

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 2014

The National Youth Assembly (NYA) took place between 15 -18 August 2014 in Gartmore House, near Aberfoyle, Stirlingshire. There were 100 delegates aged between 17 - 25 years old, all with a connection to the Church of Scotland. The NYA is a residential weekend which exists primarily to give young people 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 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. The theme for the 2014 weekend was "My Father's House". The Assembly utilised this theme throughout the weekend; in the discussions, in worship, in workshops and for reflection.

The 2014 Assembly had four discussions; how we worship, how the Church spends its money, how we can do ministry intergenerationally and how we can support Christians in the Middle East. Delegates gathered to listen to speakers who were invited to address the Assembly before meeting within their small groups to discuss the issue, and then coming together as one big group to share ideas, challenge other points of view and learn from each other. As a result, a summary of the discussions has been prepared which shows the breadth of opinion within the delegates and shows the depth of our conversations, valuing all of the voices at the Assembly and not simply the majority.

How we worship

The first of the discussions focused on how we worship. The hope for this discussion was to share experiences and

ideas of how we worship and then to consider if this would work in our own churches.

The Assembly was introduced to this topic by being asked to reflect on our best worship experience and then to share this in our small groups. There were several different responses by delegates which included: praising and speaking in tongues, meditation, silence and feeling led by the Spirit. These responses demonstrated the diversity of worship experiences within The Church of Scotland and how each individual has different preferences.

Worship within the Church of Scotland

The Assembly felt it was encouraging that everyone from a variety of congregations and places came together to worship. Some other responses included:

- *"it is good to have tradition but also to include a mix of other stuff"*
- *"doing new things helps us to be more open and can be more meaningful"*
- *"different places have a different atmosphere and this can depend on the number of people"*

The NYA felt that worship could be divisive, and recognising that this is a sensitive issue, we would encourage congregations to respond to these views in a delicate manner.

Delegates thought that ministers should communicate with different denominations or visit other churches to experience other types of worship. Delegates recognised that a broad spectrum of worship styles could be adopted, for example: art, silence, joint prayers, walks, asking questions and interactive sermons. Many of the young people felt that there could be times where worship outside would be beneficial. One particular benefit could

be different denominations coming together by singing outdoors and learning from one another.

Having a communal aspect is crucial for worship. Delegates thought that churches could conduct sessions with a variety of people involved to explore different forms of worship styles, identify our similarities and find common ground. The Assembly also discussed how exploring 'worship throughout the world' within our congregations is important to highlight the differences that exist, to illustrate that difference is healthy and that we are united through Christ.

Worship in the future

The Assembly acknowledged that society has progressed dramatically in recent years and the Church needs to play catchup. In schools and many work places open discussion is encouraged. Delegates supported the idea of ministers including discussion during Sunday services, perhaps a question and answer session.

Finally, the Assembly discussed the use of space within our church buildings for worship. There was a general consensus that pews were no longer practical and flexible seating allowed a greater variety of worship to be offered. The use of physical space to create a spiritual environment should not be overlooked.

How the Church spends its money

Over the past six years the nation's interest and

understanding of financial matters has increased greatly with more questions asked and more clarity demanded from all organisations including financial institutions, charities and everyone in between. Having a discussion on how the Church spends its money on a national level, therefore seemed appropriate.

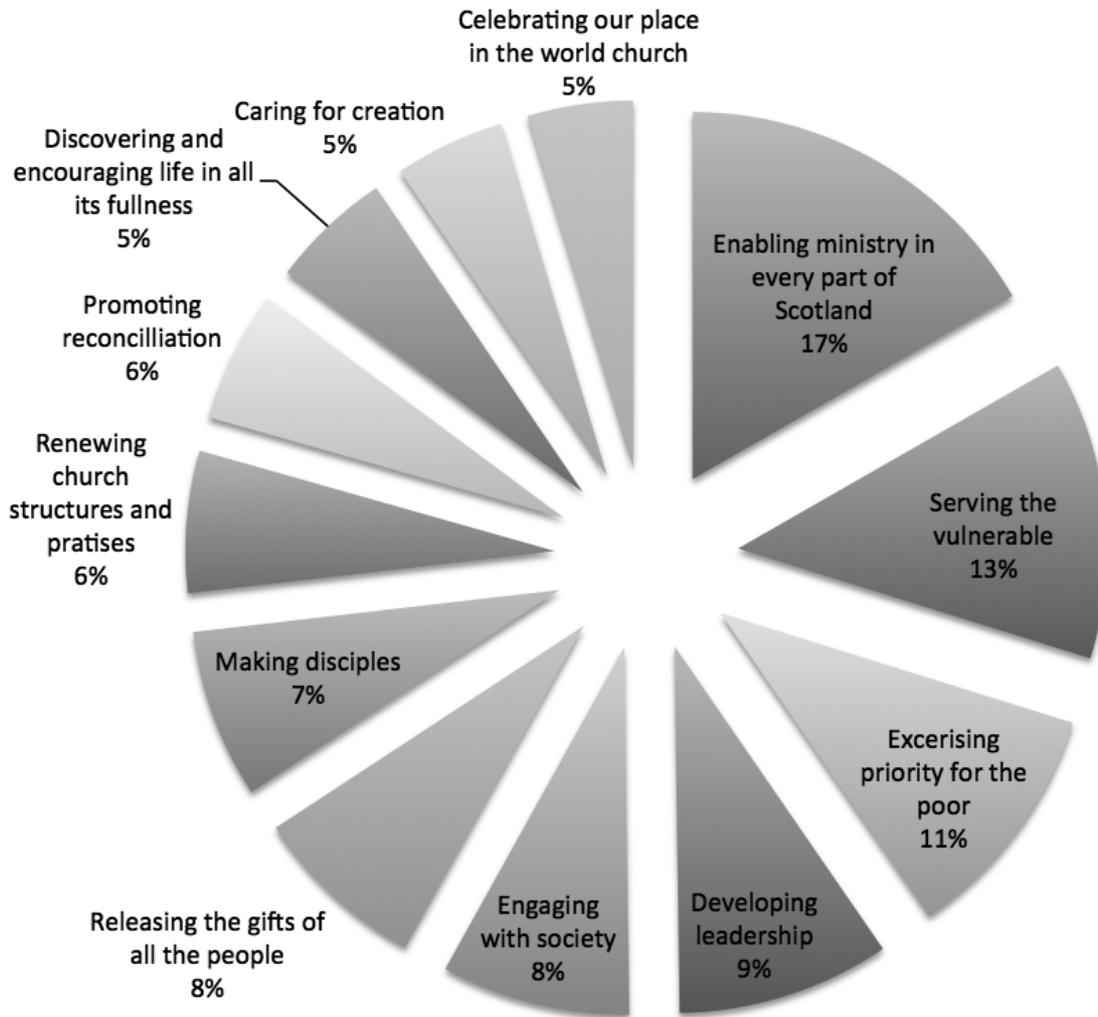
We were introduced to the topic by considering where the money from our congregational offerings goes. The Assembly acknowledged the importance of these offerings for the work of the local and national church. On learning how the money received from the Ministries and Missions allocations is distributed for the work of the national councils and committees around half of the delegates were surprised that 86% is assigned to the Ministries Council and only 14% is assigned for everything else.

In small groups delegates were challenged to consider how they would allocate the money the national church receives based on the core priorities¹. Many groups felt that the core priorities overlapped a lot and grouped them accordingly².

¹ The Core principles of the church can be found within the unincorporated councils and committees report and financial statements under the Achievements and Performance section of the Trustees Report under the sub heading of Priorities.

² This is expanded in the supplementary report.

HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD SPEND ITS MONEY



The general feedback to the topic was positive, and many points further to those above were raised during small group discussions. These included thoughts around how we could be 'short-changing those who need us the most

if we do not invest properly in the correct people who will be tasked with helping them', or how 'different areas of the Church can receive funding from external organisations' it was also noted that many felt the 'core priorities were

quite vague, a more detailed explanation of each would have been valuable. Overall delegates seemed to enjoy the opportunity to think about the relationship between money and the national Church.

How we can do ministry intergenerationally

During our discussion about intergenerational work it was generally agreed that the young and old folk within our Kirk complement each other well. It was recognised church members with more life experience play an invaluable role in nurturing the Kirk's saplings, allowing them to flourish in later life.

It became apparent that delegates experiences were largely positive when working with different generations. Many commented on meaningful interactions before and after Sunday worship, at social events and outwith the formal setting of worship:

"It is good mixing between ages as this can promote harmony in our churches. It is vital in worship to feel comfortable and secure. Therefore, making harmony between the generations is important."

Whilst discussing if mixing between generations within our churches was important we were fortunate to hear a variety of heart-warming stories. Many delegates had very fond memories of more experienced churchgoers teaching them and showing them the way, for example one youth delegate was taught how to play the saxophone by a ninety-two year old gentleman. Churches were described like families; everyone regardless of their age has a gift and something to offer. Many similarities between the generations were identified, to name a few: sense of humour, faith journey, life experiences, relationships, etc.

Considering how best for generations to work well together a variety of opinions were shared. The Assembly briefly discussed church committees and how being the 'token young person' is not a helpful solution, in fact people need to be selected to participate on their merit and have their contributions valued rather than being the young person present who is never listened to. Music was

highlighted to be particularly useful in bringing generations together for fellowship. Technology too offers an opportunity for younger generations to serve older generations by offering expertise, organising CDs, podcasts etc. This can be extremely valuable for the elderly who are no longer able to attend Sunday worship regularly.

Thinking how intergenerational work can be promoted at a national level, a number of ideas were suggested:

1. Working with The Guild, of which we are already an honorary member, to establish ways in which we can serve each other.
2. National councils and committees to continue welcoming young people to join them AND consider having meetings in the evening or weekend in order to be inclusive of those who have study or work commitments.
3. Enable younger people to discern their sense of calling/vocation. In time this could lead to a larger number of young people contributing at the General Assembly as ordained ministers and elders.
4. Create a national resource to support congregations to work intergenerationally.
5. Encourage young people to take on leadership roles.

Finally, we addressed the issue of the 'missing generation' within our church that is felt by many young people. We often focus on the polar opposites when discussing intergenerational work, however, it is vital we do not overlook the needs of those who fall into the 'middle age' category. We must ensure we engage with them in meaningful ways, striving to ensure their needs are met whilst benefitting from all they have to offer. Intergenerational ministry is about blending all generations together rather than just focussing on the young and the old.

The Assembly held intergenerational work in high regard. Many people left feeling inspired having heard an idea they could try out in their church at home to help bridge

the gap between the generations and promote a 'family feeling' within our own congregations.

How we can support Christians in the Middle East

For our final discussion The Assembly were delighted to welcome Kenny Rogers who gave us an invaluable input from his first-hand experience. Fourteen delegates have also travelled to that area and some of the words used to describe the situation were hell, savage, brutal, hopeless, despair, relentless, why, hurt, human.

How can we as individuals, and a church, support our brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution?

- Pray, individually and collectively.
- Support campaigns, such as Rt. Rev. John Chalmers, Peace Doves.
- Lobbying the government.
- Supporting and endorsing various organisations, charities and appeals.
- Use social media to instil hope to raise well-informed awareness of issues in the Middle East.
- Visiting partners in The Middle East, Face to face support is always welcomed.
- The Assembly encourages ministers and leaders of the church to discuss, talk, preach and pray about it.
- Work with people from other denominations and faiths on combatting problems.

What can we do to be peacemakers, not only in the Middle East, but also in our own communities?

- Supporting mission already in place, use their resources and travel alongside them.
- Use Rt Rev John Chalmers theme for his year in office of Respectful Dialogue.
- Supporting interfaith dialogue.
- Remember scripture at all times and try to follow Christ's example by loving our neighbours.
- To have hope, so we can be a pocket of optimism amongst despair.

What do we think when we hear that Christianity may die out in the region where it was birthed?

The Assembly felt worried, disappointed and alarmed at the thought of this.

How do we respond to that?

We have hope - our faith is resilient. We have a good God who says that: "If I am for you, no-one is against you" and "That is the hope we have, to resist these evil powers."

We have concern - that it's not perhaps so vital to focus on a single religion, but actually to focus on humanity, in terms of how we treat each other – we need to start looking at human beings as members of a family, whether that be a family of faith, nationality or the human race.

"I'm not so sure that if we let other humans be treated as people who don't matter, that there can be any coming back."

We know Christ to be everywhere – even when our hearts are breaking for our brothers and sisters who may be forced to take another religion or leave their homes.

Masquerade Ball

Our Gala Dinner on the Sunday evening took the form of a masquerade ball. This was inspired by the thought that we should not have to hide ourselves within our own congregations. Rt Rev John Chalmers attended and spoke very movingly about how valued The National Youth Assembly is. There was a very competitive game of crazy golf played by the two Moderators to which Rt Rev John Chalmers was able to show off his skills from the golf course and win the battle. Our Moderator, Rachel is clearly more of a hockey player than a golfer.

Each year, the Gala Dinner fundraises for a different charity. This year we chose to support Perth Prison Visitor's Centre, one of Crossreach's projects. We were able to raise £1696.85.

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.

The 2015 NYA will be held at Gartmore House in Stirlingshire and will take place on 14 – 17 August 2015 with discussions about climate change, child exploitation,

the confessions of our faith and the General Assembly. It is open to all 17-25 year olds with a connection to the Church of Scotland with 140 places available on a first come first served basis³.

RACHEL HUTCHESON, *Moderator*
JOHN HASTON, *Clerk*

³ For details and booking please see
<https://www.resourcingmission.org.uk/learn/young-adults>