

GENERAL SYNOD

Encouraging Youth Evangelism

Summary

In Matthew 9:37, Jesus says to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few". Never has this been more true than the Church's present engagement with young people and specifically with regards to youth evangelism. The good news is that we have a generation of young people who, as research has shown, are open to faith in a way we have not seen before. Yet as a church, we continue to struggle to engage with this generation, as we help them to explore with what it means to follow Jesus in the 21st century.

Current engagement with young people

1. Our engagement with young people within our Sunday worshiping communities is currently very limited. The majority of churches have no, or very few people under 16.

According to the 2017 Statistics for Mission Returns (based on 10,540 single church returns) when looking at the average Child (under 16) Sunday attendance (October 2016, including Sunday church services and fresh expressions of Church, but not including services for schools):

- 36.1% (3810) of our churches have no-one under the age of 16
- 65.6% (6910) of our churches have less than 5 children or young people under the age of 16*
- Only 30 (0.28%) of our churches had more than 100 u16's
- Only 170 (1.61%) of our churches had more than 50 u16's*
- Only 680 (6.45%) of our churches have more than 25 u16's*

* These figures are inclusive of previous statistics (i.e. 29.5% have between 1 and 5 u16's and the 65.6% statistic is inclusive of the 36.2%)

It is important to note that this is 0-16 rather than 11-16's so will include infants and families.

2. In 2017 the Youth Evangelism Officer, with help from the statistics department and the DYO network, did an overview of where there were employed people working in some capacity with 11-18 year olds. We found that there were only around 700 employed workers across the whole Church of England, with an additional 120+ currently in vacancy

There are numerous factors that contribute to this low number of youth workers including a decline in funding, the drive for younger vocations for ordination, a shift in gap year culture and the closure or downsizing of many of the youth work training institutions.

There is a dramatic need as Mark Russell points out in paragraph 11 to:

encourage 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.

Where this is being addressed

In January 2018 the newly formed Evangelism and Discipleship Team was formed This builds on the motion agreed by Synod in *National Support for Local Churches, Report from the Archbishops' Council (GS2069)*. GS2118 outlines the operational priorities of the Team. The third priority is to see the church 'prioritise children and young people in and for evangelism and discipleship'. As suggested in GS 2118, much of the outworking of this priority will fall under the remit of the work of the National Youth Evangelism Officer.

Examples of what is already being done to help promote and resource youth evangelism

Within the work of the Youth Evangelism Advisor role who 'promotes and resources youth evangelism across the Church of England', there are 3 key streams that are being addressed:

1. Encouraging and resourcing young people to be confident in sharing their faith
2. Encouraging and resourcing youth workers and churches to be confident in sharing faith with young people
3. Encouraging and resourcing Diocese to think about evangelism and discipleship with young people

These three streams outwork in a variety of ways with eight of the key outworkings detailed below.

1. Talking Jesus Youth

Talking Jesus Youth was a large piece of research conducted at the beginning of 2017 as a follow up to the 'Talking Jesus' research of 2016. Conducted by ComRes with 2000 young people aged 11-18, this research highlighted the disparity between what is possibly the most open generation to exploring faith and a generation of Christian young people who are scared and unequipped to share their faith. It also highlighted the current limited reach of the Church. 45% of young people in England said they don't know anyone who is a Christian.

2. Mission Academy Live

Mission Academy Live is an online, ten session, video series that helps young people to confidently share their faith. Launched in 2017, this resource was created ecumenically by the Hope Revolution Partnership (Church of England, Hope Revolution, Scripture Union, Youth For Christ, Alpha, The Message Trust, Limitless Elim and Pais Movement.) The resource is available at www.hopetogether.org.uk/malive_ and has been used by over 500 churches

3. Amplify & Advance 2020

Amplify is an ecumenical project and sits within the Advance 2020 initiative.

Advance 2020 seeks to identify a large number of young people as evangelists. It helps to explore what this means and how these people can be released for a year of intentional mission throughout 2020. This is part of the Evangelism and Discipleship Team's wider vision to identify and release 1000 new evangelists by 2027.

Amplify, the youth arm of Advance 2020, is being run by the Hope Revolution Partnership and is a year long intensive mentorship scheme for 60-100 young people, aged 11-18 who are particularly gifted in evangelism. This will result in 180-300 young people being trained and equipped as peer to peer evangelists by 2021.

4. Youth Worker Vanguard

Around 700 youth workers have been identified who are employed by churches across the Church of England. The aim is to establish a group of around 30-40 of these youth workers from across the Church of England. These youth workers will be selected from some of the biggest, fastest growing and most innovative youth ministries in the Church of England. Through meeting together, the intention is that this group will become the innovation hub out of which new resources and support are established, developed and rolled out for the wider benefit and resource of the church.

5. Youth Focused Churches

We have been working with a number of dioceses helping them develop plans to establish multigenerational church plants that will have a missional focus on reaching unchurched young people. Each diocese will seek funding as part of their SDF funding stream. We currently have 4 dioceses who are engaging in the idea, although targets are largely set by dioceses internally.

Additionally Malcolm Macnaughton and John Day, part of the Archbishop of York's staff, have helped co-ordinate the initial formation of the Missional Youth Church Network (MYCN). In partnership with the ABY Youth Trust, this initiative encourages dioceses in the Northern Province to look at new ways of engaging with young people and explore fresh ways of creating church.

Both of these are related to the practical outworking of Mark Russell's point that we should be:

Encouraging 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

6. Learning Communities

Presently much of the main growth in youth work is largely in urban, evangelical churches. Therefore it is planned to establish Learning Communities to address increased engagement around youth evangelism with rural based, BAME and Anglo Catholic young people and churches

7. Youth Evangelism Conference

The Youth Evangelism Conference is a one-day conference that seeks to equip and empower leaders in evangelism, with and to young people. The YEC is a partnership of Church of England, Hope Revolution, Scripture Union, Youth For Christ, Alpha, Limitless Elim, and Pais Movement. The conference is run across 2 sites, one in the south

(Cambridge) and one in the north (Preston) and in 2017 had attendance of 315 at the Southern event and 110 at the northern event

8. Growing Faith Initiative

The House of Bishops' work on 'Growing Faith', which is commended to the Synod in paper GS 2121 will bring together all aspects of work with young people, in churches, in schools, and in families and households. The paper outlines the ways in which churches, schools and families can be encouraged to work better together, each supporting the other, and with all parts of the Church fully engaged to, to develop and sustain Christian faith among more children and young people.

William Nye
Secretary General
January 2019

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
© The Archbishops' Council 2019**