

General Synod 2022

Church of Ireland Youth Department Report

Proposer: Mr Simon Henry

Check Against Delivery · Embargo Until Delivery

Who would have thought in 2019 as I stood before Synod to launch our CIYD Young Leaders in Ministry Fund, what would be ahead for our young people in the few years ahead of them, the youth workers and volunteers across Ireland?

In what has been a turbulent few years for CIYD and youth ministry, I do want to thank the tremendous hard work and dedication of my colleagues Steve Grasham and Barbara Swann, they make me look very very good and I would be lost without them, and they helped keep me sane and focused during the pandemic. I do want to thank also our President Bishop Pat and Chairperson Brigid Barrett who were very encouraging and helpful to me personally and the staff during this time too.

To all the members of our Executive Committee and Central Board who are always helpful, and who have gone beyond the call of duty to help facilitate the work of CIYD across Ireland especially the past few years. We are very grateful for the funding that comes in from Allocations, the Irish Government and the Education Authority in Northern Ireland and we are certain that we are using the resources as wisely as possible.

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.

Make no mistake – there has been a dramatic shift in youth ministry, in young people themselves, in their culture, and of course the church itself. Is crisis too strong a word? I've been pondering this for a while as I speak with many other youth ministry key agencies and workers across the island.

I firmly believe the church finds itself at a crossroads – the long shadow of the past few years impacted youth ministry greatly with youth workers being furloughed, paid off or volunteers completely disappearing in some cases. There is a large scale volunteer crisis across the entire youth sector, in the UK and Ireland – secular, uniformed, church, all of it. The church and its leaders must respond to this – as well as us as individual followers of Jesus, as members of our local parish, and wider as members of the Church of Ireland. Our job is to pass on the faith we have – are we really doing that as a church?

General Synod 2022

Youth ministry is not and should not be a side show of the church, but unfortunately the statistics tell us otherwise. In recent research done across the island of Ireland by our friends at Christ In Youth, some glaring stats were presented. This research was across all denominations and none:

- In Ulster, there is 1 youth worker for every 2,821 young people.
- In Leinster, its 1 youth worker for every 22, 662 young people.
- Connaught its 1 for every 15,577 young people
- And Munster, 1 for every 21,120 young people.

Also, overall in Ireland, para church organisations employ more workers than actual churches do.

Sobering stats here. CIYD as a department employs 2.5 people – now I’m not on this stage to beg for money, and neither should I, but I am saying as a church nationally, as dioceses, we need much much more financial investment in youth ministry and youth workers. We would love our budget to increase to do more, and maybe that is a challenge I present to the church body today, but we would also love to see more local investment in youth ministry too.

I’d like to highlight the launch of our new Strategic Plan 2022-2025 at this year’s Synod– copies are available on your way in today.

We want to do our level best through this Strategic Plan to facilitate and encourage growth in youth ministry where we can, to Equip, Engage and Empower, to resource youth ministry as best we can and to work in partnership with others.

The other thing I would like to highlight is our delayed CIYD Youth Forum which took place just a few weeks ago. The forum was attended by young people and youth leaders from almost every diocese and we were grateful that we had Archbishop Andrew with us that day to launch the event.

“Covid was hard, meeting up again was great”.

“I felt super empty and unfulfilled and lonely”.

“I’ve felt down a lot, but I turned to my faith more and tried my best to keep me and others positive”.

A few quotes from young people who attended.

Bishop Andrew reminded the young people of the story of Zacchaeus and how Jesus drew alongside him in his isolation and encouraged everyone to see themselves as valued and love by God.

During the day our facilitator from the Diocese of Manchester, Ms Susie Mapledoram, encouraged the young people, and their leaders, to think about the highs and lows of the last couple of years, to reflect

General Synod 2022

on the life of Elijah (1 Kings 19) and the need for Rest, Food, Friendship and Being in the presence of God.

From discussions and current research in the youth sector, loneliness is a huge issue for many, there has been an increase in the number of young people feeling lonely, often or all the time. Loneliness can be a tough additional factor on top of feeling anxious or depressed or having mental illness. Once all the young people's thoughts and contributions are collated a more in-depth report will be produced by CIYD.

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.

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.