

# CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD AND NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY

## May 2017

### PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

#### The General Assembly:

1. Receive the report.
2. Commend the Guild and the National Youth Assembly for their continuing commitment to developing intergenerational initiatives.
3. Encourage ministers, Kirk Sessions and other church leaders to consider how intergenerational work and ministry might be of benefit in their congregations and parishes.
4. Encourage Presbyteries to consider how they might support congregations in developing intergenerational work and ministry.
5. Encourage the Councils and Committees of the Kirk to keep intergenerational issues in mind in their discussions and decision-making.

## REPORT

### 1. Background

1.1 Since the National Youth Assembly (NYA) became an honorary Guild group in August 2013, the Guild and the NYA have been seeking further ways of working together. From the acknowledgement that each of our organisations is broadly defined by age, the issue of intergenerational work and ministry arose.

1.2 Following the instruction of the General Assembly in 2014, 'Commend the Guild on welcoming the National Youth Assembly as its first Honorary Group and instruct the Guild, in partnership with the National Youth Assembly, to prepare a report in relation to intergenerational work and ministry, reporting to the General Assembly of 2016', a joint working group was established, which quickly realised that intergenerational work and ministry is a far broader concept than just the Guild and NYA working together – it is an issue which could involve the whole church. The group decided to

delay the full report until 2017; an interim report was produced for the General Assembly in 2016.

1.3 On-going discussion, background reading and research (including the responses to a 2016 survey of current practice within the Kirk), have led the working group to the conclusion that intergenerational work and ministry have much to offer the Church of Scotland.

### 2. What is intergenerational work and ministry?

2.1 In its simplest form, being intergenerational is about interaction between those of different generations. A useful definition is: 'Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations.' (Centre for Intergenerational Practice: Beth Johnson Foundation, 2001.) It is important that such practice is not thought

of solely as 'young people meeting old people,' as there can be significant generational differences between those who are as little as ten years apart in age. Intergenerational work builds on the positive resources that all age groups have to offer each other and it can contribute significantly to building more cohesive communities.

2.2 In churches, intergenerational work and ministry are based on learning, worshipping, living and growing in faith together, through shared experiences in which participants of all ages are valued. Many writers and congregations refer to this as 'building our church and community family.'

2.3 Since the church is one of the few places in any community where people of all ages regularly come together, one might assume that 'intergenerational' would describe all church life. However, much of what goes on in our churches is specifically geared towards one age group or another, and even when all generations are present together (for example, for Sunday worship) there may be very little interaction between the different groups. The church, then, often operates in a *multigenerational* rather than an intentionally *intergenerational* way.

### 3. Why is intergenerational work and ministry important at this time?

3.1 In society: In Britain, as in much of the developed world, traditional patterns of family and community life have changed rapidly over the last 50 or 60 years. One consequence of this is that people belonging to one generation often have little regular contact with those of other generations. Attitudes of one generation to another may be more influenced by media stereotypes than by interaction with real people, causing mistrust and a mutual lack of respect and leading to increased fragmentation of our society. Many governments, local authorities and organisations recognise that this is an important issue for our time. 'The future of society requires fruitful encounter between young and old.' (Pope Francis, Twitter, 14.06.2016).

3.2 In parishes: During the first half of the 1900s, the Church of Scotland parish was still a recognisable and cohesive unit. Most people lived, worked and worshipped in the same locality for most of their lives; family and community bonds were strong; people knew their neighbours and fellow-parishioners well - most were Scottish. Now, many adults live far from where they grew up and they often commute long distances to work; grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are spread throughout the UK and around the globe; children may live in one locality, go to primary school in another and to secondary school in yet another; the ethnic and cultural mix of every community is much more diverse. While the parish boundaries round our churches may be fixed, the local population to which the church seeks to minister is a much more fluid concept. Well-planned intergenerational work and ministry can help to build relationships and bring communities together.

3.3 In congregations: In the 2011 census, 1.7 million people (just under one-third of the total population of Scotland) stated that they were 'Church of Scotland.' (*Scotland's 2011 Census, Release 2A, Table 7*) The Kirk's own statistics indicate that it has around 350,000 members (about one-fifth of 1.7 million), by no means all of whom play an active part in congregational life.

3.4 Many congregations struggle with the question of how to bridge the gap between those who are actively involved in the work and worship of the church and those who feel some affinity with the Kirk but keep themselves at a distance. Another major concern for many churches is the rapidly increasing average age of members: in some congregations, children and young people are rarely present.

3.5 And yet, '***The vision of The Church of Scotland is to be a church which seeks to inspire the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities.***' (Church of Scotland website, 'About Us.'). If it is to achieve that vision, the church

must reach out to whole families, to all generations. An intergenerational approach can be an effective part of that outreach.

**3.6** In the lives of individuals: Loneliness is something experienced by many people in our modern society - it is a major issue in the increasing demand for help and support from mental health services. Loneliness can and does affect people of all ages and in all walks of life, but it is particularly prevalent among folk with disabilities and among older people, especially those who live alone or who have limited mobility. Mental health services for young people are also experiencing increasing demand – in this age of instant communication, when younger generations live their lives more and more online, it is not hard for some to become isolated from real people. In reaching out with the gospel of love, congregations can offer a safe, welcoming and caring family environment for people of all ages.

## **4. Are other churches and organisations developing intergenerational practice?**

**4.1** A search through the websites of the larger Christian denominations in Britain reveals that, while most have full statements regarding ministries with children, young people and the elderly, there are only occasional references to intergenerational work and ministry. (The Kirk's website has more than most!) The Baptist Union of Great Britain is an exception; their 'Today . . . not tomorrow' resources have been specifically developed to support churches moving towards an intergenerational approach, which church leaders are actively encouraging.

**4.2** However, as the results of any web-search for 'intergenerational ministry' will clearly show, a number of congregations across all denominations, both here in Scotland and throughout the world, are implementing (or moving towards) an intergenerational way of working and worshipping together, which they report as enriching congregational life and increasing their effectiveness in reaching out to local communities.

**4.3** Outwith the churches, intergenerational work has, over the last decade, become firmly established in many communities across the United Kingdom, with local councils initiating (or encouraging through funding) projects aimed at bringing different generations together, in order to break down barriers and create more cohesive communities.

**4.4** Such initiatives are amazingly diverse in respect of the activities undertaken, the age groups involved and the location of the projects. The London Borough of Camden has pioneered intergenerational work in its highly populated and culturally diverse neighbourhoods. 'Brighter Futures Together', in the North East of England, sees intergenerational practice as a key part of building sustainable communities.

**4.5** Closer to home, the Scottish Parliament has allocated funding for community development - 'Generations Working Together' (GWT) is one organisation using this funding to encourage intergenerational projects throughout Scotland. The GWT network is a major Scottish resource in terms of training and support for any group interested in developing intergenerational work, and their web-site contains useful information regarding possible sources of funding for intergenerational projects.

## **5. Is intergenerational work and ministry already happening in the Church of Scotland?**

**5.1** In 2016, the Guild/NYA joint working group undertook a survey of intergenerational work and ministry within the Church of Scotland. We had 50 responses – not a large number, but there was a wide geographical spread and roughly equal representation of rural, town, suburban and city churches. Several returns mentioned events and projects that were planned in partnership with other congregations, from both the Church of Scotland and other denominations. The working group members were greatly impressed by the work that is going on, and wish to express thanks to all who responded.

**5.2** A number of the responses described 'one-off' or annual/seasonal events in which two or more (sometimes several) generations participated. These included:

- summer fêtes
- Christmas fairs
- a pantomime
- Souper Sunday
- packing shoe-boxes for Blythswood
- a climate change conference
- a church weekend away
- a ten-pin bowling evening
- activities planned for school in-service training days
- a Christmas party for the beginners Sunday School *and* the Senior Citizens Group
- a children v parents quiz at the end of the Sunday School year
- a number of summer fun weeks, one of which ran in the early evening so that more people of working age could be involved.

Several of these events specifically included different generations at the planning stage as well as in the activity itself.

**5.3** Many respondents told us about on-going weekly or monthly activities intentionally designed to bring generations together:- Messy Church, taking responsibility for a food bank, running a regular fair trade stand, all-age choirs and praise bands, a church drama group, church meals together ('food works well as a social lubricant'), a youth café, knitting clubs, story-telling groups (including a BookBug club), a link between a lunch club for people with dementia and the local Sunday School, a café church in a supermarket, an all-age meal and worship in a sheltered housing complex, skill-swapping groups for young people and seniors, befriending and mentoring schemes and the planned inclusion of children, young people and their parents in the practical tasks of running the church (eg

ground care, welcoming duties on Sundays, acting as the beadle, taking a role in the tech/projection corner, etc.

**5.4** Some of the churches we heard from had a very clear intention to build the church family by being intergenerational – 'we just ask everybody to come to everything!' In one church, a large-scale building project (often the preserve of older, experienced Kirk Session or Board members) is intentionally being managed by an intergenerational team as 'all generations will use it and benefit from it'. In another, church members of all ages joined in a three-week community building project to create an amphitheatre on a brownfield site – 'a huge visible result left everybody feeling positive'.

**5.5** Many of the responses to our survey mentioned intergenerational worship, and a wide range of approaches was described. Some churches specifically include representatives of all age groups in their worship planning teams; it's clear that intergenerational worship requires careful planning. Some congregations focus on the major festivals of the Christian year for their whole church family times; for others, intergenerational worship has become a built-in feature of weekly church life. An alternative to traditional worship, at a different time, is offered by some congregations, where, for example, breakfast church or café church can provide a more relaxed, family-friendly setting.

**5.6** In other places, there's a determination to keep the whole church family together for Sunday worship, either for the entire service, by going down an interactive learning/doing/worshipping route, or for the major part of the service, in which all ages participate and lead, after which the younger generations go off to more active learning sessions and the adults have a quieter time with a sermon and, in some places, discussion. 'Children play a full part in everything – this enhances the worship for us all!'

**5.7** Music plays a significant role in worship, and can be a sensitive area in times of change. All-age choirs and praise bands have great potential in showing that all generations

are valued and have much to give; the inclusion of a variety of musical styles in hymn choices is essential. 'The older generation may not always like the songs, but they love the children and young people who are singing and playing the instruments!'

## 6. What challenges are faced by those adopting this approach?

6.1 As with any new initiative, finding time for discussion and planning presents a challenge for people who are already busy, especially when the daily and weekly schedules of different generations clash. Another challenge faced by some respondents to the joint working group's questionnaire was resistance to change – it's very important to 'take people along with you' by explaining the purpose of any move away from established practice.

6.2 Finding an appropriate venue for a particular project can sometimes be difficult. Also, in bringing together groups of different ages, health and safety issues are paramount, and it's vital to seek guidance on best practice re Protection of Vulnerable Groups.

Coming up with a succession of new and appropriate activities for different generations to share requires a lot of imagination!

6.3 Setting up a new group or activity can involve expense – but funding sources can be found for intergenerational work. Several respondents agreed, though, that 'the challenges were practical, not intergenerational.'

## 7. What benefits can arise from intergenerational work?

7.1 The Guild/NYA joint working group believes that well-planned intergenerational work and ministry can be beneficial to congregational life and to the communities that the church seeks to serve, through helping to reduce mistrust and wariness of those of other generations, and by encouraging respect, understanding and mutual growth. In the words of our survey respondents:-

- each accepting the other
- everyone supporting each other
- using varying skills and knowledge
- great team work and praying together
- distribution of responsibility throughout the age groups
- it is great to see all ages of the church family working together
- share experiences and learn from one another
- we do feel very much like a family
- each is surprised by what we can do together
- a blessing and affirmation of personhood throughout life
- the range of experience and ideas in the leadership team is a powerful tool
- our young people like to feel that they are changing the world; giving them responsibility in the church family helps them to do this
- the young people feel safe and able to confide in the older 'Grandma' figures; conversations about all sorts of issues flow very freely
- children feel the love and joy of the Lord through words and actions
- the young ones grow and mature; the older members are invigorated
- mutual awareness, listening and understanding
- what is striking is the way in which this unites believers (*this re a holiday club jointly led by CoFs, RC, Free Kirk and independent fellowships*)
- it draws families in, which is what we need; families are exploring faith together
- everyone belonging – being part of a family – a truly great atmosphere
- the most powerful thing for older church members is the simple fact that the church is now full of children, young people, and young families

## 8. How might intergenerational work and ministry be developed in the Church of Scotland?

8.1 It is important that intergenerational ministry (or 'building our church and community family') should not be seen as an add-on to work which is already taking place. We should view it, rather, as an underpinning principle which like, for example, 'taking the good news of Jesus to our community', 'caring for God's world' or 'loving our neighbours', should form part of the basis on which all church work and worship is founded.

8.2 However, many congregations (or groups within congregations) have, in fact, entered the cycle of intergenerational work by undertaking a single project, extending and building on that to influence the whole church family. So it's possible to get into intergenerational practice either by 'diving in at the deep end' and changing the basis of congregational life, or by 'dipping a toe' and seeing what works in your local situation. It is **learning and doing things together** that creates the bond between different age groups. The Guild and the National Youth Assembly would encourage all ministers and church leaders to find out more about intergenerational work and ministry and to consider implementing this approach in their congregations and communities.

8.3 As more congregations move towards an interest in developing intergenerational work (and, since our survey in summer 2016, many more instances have been brought to the attention of the joint working group) it is clear that Presbyteries could play a pivotal role in encouraging churches which are moving in that direction, by, for example, publicising successful initiatives, arranging training for church leaders or organising larger-scale one-off events.

8.4 It is clear from our survey that church youth workers, development workers, schools and families workers, etc., play an important role in building up the church family in this intergenerational way, particularly when new church/community initiatives are being set up. Perhaps this is

something that could be borne in mind by Presbytery committees dealing with ministries and re-appraisal.

8.5 It has been encouraging for the Guild/NYA joint working group to note that several of the Councils and Committees of the Kirk have, in recent months, indicated in statements or press releases that they have an interest in some aspects of intergenerational work and ministry. Following our own very positive learning experiences in working together across the generational gap, the Guild and the National Youth Assembly jointly hope that members of all Councils and Committees will continue to consider these matters in their discussions and decision-making.

## 9. The Working Group

9.1 Thanks are due to everyone who took part in the joint working group. Their commitment and enthusiasm have resulted in a positive and encouraging report and their ability to work together has demonstrated the concept of inter-generational work in a very practical and effective way.

9.2 The members of the group were:

For the Guild:	For the National Youth Assembly:
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Mary Reid	Lyndsay Kennedy
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*In the name of the Church of Scotland Guild and  
The National Youth Assembly*

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