision-making processes of the Church of England. We recognise that the Private Members Motion is not perfect, and there may need to be amendments. We are very open to this. These are some of the issues that may need to be addressed:
 - a) **Safeguarding:** It is absolutely essential that whatever we do puts the safety and well-being of young people at the centre. What can we do to ensure that this happens?
 - b) **Age Range:** We have focussed our proposal on 18-25 year olds, partly because of safeguarding concerns, but also because of consequent staff costs. It would be good to involve a wider age range, but the implications would need to be managed.
 - c) **Model:** Do we need a separate Synod, a parallel body or increased youth representation in General Synod? There are other models but we need one that works best for us.
 - d) **Voting Rights:** It is great when young people are given a chance to speak, but this can feel patronising and disempowering if there is no right to vote. How do we ensure that young people are not treated as second rate members?
 - e) **Appointment Process:** We have suggested appointments through Diocesan Synods. Is this the correct approach?
 - f) **Ecumenical Synod:** Given the parallel movements in other denominations, could we commit to work with others in a UK Youth Synod?

Revd Tim Norwood

June, 2023