

Church of Ireland Youth Department Report

Proposer – Bishop Pat Storey

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Archbishop, members of Synod, it doesn't take much of a stretch of the imagination to recognise how difficult this 18 months has been for everyone, but particularly for our young people. They have felt isolated without the company of their friends, robbed of their early university years, and devoid of the fellowship of their churches and youth groups. As President of the Church of Ireland Youth Department, I have also witnessed the isolation and helplessness of staff, diocesan youth officers, and volunteer youth leaders around the whole island. Youth ministry, due to government regulations, effectively stopped. Along with schools and colleges, young people were confined to home and bereft of peer company. Whilst all of us found the pandemic difficult, some young people found it unbearable and we will be dealing with some residual mental health problems for years to come.

Nevertheless, our staff and youth officers persevered, reinvented the way they communicated with their young people, and went virtual. This was far from ideal, but it was a good way of maintaining contact and fellowship with other young people of faith. It has left our youth officers and leaders in need of rest and recuperation, but they have been exemplary in their delivery of youth ministry in very trying circumstances, and I, as President, want to say a huge thank you to each and every one of them. It hasn't gone unnoticed and it is not taken for granted. Young people will remember that you kept the youth flag virtually flying.

Staff have been busy on what they have been able to do, including putting together a very valuable resource called A Welcoming Church, which addresses ways in which youth ministry can be inclusive of those with particular challenges, including the anxious, the hearing or visually impaired, those with mobility difficulties, those in chronic pain, dyslexia, and many more. The pack gives us tips on how to be more inclusive with those who don't fit into our often thoughtless routines. It is a great addition to the CIYD library.

We continue at this time to open up our youth activities according to government guidelines and we are grateful for all the grants we receive as an organisation to help make youth ministry happen. This includes the RB Allocations Committee, the Education Authorities, the Youth Affairs Department, and a special thanks to the Priorities Fund and the Church Fabric and Parish Development Fund for their grants for our Young Leaders in Ministry Fund. This fund provides training opportunities, at home and abroad, for our young people who want to upskill in youth ministry, or to have an opportunity to serve on a team away from home.

I would like to sincerely thank our staff who have also worked so hard to enable youth ministry to happen virtually in these difficult times: Barbara in the office, and Simon and Steve as our team leaders North and South. I am very nervous of calling either of them Youth Officers for the Republic of Ireland, or youth officers for All Ireland! But whatever they are, we are very grateful for them. The Central Board and executive are to be praised too for continuing to provide governance and guidance through a pandemic.

As we approach our Day of Prayer for young people on Sunday 21st November, I would ask you to continue to pray for our young people and the Church of Ireland's youth ministry. Our young people need to be re-introduced, re-included, and re-invigorated as we re-enter face to face youth ministry and other youth organisations in our churches across the island. I count it a real privilege to be involved in this work and as we work to share our faith with our young people, we remember that they are both the present and the future. We are grateful for their energy, their humour, and their passion. Let's do all we can to encourage and support them as we return to traditional youth ministry.

Archbishop, members of General Synod, I am very happy to propose the Church of Ireland Youth Department Report.