

GENERAL SYNOD 2018

Church of Ireland Youth Department Report

Proposer: Mr Simon Henry

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Last year as I stood here, I asked the Synod to bear with me as I spoke, as I had just had braces fitted the week before. Someone, who will remain anonymous, said to me afterwards: “It’s as well you explained that you had braces on – some people might have thought you had been at the bar for a while.” The braces are still on for now, and rest assured, I haven’t been near the bar today.

The mission of the Church of Ireland Youth Department is to work with our dioceses, parishes and others in partnership to see young people come to faith and be disciplined into the Church. That’s our end goal, to see young people become disciples and for them to make disciples.

It has been a busy and exciting year for CIYD since I last stood before the Synod and I do want to thank the tremendous hard work of my colleagues, Steve Grasham and Barbara Swann, who I would be lost without. Thanks also for the constant support of our President, Bishop Pat, Chairman, Malcolm Kingston, and all the members of our Executive Committee and Central Board who are always helpful, encouraging and who beyond the call of duty to help facilitate the work of CIYD across Ireland. We are very grateful for the funding that comes in from Allocations and the Irish Government and we are certain that we are using the resources wisely to return much more back into society.

Young people from throughout the Church of Ireland converged on the City North Hotel, near Dublin, on a rainy Saturday in January for CIYD’s Church of Ireland Youth Forum. The forum was attended by young people and youth leaders from almost every diocese. We were grateful that we had Archbishop Richard with us that day to launch the event.

Throughout the day young people debated issues affecting them and we looked at ways of encouraging and supporting youth participation. We looked at ways of facilitating change and taking action, as well as how young people can be supported on their spiritual journeys.

We debated a number of questions looking at what is good about young people getting together and what makes it harder or easier for that to happen. We talked about the big issues of concern for young people and about their priorities. The young people looked at their own spiritual journeys and what they had found exciting and inspiring, difficult and helpful and what they gained from being part of a church community.

As the forum drew to a close the young diocesan representatives spoke about what they would like to see for their own parish. And folks we all really need to listen to what this cross section of young people said, no matter what corner of Ireland they were from, there were similar themes emerging from their feedback.

Among their aspirations were greater involvement of young people in church services, a 'church beyond walls' through outreach and further engagement with their community, welcome for groups on the fringes, increased support for youth groups, to improve spiritual disciplines, all-age sermons, greater use of technology, and more leadership opportunities for young people in church.

I, on behalf of CIYD, on behalf of the young people we engaged with at the Youth Forum, am asking you as bishops, clergy, leaders and influencers in your parish and dioceses to get behind young people and give them more opportunities within your parish and your diocese. A simple way to start this would be having a regular youth-led service, with strong leadership and input from young people in shaping it. CIYD, and local diocesan youth officers and youth councils, would love to help you achieve this.

We have to remember that Church is no longer at the centre of many of our communities. Young people inhabit a world that is increasingly pluralistic and morally relative. Yet, they are more than ready to hear about Jesus Christ. They are more than ready to give him their life and take those first steps into discipleship. It is vital that we do everything we can to direct young people towards God and to help them develop their faith and provide opportunities and not barriers.

Young people and children are often not taken seriously either in society generally or in Church. In the community young people are often perceived as a problem to be dealt with, or resented, and in church they may only be valued as 'the Church of the future' rather than the Church of the present. It is always worth considering how young people can gain a higher profile both in church and in the wider community.

It must be remembered that Christian young people are of equal value to adult Christians. The Church has much to gain from all they have to offer. I commend this report to you today and ask for you to kindly receive it.