

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 2013

The National Youth Assembly (NYA) took place on the 16 -19 August 2013 in the West Park Centre, Dundee. There were 111 delegates aged between 17 - 25 years old, all with some connection to the Church.

The NYA is a residential weekend which exists primarily to give young people in the Church of Scotland a voice in decision making at a national level. Alongside this, the weekend allows delegates to gather with other young Christians, build community with each other, learn and worship. The theme for the weekend was "Identity – Who do you say that I am?". The Assembly considered this theme in different contexts; in relation to the Church of Scotland, in relation to Scotland's national identity, and in relation to ourselves as individuals. The Assembly used this theme as the basis for our daily discussions, in worship, in workshops and for reflection.

The NYA is an event which has evolved throughout the years and is continuing to evolve, striving to best serve the young people who attend and explores ways (including supporting existing ways) in which young people have a voice in the Church of Scotland at a national level. Following a consultation and planning weekend with young people in 2012, it was decided that the NYA would move away from its traditional debate format and move toward a more consensual, open forum discussion model. Delegates met daily in their small groups of 8-10 people to discuss issues relating to the theme of Identity and then came together as one big group to share ideas, challenge other points of view and learn from each other. As a result, the NYA did not agree a set of statements as usual. Instead, a summary of the discussions has been prepared which hopefully shows the breadth of opinion within the youth of the Church and shows the depth of our conversations, valuing all of the voices at the Assembly and not simply the majority.

Identity of the Church of Scotland

The first of the daily discussions focussed on the Identity of the Church of Scotland. The catalyst for this discussion came from the consultation weekend where many young people expressed an interest in knowing more about the history of the Church and its structures; to know more about what makes the Church unique. The hope for this discussion was to learn more about the Church of Scotland and to use this knowledge to engage in ecumenical work more effectively with a greater sense of our own identity. The NYA was introduced to this topic by two of its own young people, Nicola Whyte and Andrew Kimmitt, who guided us through some of the Kirk's history, theology and organisational structures. This was an engaging introduction to what may have initially seemed like a daunting topic for some and the NYA was led through this by way of facts, quizzes and even dance! Following this introduction, delegates gathered in small groups to discuss what they thought makes the Church of Scotland unique.

Some aspects of the Kirk that were particularly commented on in the small group discussions were:

- Delegates were positive about the responsibility the Church takes for **caring** for all of the people of Scotland, both through **territorial ministry** and through **CrossReach**.
- The **breadth of worship, theology and people** within the Church was acknowledged. Some delegates had positive experiences where breadth and diversity were welcomed. Conversely some delegates talked of people in Church holding stereotypical views and not being open to other ideas.
- It was acknowledged that the Church can **bring people together**; through community work, outreach, fellowship and mutual encouragement. Some delegates however, felt that some people felt excluded from church communities and that this may be a result of

poor communication and a lack of support.

- Some delegates commented on the strength of the **structures of the Church**; some felt that being part of national events educated them about structures and gave them an appreciation of the work of the wider Church. Others felt that there is a **disconnect** between the local church and the national Church and that local congregations don't know how the national Church works which can often lead to negativity.
- Delegates appreciated the care that the Church shows for its young people; through creating safe spaces to learn, worship and meet people. Delegates appreciated the NYA and local youth projects whilst others worried that NYA was the **only national event for young people under 25** and that not all local churches could provide youth work.
- A striking number of delegates felt that **flexibility** and **diversity** are important broad characteristics of the Kirk and things that set us apart from other denominations.
- Although there was not unanimity in the experiences that delegates recounted, one thing was clear in the discussion: some of the most important parts of our identity are those that we share with all Christians: **following Jesus** and being part of the **body of Christ**.

Many of the young people valued having a space to have this discussion and saw it as an opportunity to learn more about the Kirk from others around them and enjoyed the chance to reflect on the positives of the Church on a local, regional and national level.

Ecumenical Human Library

Following on from the NYA's discussions in relation to the Kirk's identity, an "Ecumenical Human Library" took place where members from other denominations were invited to attend the NYA for the afternoon. Delegates were given the opportunity to learn about other denominations in a relaxed setting through storytelling, question and answer and through sharing. It proved to be the highlight of the weekend for many of the delegates. The NYA is grateful to the members of the Baptist Church, the Salvation Army, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Gate

Christian Fellowship, Vineyard, the Iona Community, the United Reformed Church and Livingston Ecumenical Parish who joined us for the afternoon and shared so openly.

Identity of Scotland

The second daily discussion for the weekend focussed on the Identity of Scotland. We were led through this topic by the Church and Society Council who facilitated their participative discussion process "Imagining Scotland's Future". The outcomes from this event were used together with the outcomes from other events around Scotland run by the Church and Society Council to form part of the "Imagining Scotland's Future" report which was launched in February.

The focus for the discussion was determining what the delegates of the NYA wanted the future of Scotland to look like. Conversation focussed on delegates' values, experiences and visions. As a large and diverse group of people, a broad range of different responses were gathered and the discussions were exciting and varied. There were several main themes which came out of the discussion and these give some indication of what is important to the NYA when thinking about the future of Scotland, whatever the outcome of the Scottish independence referendum.

In the past, the NYA has continually spoken out in favour of campaigns which seek to end discrimination and it is therefore of little surprise that at this year's Assembly, a common theme for the NYA was seeing a Scotland that is **free from discrimination**. Delegates discussed how important it is that Scotland is a welcoming country to all particularly in a continually developing and increasingly multi-cultural society. One of the small groups stated: *"We believe that Scotland should be free from fear and discrimination and should celebrate diversity through community, education, the arts and sport."*

One word which continually appeared throughout the discussion of the Assembly was **equality**. This word was particularly prominent in discussions surrounding **education**. Delegates of the Assembly were particularly

keen to see a fair, ethical and lifelong education system in Scotland's future. There was broad agreement that one of the best means of supporting diversity, immigration, tolerance and positive attitudes that challenges stigma is through comprehensive education which is **accessible to all**.

Some of our delegates got creative, using poetry to summarise their thoughts:

"New relationships, forged together, Striving towards a community goal. All are included, all religions and races, Making a difference all as a whole. Including the elderly, including the young, Breaking barriers to start life anew. With mutual respect, all an open mind, We can be better than ever we knew."

Other aspects which were key for the NYA in discussing Scotland's future were living in a country which was **free from sectarianism**, which has a **strong, just and inspiring judiciary system** and which has a **democratic political system**.

Personal Identity

The final daily discussion for the weekend focussed on personal identity. Delegates discussed aspects of personal identity in relation to their own identity within the Church at various levels and also in relation to other aspects of life. This broad topic allowed delegates to explore the idea of call, their call, and what barriers exist to allowing them to live these calls.

The first point in the discussion was looking at what barriers there were for **young people coming to church for the first time**. Some examples of responses from the discussion were:

- "the aspect of social pressure from your peers"
- "young people have an idea that church is boring and old fashioned"
- "people don't get welcomed; people say 'that's my seat'"
- "you don't necessarily know what to do and when to do it"
- "it's difficult to find a church that suits you"

There was a general sense that for some people there was a **fear of the unfamiliar** and a **fear of not being welcomed**.

The NYA broadly felt that, in some cases, local churches could and should be more welcoming. Similarly they felt that more focus should go into making all churches a welcoming place of worship which welcomes people regardless of knowledge and experience of Church.

The second point for this discussion was looking at **barriers to staying in the church past the age of 14**. Delegates often come to NYA as the "only young person" in their church and coming to the NYA makes them feel part of the wider Church helping them feel less alone in it. Some examples of the responses from the discussion were:

- "if young people have a role, they are more likely to stay"
- "there is lack of support and opportunity available for young people at this stage in life"
- "there is a lack of challenge"
- "suddenly you're in the big bad wide church – there is no junior church to attend and not enough people for a youth group"
- "people at this stage have a lack of Christian friends and struggle to grow"

Many young people feel that if they were given **responsibility** in church, they would be more likely to regularly attend. In light of this we discussed **what the barriers are to being given responsibility in church**. Some responses included:

- "you're a young person, so you can only deal with the things relating to young people"
- "young people have too many commitments and cannot fully commit to roles"
- "at what age do we stop being 'the future of the Church?'"
- "young people fear that they are being given responsibility out of tokenism"
- "sometimes when you have grown up in a church, you're always going to be viewed as a child"

Many delegates of the NYA, past and present, have developed a sense of call to different roles in the Church through finding time and space to reflect in a safe environment with likeminded people. Many find these

roles take the form of ministry and therefore the NYA discussed what **barriers exist for entering ministry**. Some examples included:

- “people don’t have enough knowledge of what the different forms of ministry are”
- “there is no space for younger people to explore a call to ministry”
- “there is a lack of support available in relation to training; cost can be restrictive, there is a lack of flexibility and it takes a long time”
- “quite often young people aren’t taken seriously”
- “people are told that they are too young and that they should go and get some ‘life experience’”

Many delegates felt like they **did not know** about the various forms of ministry and **wanted to know more**. There was a general sense from the delegates that the main barrier to entering ministry in any of its forms related to lack of flexibility and struggles with fitting in training with university and careers. Many delegates also felt that ministry was probably something that they were too young for and not experienced enough for and they were unsure of what stage of life was best to take on this commitment.

After discussing the various barriers, the delegates spent some time reflecting on what they felt called to do in life. Every delegate wrote a response and the collated responses have been used to form a document called “**COSY voices**”.¹ The broad spectrum of responses reflects what a broad range of delegates exist within the Assembly. Some responses simply said that **they didn’t know** at this point what they were called to do. Others explored roles relating to their university experiences, church experiences, or something new that they hadn’t tried yet. It is clear that the NYA continually promotes a **safe space for young people to explore and identify their call** whether it be specifically in relation to the church or outwith the church. The delegates continually appreciate this space and the Church continues to see the fruit from this.

¹ The COSY voices document can be downloaded from www.resourcingmission.org.uk

Youth Reps

Every year the NYA elects youth representatives who carry on the work of the NYA throughout the year. At NYA 2013, 18 youth reps from a broad range of presbyteries were elected who, along with the Moderator and Clerk, meet together on a roughly quarterly basis and utilise social media to share ideas and progress work in-between meetings. This year, the youth reps have worked together to collate the feedback from NYA to produce this report and a fuller supplementary report.² The reps also adopt a theme for the year which for 2013/2014 is **intergenerational work and ministry**. The reps have so far spent time exploring the theme and researching. This is an ongoing piece of work and the hope is to continue this in a more practical way with other groups in the future.

In February 2013 the COSY guide to ethical living³ was published and also released for download following an instruction from the NYA 2012.⁴ This guide was the product of the work of the elected youth reps from NYA 2012 together with other young people associated with the NYA. The Guide has been used by various people and churches since its release and is proving to be a useful resource for discussing ethical living. There are plans to produce similar guides on different topics in the future.

As well as the elected youth reps, the NYA 2013 elected two Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs), Rachel Walker and Hannah Mary Goodlad. The NYA 2010⁵ instructed its youth reps to explore different ways of working with the SYP and the product of this instruction can now be seen following work towards this over the last few years. The MSYPs attend the SYP sittings and contribute to debate, providing links between the NYA and the SYP and building a fruitful relationship for both groups.

² The supplementary report can be downloaded from www.resourcingmission.org.uk

³ The guide is available for free download and a printed copy can be purchased for £3, both from www.resourcingmission.org.uk

⁴ The NYA report to the GA 2011 http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/5751/ga11_nya.pdf

⁵ The NYA report to the GA 2013 http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/13814/23_YOUTH_ASSEMBLY_2013.pdf

Guild

2013 marked the start of an encouraging partnership for the NYA and the Guild. The NYA was joined for the weekend by Marjorie Paton, National Convener of the Guild. Marjorie participated in our discussions and also led a talk and workshop focussing on the work of the Guild. Our annual gala dinner was held on the Sunday night of the Assembly and this raised £2470.67 for the current Guild projects. During the dinner Marjorie presented the NYA with a certificate making the NYA the first honorary group of the Guild.

Since the NYA gathering, the moderator, clerk and 18 elected youth reps have met with members of the national Guild. At this meeting, the NYA reps and the Guild spent time getting to know each other and sharing ideas of what the two groups could do together. A working group made up of members of the national Guild committee and NYA reps has been formed and the group is working towards practical things that the two groups might do together. The NYA reps have been exploring **intergenerational work and ministry** in their regular meetings throughout the year. As two groups in the Kirk who are often broadly defined by their age, this new partnership sees the start of these groups working together to promote and encourage **meaningful intergenerational work within the Church.**

Conclusion

The NYA is something that the Church can remain proud of. Young people continue to come to this event, either as a veteran or as a first time delegate. The delegates are quick to form community; a community that loves and cares for its members, a community that constantly evolves according to its needs, a community that is passionate about God, and a community that exists to give young people a voice in the Church.

Next year, the NYA will move to Gartmore House in Stirlingshire and will take place on 15 – 18 August 2014 with the theme 'My Father's House'. It is open to all 17-25 year olds with a connection to the Church of Scotland with 135 places available on a first come first served basis.⁶

LYNSEY MARTIN, *Moderator*
ESTHER NISBET, *Clerk*

⁶ For more information and online booking see www.resourcingmission.org.uk/nya

