
The Church of England's National Youth Strategy

Publication GS 1481 – A response from Andy Poole, Diocesan Youth Officer, Manchester Diocese.

Introduction

The National Youth Strategy has been developed by the Archbishop's Council in pursuit of two of its four Themes for the current quinquennium: Equipping to Evangelise (theme 2); and welcoming and encouraging children and young people (theme 3). Its underlying philosophy is a continuation of the recommendations detailed in *Youth A Part*, which was endorsed by the General Synod in July 1996.

Alongside the National Youth Strategy is the proposal that a Youth Evangelism Fund be set up with the need for these two initiatives to be considered together.

National Youth Strategy

There are four elements to the strategy:

- Young People and Worship;
- Young People as Leaders;
- Resourcing Youth Workers;
- Young People and Mission.

1. Young People and Worship (p.6-8)

Comment:

Youth worship is a key issue within youth work particularly at a time when young people are leaving the Anglican Church in great numbers. There are however many models of worship around that are helpful in attracting young people and these should be welcomed, supported and learnt from. The proposals for the sharing of effective examples of worship with and for young people and the identifying of good practice that enables worship to be a tool for effective mission and evangelism will therefore be of undoubted use.

Youth leaders and young people may sometimes lack the confidence and the initial impetus required to stage youth worship events and introduce new forms of worship and so they will find this element of the strategy particularly helpful.

Worthy of note are the comments by Bishop Graham Cray in section II (pgs 41-48) on the subject of youth congregations.

2. Young People as Leaders (p.9-14)

- (a) Develop a training framework which equips young people to be leaders and innovators in the church.
- (b) Continue to develop the Young Adult Observer Group at the July sessions of General Synod to enhance Diocesan and regional initiatives

- (c) Secure a stronger representative voice for young people through the Synodical Review process.
- (d) Develop the Church of England Youth Council as a national forum for young people.

Comment:

This element of the strategy is crucial for the future of the church; to encourage young people's innovation, creativity and to equip them with leadership skills will be essential if the church is to be effective in reaching this generation of young people. It has been shown that youth work which takes this issue seriously is often the most effective and its significant the statutory sector's strategy for work with 13-19 year olds (Connexions) is underpinned by the involvement of young people at every level.

The establishment of training for young leaders and opportunities for them to engage in decision making processes should be welcomed, however care must be taken to ensure that these initiatives don't become too formal and inflexible and that they don't automatically replicate the structures already in place. Young people must be given the opportunity to potentially reshape structures and not merely moulded into a group of young Christian bureaucrats.

3. Resourcing Youth Workers (p.14-20)

- (a) Establish and accredit training for voluntary youth workers at Diocesan and national level.
- (b) Identify and map the growing number of routes towards training and qualification.
- (c) Undertake an audit of youth work appointments within the Church of England
- (d) Establish a process of recognition for youth workers within the Church of England
- (e) Develop a more coherent strategy for the deployment of youth workers.

Comment:

These proposals will further strengthen the church's reputation for taking youth work seriously and will play a significant part in ensuring its work with young people is of a high and professional standard; they should therefore be welcomed.

Having said that one of the biggest issues that many of our churches face is the recruitment of committed youth leaders who are able to invest time in the church's work with young people. The introduction of a potentially demanding training course which volunteer youth leaders are required to attend may further add to the problems of recruitment. This issue will need to be handled carefully.

A process of recognition for youth workers within the church would be helpful particularly as the Diocese of Manchester has no such mechanism currently in place.

Whilst the deployment of full time youth workers in dioceses could be done more effectively, this will need to be handled carefully with parishes who pay a workers salary.

A concern here and also in other parts of the strategy is the amount of auditing and mapping that needs to be done. The gathering of information that could soon be out of date has the potential to be a huge drain on the Youth Officers (amongst others) time and energy.

4. Young People and Mission (p.21-27)

- (a) Review projects in mission and evangelism with young people and publish a best practice guide.
- (b) Identify Diocesan projects which give or could give young people an opportunity for service both in this country and overseas.
- (c) Train and equip young people as partners in mission and evangelism within their own communities.
- (d) Actively support a Youth Evangelism Fund.

Comment:

The best communicators of the Christian faith to young people are young people themselves and so any initiative which helps this to take place will be beneficial. However its important to note that this should not involve the rest of the church abdicating responsibility but rather working alongside young people supporting and encouraging them in this task. This element of the youth strategy will increase the need for older people to be involved in youth work, not decrease it.

One of the key tasks of the Diocesan Youth Officer is to share good practice with churches, a best practice guide in mission and evangelism will therefore be an important tool in resourcing and equipping parishes.

Finally, it is useful that the strategy refers to mission and evangelism both locally and overseas. In addition to being committed to working at a local level with young people the Diocese of Manchester is working towards a young people's trip to Namibia in 2004.

Youth Evangelism Fund

Introduction:

The aim of the fund is to promote and resource the work of evangelism among young people in England. It will be a national fund with local expression that aims to assist and support local people to do what best fits with their situation and insight. The fund will operate with a system of matched funding and applications will be assessed (and supported) locally and selected nationally.

2 points are worthy of note.

1. The fund will seek to support (although by no means exclusively), projects which involve 'new' styles and patterns of church that reflect the culture and aspirations of young people. I believe this to be particularly important if the church in Greater Manchester is to be strong and effective in years to come.
2. It is suggested that in allocating funds appropriate weighting should be given to initiatives in Priority areas. This of course could be particularly beneficial to the Diocese of Manchester.

Concluding Remarks

I do have one or two reservations in some areas of the strategy which have been documented in this paper; I also think it is regrettable that more emphasis hasn't been placed on working with vulnerable and excluded young people.

However I do consider that the 4 areas highlighted in the National Youth Strategy are key to effective work with young people and indeed to a large extent already underpin the Board of Education's work with parishes in the Diocese. Crucially, the 4 areas are generic enough to allow parishes and dioceses the flexibility required to apply the strategy within their own contexts, this will give direction and support to their work with young people rather than stifling or controlling it. Further, the National Youth Strategy has the potential to be backed up by the establishment of The Youth Evangelism Fund, which by no means being the only support that will be required, will send out the message to young people and youth leaders that the church is committed to supplying both the strategy *and the tools* required for this important work.

Following on from the recommendations of Youth A Part I consider the publication of the National Youth Strategy to be both timely and beneficial and am in favour of its adoption.

Andy Poole
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