

General Synod Motion on Youth Synod and Children's Voices: Update from Archbishop's Council and Business Committee

Introduction

1. The July sessions of General Synod passed a private member's motion calling for the development of children and young people and young adult voices in the life of Synod and Archbishops' Council. The motion as amended is attached at Appendix 1.
2. This motion comes in the light of the 2019 decision of the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC) to disband and the realisation that Synod did not elect any significant numbers of young adults in the 2021 elections.
3. The motion recognised and commended the determination of Archbishops' Council to prioritise ministry with children and young people and to be proactive about hearing the voice of children and young people in its own deliberations.

Overview

4. The main elements of the motion that require action are as follows:
 - A. Tasks for Business Committee**
 1. Seek to enable greater numbers of young adults be elected to Synod
 2. Enable the voices of children, youth and young adults to be heard within the debates of General Synod
 - B. Tasks for Archbishops' Council**
 1. Establish a regular national young adults gathering, funded for year 1 and explore funding for future
 2. Appoint 3 young adults to attend Synod

Whilst area A(2) is a matter for the Business Committee, it mirrors the Archbishops' Council's own aspirations in this area. At the September 2023 Archbishops' Council meeting it was agreed that the Council and the Business Committee should work together on this.

5. This short GS Misc provides an update on progress and thinking so far.

6. Business Committee Tasks

- A.1 The Business Committee has limited power in enabling more young people to be elected to Synod. It will however try and work with the Synod Office, the Communications Office and Dioceses to encourage young people to stand for election.

The Business Committee believes that continuing to make Synod more accessible, for example trialling a London synod over a weekend, will assist in encouraging young people to stand.

- A.2. The Business Committee will explore how voices of children, youth and young adults can be heard within the debates of General Synod. It has agreed to seek advice from Youth Practitioner Organisations, as well as Synod members. Synod members themselves may well be expected to play a part in this, bringing the younger voice in their Dioceses to the General Synod. In addition, the Business Committee will work closely with the National Society team (who will be acting at the request of Archbishops' Council) to enable well planned and presented inputs from children and young people to become a regular feature of Synod. This will include commissioning the National Younger Leadership Groups to undertake young voice work on a range of issues that are expected to be debated at future Synods. A detailed timeline for this will be constructed together.

7. Archbishops' Council Tasks

- A.2. At its September 2023 meeting, the Archbishops' Council agreed to annual funding of £65k to support and enable this work. This work will be undertaken by members of the National Society team (including both current members of the Archbishops' Young Leaders Award team, and the development of further new capacity), in close partnership with the Business Committee. The first portion of this funding (£35k) will enable the ongoing leadership of the National Younger Leadership Groups with a continued increase of members (through both schools and churches) in dialogue with each diocese. These groups will be consulted on a range of topics, enabling children's and young people's voices to be heard in key Synod debates going forward. This will involve up to 500 children and young people (aged 5-18) being part of this work in 2024. Furthermore, the National Younger Leadership Group team will establish models of best practice and a short training programme for each diocese to enable its leaders and Synod to better hear voice of children and young people in their own decision making.
- B.1. The second portion of the funding (£30k) will be used to develop national gatherings for young adults. While the ambition to host a face-to-face gathering each year was warmly welcomed in principle, the Council agreed to develop this work through a series of three online gatherings involving any dioceses wanting to take part in 2024. This would enable the more secure building of a movement of young adults, ahead of planning a full face-to-face young adults gathering in 2025.
- B.2. As part of this work, a number of young adults would be enabled to attend each Synod, and the National Society will work closely with the Business Committee to plan how this engagement can become systematic and productive for those taking part. The detail of how many young adults this will involve, and the nature of their attendance will be discussed with those taking part in the online gatherings and then enacted accordingly.

Appendix 1

SPECIAL AGENDA III: PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTION

CHURCH OF ENGLAND YOUTH SYNOD (GS 2298A and GS 2298B)

Final approved 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);
- e. request the Business Committee to bring a report to Synod with recommendations that increase the voice and representation of young people within Synodical bodies and through Synod elections and detailing how the above has progressed enabling children and young people's opinions and concerns to be heard;
- f. recognise the role played by children and young people in the development of the Church of England Vision and Strategy;
- g. values the work being undertaken through the Growing Faith Foundation to listen to the voices of children, young people and young adults;

and therefore call on each diocese to work alongside Children, Youth and Family advisors and practitioners to develop ways of ensuring that children, youth and young adult voices are heard within their decision making processes; and actively involve them in decision making;

- h. request the Business Committee to bring forward proposals, including legislation if necessary that:
 - i. seek to enable greater numbers of young adults be elected to General Synod;
 - ii. enable the voices of children, youth and young adults be heard within the debates of General Synod
- i. encourage each General Synod member to work with Children, youth and Family advisors and practitioners to listen to the voice of children, youth and young adults in their preparation for each meeting of General Synod.
- j. request the Archbishops' Council to:
 - i. ensure that all policies seek to ensure that they contribute to fulfilling the vision of being a younger and more diverse church;
 - ii. develop ways whereby the voices of children, youth and young adults are fed into their discussions and decision making processes;

- k. call on the Archbishops' Council to establish a regular Church of England National Young Adults Gathering (name to be determined) which will enable young Anglicans between the ages of 18 and 25 to:
 - i. meet together for worship, prayer and fellowship,
 - ii. engage with and discuss issues identified as being important by young adults themselves, and
 - iii. relate to decision-making structures including Dioceses, General Synod and Archbishops Council;
- l. request to the Archbishops' Council that funding be found from within the budget for a first such national gathering whilst exploring provision of longer term funding;
- m. call on the Archbishops' Council to appoint three young adults to attend General Synod in accordance with Standing Orders