Strategy for young people
Guidance for Youth Workers, Congregations and Presbyteries.
BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING, STOP AND READ THIS!

In Luke 24 we read about the encounter Jesus has with two of his followers. They meet him on the Road to Emmaus, following the events in Jerusalem that saw Jesus tried and sentenced to death. They are dejected, all hope lost. These words are incredibly familiar and with all such things their meaning to us in our day can be reduced or lost altogether.

This story is a good one to underpin all of the ideas in this strategy. All that follows is simply an extrapolation from the story of Jesus and his meeting with these two men. Why is the story important to us?

First of all it shows that Jesus encounters the men on the journey they were already taking? They didn’t have to go somewhere special to meet Jesus, he joined them on their road. This is a clear challenge to us in the Church of Scotland to try to meet young people where they are and not always be content to play on our home turf. If 90% of Scotland’s young people don’t darken the door of our churches, where are they and will we go out and meet them?

Secondly it shows us that Jesus is interested in the conversation they are having. He asks what they are talking about. He doesn’t come in, stop them on the road and then preach them a sermon for an hour! He joins in what they are already talking about, what they are concerned about. Conversation is at the heart of every encounter with Jesus. We need to have a conversational ministry with young people but we need to start with the conversations they are already having. They are concerned about home, school, jobs, the environment, global poverty and HIV – and this list is clearly not exhaustive! To join in the conversation we need to know what young people are talking about and we can only do that if we are building relationships with them. Relationships are at the heart of what this new strategy is about.

Thirdly this story shows us the importance of using familiar symbols. Jesus breaks bread with his friends and in doing that they can see as though for the first time. In using symbols that are familiar to young people today we can help them see too.

Finally this story shows us the need for us to spend time with young people. If Jesus had been in a terrible rush, if he had too many other things to do then he might have moved on from the young men when he had the obvious opportunity to do so. Instead he waits for and accepts their invitation to join them for a meal and this is the point at which everything changes. We need to give time to young people and wait for their invitation to be on their journeys, to join in on their conversations and to work with them to make sense and meaning of their symbols.

Our Church has a long and positive tradition in working with young people that goes back hundreds of years. In the early stages of a new millennium it is right for us to take stock of that history and then to move forward, with more confidence than we have sometimes shown, to journey with the young people of the 21st century.

Steve Mallon
Associate Secretary Education and Nurture
A strategy for young people

In many areas of Scotland today, young people have abandoned the Church. Various reasons are given for this: because the Church is boring, unwelcoming, or because young people cannot see how faith is relevant to them.

The Church of Scotland has recognised that a problem exists, and this has resulted in the formulation of the Strategy for Young People. This terrific concept will, it is hoped, allow young people to explore faith in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. In so doing, the lives of congregations across the country will be greatly enriched. So everyone benefits.

Jude Taylor
Moderator of the National Youth Assembly 2006
Every young person in Scotland matters!
A strategy for young people

A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Church of Scotland, through this Strategy, makes clear its concern for all Scotland’s young people, whether they are involved in the Church or not. Today’s young people need to be given opportunities to thrive in all areas of life including their spiritual development and the Church will stand alongside other agencies in trying to offer such opportunities.

The Church of Scotland affirms the right of every young person to live a life free from poverty – in all its forms, to have good health and education opportunities and to be fully involved in the communities in which they live.

The Church of Scotland commits itself to respect every young person who comes into contact with its congregations and agencies regardless of their personal circumstances or social background. This respect is unconditional and will not be affected by the choices made by young people in terms of whether or not to get involved in the life of the Church and/or the Christian faith or in choices made by young people in terms of lifestyle.
We want to introduce young people to Jesus Christ and the Christian faith and the positive impact this encounter can have upon their lives. We believe that following Christ is a positive thing for young people and for the home and community he or she lives in. We believe that the Christian faith can transform the lives of those involved in it and engage them in acts of community service locally and globally.

We want to introduce young people to the local church where they should be able to worship in relevant ways and be offered a variety of relevant learning opportunities. We believe that this involvement can add real value to the lives of young people and help them find their place in the world and make a positive contribution to it.

Young people who are involved in the Church of Scotland at congregational, presbytery and national levels should be challenged to make a positive contribution to the life of the Church. The Church is not simply an organisation that has to make provision for young people but it can also expect young people to offer their time, talents and money in appropriate ways. This recognises that young people are stakeholders in the Church and so have the right to contribute to it along with everyone else. Existing Church leaders must take this contribution seriously and young people should be encouraged and supported as they work these things out.

We have a concern for all of Scotland’s young people and aim to be involved positively in conversations about them at all levels of Scottish life and where possible to provide services for them that will add value to their lives and to their communities. We want to help young people to make the necessary transition into adult life so that they can live full lives.
A statement of values

The Church of Scotland has a commitment to:

- Treat all young people with respect.
- Respect and promote young people’s rights to make their own decisions and choices.
- Promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people in their communities.
- Contribute towards the promotion of social justice and inclusion for young people.
- Allow young people to have a voice in all aspects of church life and to help to be heard in the wider community.
- Allow young people to identify their own learning needs and be involved in the preparation and delivery of appropriate learning programmes and experiences.

“...The thing I most enjoy about being involved in the C of S is the sense of purpose in working ultimately in God’s service and in the service of humanity. So much else in society seems to be ultimate individualistic.”

Eystein, Edinburgh
principles...

Give them opportunities to hear the Good News and make up their own minds about its place in their lives.
A statement of principles for good practice

Youth work practitioners have a commitment to:

- Develop and maintain the required skills and competence to work effectively with young people.
- Listen to young people with respect and allow them to participate fully in any youth work programme.
- Plan and organise programmes that make sense in the lives young people live and relate to the community surrounding the local church.
- Make all activities open to anyone who wishes to engage in them and work with young people in a way that fosters social inclusion.
- Work alongside others engaged in youth work in the local church and see to provide a co-ordinated approach wherever possible.
- Seek opportunities to work with other congregations and agencies in the local community.
- Be as flexible as possible with young people and allow their needs and aspirations to shape the learning programme in each local church.
- Provide learning programmes that relate to personal, social, economic and political experiences as well as moral, biblical, theological and spiritual themes.
- Help young people recognise the need to change both now and in the future.
- Recognise that those who teach and share the Christian faith should themselves be learners and understand that they have things to learn from young people.

Youth workers are notoriously bad at counting. When they say a few, they mean two. When they say lots, they mean about ten. My core group of young people I know well is small. Deliberately so. My contact with the core group came from three different sources: the first source was a summer project that existed the summer I began, who were trying to create something sustainable for the local young people; the second source was from following up some work done by a local children’s worker; and the third source are those young people that make themselves known to you through writing their names on the wall to get noticed, or stealing from local shops and annoying local businesses. All three groups are equally important, for different reasons. The first group are relatively outward thinking and take less persuasion to get them to attend things. The second group are young people who have already been identified by others, as being vulnerable and are all involved in the social care system already — they work best when their groups are built around their own social networks of their friends. The third group are well known and avoided by most people in their school and community — someone seeking out to know them for positive reasons is unusual and subsequently precious to them.

Through these links I have had the privilege to walk alongside young people in school in classes, when they have been bereaved, after they have been involved in a murder and found themselves in a young offenders institution, and on those sunny days painting a mural on the wall for all to enjoy. These young people may not attend church, but they definitely have a need for what the church sets out to do — to spread the message that Christ left us, to live life in all its fullness.

By Sarah Brown, Youth and Community Worker in the parishes of Govan Old, New Govan and Linthouse St Kenneth’s in Glasgow.
A statement of practical skills required for effective youth work

Youth work practitioners should:

- Understand themselves and young people.
- Engage with young people and the lives they live.
- Help young people to learn about God, the Bible, the Church of Scotland and the communities in which they live and issues relating to how the world works today.
- Be able to communicate well with young people, recognising that this will involve listening as well as talking.

- Plan effectively by setting realistic targets based on the identified needs of the young people they work with.
- Manage and organise the work with young people so as to maximise the potential for young people to enjoy and benefit from the programme.
- Grow and gain confidence in the Christian faith so that it can be communicated effectively with young people in the local church and community.
“What do I love about being in the CofS? I think the sense of belonging is what I love most. As to what I enjoy doing, well I get to meet people from all over the country, and most recently all over the world, and share faith and experiences with them. To share their joy and their pain, and to do something about it through the various bodies of the Kirk and affiliated organisations like Christian Aid etc."

Allan, Kilmarnock

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Options for Young People in the Local Church

- Give them opportunities to hear the Good News and make up their own minds about its place in their lives.
- Offer them relevant worship at times that make sense – sometimes in their own age groups and at other times with the rest of the church community. It is crucial that young people who want to are able to take part in services of Holy Communion and that the sacrament is explained to them in ways they will understand.
- Plan relevant learning experiences by well-trained and committed volunteer and other workers that help them work through the process of understanding the Christian faith, the place of the Bible and how faith can be worked out in 21st Century Scotland.
- Give them opportunities to ask questions about faith and life and the workings of the local church and have those questions listened to and answered positively.
- Provide them with a variety of social activities that are fun and engaging and help them build relationships with each other and with adults in the local church.
- Give them the opportunity to have their say on issues that affect them in the local church and be involved in any new initiatives that result from this. They should also be given an explanation as to why any initiative they have asked for is not to be carried forward.
- Ask them to commit to being involved in all areas of local church life this includes taking part in worship e.g. leading services, children’s addresses, practical duties e.g. welcome at the front door and the regular rhythm of congregational life.
- Support them through the difficult transitions involved in adolescence and early young adulthood with appropriate learning activities and practical support in the form of caring relationships with adults who will ‘be there’ for them.
- Support young people when they want to get actively involved in bigger world issues to make a positive impact on the world in which they live, e.g. the Make Poverty History campaign.
In 1991 two neighbouring Churches of Scotland in Banchory decided to join their Sunday night youth fellowships together. Shortly after that they were offered a full-time youthworker for free, financed by a Church in Seattle, Washington USA. Not an offer anyone in their right mind would turn down. The resulting joint project centred round the Edge and Rock youth groups and built on relational youth work and ministry flourished. After three years the two separate churches were ready to take on the financial burden of a full time Youth Co-ordinator and employed the current worker who has been in post since 1995. The joint project in Banchory seeks to “make contact, make friends and make disciples” among the teenagers of Banchory and the majority of the activities on offer are largely an excuse to build relationships. This is also largely a sacrificial effort on the sponsoring Churches part since the majority of young people from Banchory move away to university and rarely return to fill any pews. Instead growing numbers of motivated and committed Christian young people from Banchory are working out their faith across the country, and the world. The project now caters to around 70 different churched and un-churched youth each week and is staffed by a large volunteer team alongside gap-year youth interns. Key factors in the success of the Edge and Rock in Banchory include long term committed volunteers who are able to maximize their time with young people due to the support of a full-time worker, and the positive outreach and witness of one joint project for all the teenagers of the area rather than separate groups based around one particular church or denomination. The project, and in turn the Churches have built a positive reputation among young people due to their vision putting their own interests second and investing time and money in young people.

Tony Stephen,
Youth Co-ordinator,
Banchory
Congregations either working alone or with other local churches and agencies can offer young people a variety of ways of feeling more involved in the local church:

- Find effective ways to reach out to young people in the parish and provide worship opportunities for those who don’t normally go to church.
- Provide robust and well-resourced programmes of Christian Education that allows young people to explore the Christian faith and help them develop their own personal spiritual journey that will have a positive impact on all areas of their lives.
- Establish, where possible, a youth forum for young people up to the age of 25 who wish to be consulted on all aspects of congregational life and how it affects them and their peer group. This will show the local church’s commitment to listen to young people and hear what they are saying.
- Appoint a ‘Youth Representative’ – a young person willing to represent the young people of her/his congregation on the Kirk Session. Congregations may consider appointing someone over the age of 18 to the office of Elder.
- Appoint an ‘Elder for Young People’ whose responsibility will be the oversight of pastoral care of the young people in the local congregation.
- Ensure that all volunteer and other workers who are involved in its youth programme are adequately trained and that they have at least undertaken the Kirk’s Choices for Youth Ministry programme.
- Embrace and encourage all possibilities for local chaplaincies in local schools, hospitals and other places where young people are involved.
- Involve young people in all areas of church life wherever possible and practicable.
- Create good avenues of communication between youth groups and the wider congregation.
- Offer prayer and other forms of support to the young people of the church and parish.
- Encourage volunteer and other workers to network with the wider youth work community in the local presbytery and at national events when appropriate.
- Work with other local churches and agencies in their immediate areas to provide youth work services in their local communities.
- Should take seriously its role in supervising the work of the Boys’ and Girls’ Brigade companies and work hard to ensure that the staff and young people involved in them feel part of the local church community.
“What do I like about being part of the Church of Scotland?

I love the fact that I can be part of a movement with so many people from completely different walks of life and have a sense of unity. I love being part of something national with a rich history and know that I can play a part in that history.”

Louise, Edinburgh
Options for the Local Presbytery

- Appoint someone locally to be the person who offers support, advice and through whom local churches can communicate with each other.
- Appoint a local children’s and/or youth ministry trainer in association with the Mission and Discipleship Council.
- Provide gathering points for young people in the form of events and for youth workers in terms of training, networking and support.
- Designate a small number of congregations within its bounds as ‘centres of good practice’ – where they exist - where genuine innovation and good practice can be seen and examined by all. These churches would commit to helping resource the other churches in the presbytery so that all might become stronger. Twinning arrangements between churches that have good youth work programmes and those that do not should also be considered.
- Encourage young people from within its bounds to take part in national programmes e.g. Impact, National Youth Assembly and should ensure that its place for a Youth Representative to the General Assembly is filled each year.
- Assess the progress of congregations in this strategy when conducting quinquennial visitations.
- Appoint at least one young person from a congregation within its bounds to serve as ‘Youth Representative’ who will offer a voice for young people and their issues at Presbytery meetings.
Readings on Youth

Play some current chart music or dance music quietly in the background while the following statements are read out by people of different ages.

The glory of the young is their strength

Proverbs 20:29

When I was a boy, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly impatient of restraint. They have execrable manners, flout authority, have no respect for their elders. What kind of creatures will they be when they grow up?

Heslod, Greek 8th Century Poet.

The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient in all restraint. They talk as if they alone know everything.

Peter the Monk, 13th Century

When I was a boy of fourteen my father was so ignorant I could hardly bear to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.

Mark Twain 1835 – 1910

But Yahweh replied, “Do not say, I am a child. Go now to those whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I go with you to protect you.”

Jeremiah 1:7,8
The Church has need of you, of your dynamism, your authenticity, your ardent will to grow, the freshness of your faith.

The Pope, World Youth Day

If you have gathered nothing in your youth how can you find anything in your old age?

Ecclesiasticus 25:3

Instead of giving in to your impulses like a young man, fasten your attention on holiness, faith, love and peace, in union with all those who call on the Lord with our minds.

2 Timothy 2:22

Work among children and young people is still not high enough on our list of priorities. Let us remember the stark fact that any church is just one generation away from extinction.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Do not let people disregard you because you are young.

1 Timothy 4:12

We have to stop viewing young people as the church of tomorrow but recognise them for who they are – part of the church of today. We have to get them involved in setting agenda, planning and delivering worship. We have to give them a voice to be heard and to be taken seriously.

Longniddry Parish Church

“The thing I most enjoy about being involved with the church of Scotland: Leering more about God all the time and worshiping, and meeting great people and changing the churches image because there’s not to many people my age in my area who go to church. Plus the best trip of my life to the holy land, was through the Church of Scotland.”

Barry, Glasgow
Drama
Two Young?

By John L Bell and Graham Maule (c) WGRG, Iona Community, G2 3DH.

PETER: Eh….Jesus….?

JESUS: Yes, Peter?

PETER: Eh….. Andrew and I were just having an argument.

JESUS: You’re becoming like James and John.

PETER: No…..they argue about theology. We were just arguing about your age.

JESUS: Were you, indeed?

ANDREW: It’s not so much your age…… It’s just that we think you might be too young.

JESUS: How very flattering, Andrew. Well to put the record straight, I’m 30.

ANDREW: (To Peter) There….I told you so. You owe me a pint of camel’s milk!

PETER: Wait a minute! Jesus, I thought you were the same age as John the Baptist.

JESUS: So I am…..for part of the year. John was born on 24th June. I was born of 25th December. At the moment he’s 31 and I’m 30…. until the end of the year.

PETER: In that case, we were both right.

(TO ANDREW)

You owe me a pint of camel’s milk!

JESUS: Listen, the pair of you, Forget the camel’s milk and tell me why you think I’m too young. Too young for what? You know, its 18 years since my barmitzvah.

ANDREW: Well….too young for telling older people what to do or what to believe

PETER: Yes. Andrew’s right. You’re a bit young to be interfering in adult affairs.

JESUS: Are you implying that I should never have healed your mother-in-law? Am I too young for that?

PETER: No….. It’s not so much what you do, Jesus. It’s the things you say.

ANDREW: …..like when you take a bit of common sense and make a fool of it. That infuriates older people.

JESUS: I don’t know what you’re talking about, Andrew. You’ll need to give me an example.

ANDREW: Well..eh.. How about that time when you said, ‘If somebody asks you for your coat, give them your shirt as well.’ We’d all end up nudists if we took that seriously. That kind of thing offends older people who take a pride in their appearance.

PETER: He’s right, Jesus. And you remember when you said, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen God.’ That upsets older people who think of God sitting with a golden robe on a throne, not kneeling with a dirty jersey on the pavement.

JESUS: I see…. So you think I’m too young?

PETER: Well, we’re only telling you what people say.
JESUS: Never mind 'people' Peter. What about you? What do you say?

PETER: O.K. I think you’re too young.

JESUS: So, when will I be old enough? 35….40….45….50?

PETER: Well, Abraham was 70 when he started!

ANDREW: Yes, but he had to find the Promised Land. We’re in it.

JESUS: Thanks, Andrew. Peter, have you never heard the words, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Old folk will see vision and young folks will dream dreams'?

PETER: Do they come from a Psalm?

JESUS: No, they were written by the prophet Joel. He wanted to point out that it’s those who, in your words, Would be ‘too young’ or ‘too old’ who are given glimpses of the Kingdom. And they have to share what they see.

PETER: And what about the middle aged?

JESUS: What about the middle aged? They, especially the men, Hold the reins of power in the community, in the state and in religious life. They have to listen to people older than them, and learn from people younger than them.

PETER: Jesus, you’re an idealist!

JESUS: That’s the finest compliment you’ve paid me for a long time, Peter. Now, are we going to move on…… or are you too young to follow me?

PETER: Oh, not us!

ANDREW: We’re right behind you, Jesus!

JESUS: By the way, what age are you two?

ANDREW: Eighteen.

PETER: Twenty Two

ANDREW: Liar!

PETER: O.K. I’m nineteen and a half. Teenagers! …and you complain about me being too young!

JESUS: Come on and I’ll treat you to your first shave!

“I enjoy the Youth Assembly and missionary trips as you realise there are plenty of other young people right by your side even if they are not physically there week by week!”

Rhona,
Dundee
Conversations

.... with young people talking about their experience of the Kirk – what do young people enjoy about being involved in the life of the church?

- how does what you have heard challenge your assumptions about what young people think about the church?
- How could you find out what the young people in your church are thinking?
- What difference might it make to know?

OR

Conversation

..... between different generations of the church looking at the similarities and differences of church for different generations and encouraging people to change one thing.

- What one thing could you change in your church that will make a difference for young people in the church and in the parish?

Song

Prayers of intercession.
Leader: Lord have mercy
Response: Hear our prayer

Holy God you promised through your Son, Jesus Christ, to hear us when we pray in faith – so we pray....

for a church where young people can participate at every level, where they are given the power to take decisions and to be recognised as leaders and innovators.

to recognise and value the spirituality of the young, a spirituality that longs for belonging, acceptance, a still quiet place where their deepest hopes and desires are nurtured and valued. Help us to guide them on into adult life in our common faith journey together.

for all those who work with and for young people. Give them strength and inspiration to carry out their work with the full support and recognition of all your church.

for young people around the world – for children made to be soldiers; for young women forced into prostitution and slavery; for those who live with HIV/Aids; for those who are homeless or on drugs; and for those who do not have a significant adult to accompany them through adolescence.

that we may be a church which takes young people seriously and learns from their passions for justice in the world and for their concerns in society.

Act of Commitment

As a symbol of the Church of Scotland’s commitment to young people, and as symbol of implementing the ‘Youth Strategy,’ we believe in young people’ ribbons are introduced and passed around.

All stand to say the Act of commitment.

We will commit ourselves to implement the Youth Strategy of the Church of Scotland.
To work alongside young people as equal partners journeying together in our common life as the Church of Scotland.
We will create a church where young people are valued and listened to, and are actively involved in the life, work and mission of the church.
We will seek to enable their voices to be present within our decision making structures.
We will endeavour to create worship that is meaningful and relevant to them,
To provide a welcome where their faith can grow and deepen in love, respect and with confidence.
We will to provide training for our youth leaders and offer pastoral support for our young people.
We believe in a church where young and old learn from each other and grow with each other.
We believe that every young person in Scotland, and within the Church of Scotland matters!

Appointment of Elders / Youth Elders / Youth Representatives for Kirk Session (Under 18)

Song

Blessing

As we carry the fire of the Youth Strategy on our churches and within our local communities
Lord, send your blessing on us
As we share the vision that takes all people, young and old, seriously
Lord, send your blessing on us
As we begin to take action and plan the way ahead
Lord, send your blessing on us
As we, your church, continue to proclaim the faith afresh to each generation
Lord, send your blessing on us. In your name we pray.
Amen
I have been involved in youth work on and off since I was a teenager, being greatly influenced by two single ladies who took a tremendous interest in me, introduced me to the gospel and encouraged me in everything that was going on in the church. This has made me realise just how important it is that youth group leaders and church members do need to take an interest in the young people connected with our churches. From this background in a large city I came to an island and embarked on youth work in a very different situation.

In cities and large towns there isn’t usually any shortage of teenagers or people willing to lead the youth group. Some congregations may even have sufficient income to pay a part or full time youth worker. Towns and cities don’t usually have transport problems – just jump on a bus, get a train, cycle or walk. The church is usually just down the road or round the corner. In rural and island areas transport is a problem. Parents have to drive a distance to take their young person to wherever they want to go or arrange lifts with other parents. Smaller congregations and scattered communities often have difficulties finding people to run youth groups and there isn’t any money to pay for youth workers.

This is our story in a three-linked charge, with about 15 miles from one end of the charge to the other. We started with a nucleus of around eight young people from church families in the three congregations. Our aim was to be a ‘church youth group’, not a secular youth club. We wanted to reach the young people with the gospel and encourage them to go on in their faith. Over the years the group grew and were involved very much in church activities and taking part in the services. We went on trips away, were involved in monthly activities with other church groups, like one of our highlights arranging two evenings of Graham Kendrick’s ‘Make Way for Christmas’. One evening was in the local cinema and the other in one of the secondary school lecture theatres. Both evenings were a great success with each venue being full to capacity and at least fourteen congregations on the island involved.

Things have moved on from there and the original young people have all grown up, some have married and others work away. Other young people have joined the youth group and the numbers have increased. But it is a different story now; although we still maintain our first aim that we are a ‘church youth group’ the majority of the young people that now come have no connection with the church at all. We want our youth work to last and want the young people to know that we care about them and that we want them to have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Christians are not the only people out there who want to win the hearts and minds of our young people. For those who are already Christians and want something more, we have a Sunday evening Youth Fellowship. From this group we hope to see our future leaders, but in an island situation very often young people go away to university and don’t come back! We still have our problems with transport – driving miles giving young people lifts here and there, arranging transport rosters for swimming and other events. Behaviour can be challenging too! (We have introduced football-style yellow and red cards – it was the young people’s own idea and it seems to work!) Young people know the boundaries and what happens when these are broken.

But we do have our encouragements. Taking young people away for a week or weekend, even an overnight in the church hall, gives a tremendous opportunity for getting to know and build up good individual relationships within the group. Bible study is an important part of the weekly meeting and it’s great to have the young people asking questions and wanting to pray and read the Bible. The whole programme is planned term by term and is structured in such a way that there is also free time, time for games and craft etc.

Age is not a problem for being involved in youth work. If there is a good relationship with young people they don’t care how old you are! We have a team of nine adults, seven on Friday nights and three on Sunday evenings, ranging from 17 to 76, all doing their job – team leaders, tuck shop workers, subs collector, helpers and a ‘keep-the-peace’ lady when the groups overlap!

Pauline Hunt
Volunteer youth worker Orkney
For the last 14 years at Maxwell Mearns Castle we have had, as part of our ministry team, a Youth Worker working full time. We are a suburban congregation with our age mix both in parish and church evenly spread across the generations. Adjoining our Church premises we have a 1500 pupil secondary school, Mearns Castle High School, and we have built up a positive partnership with the school, to the extent that senior management in the school regard the church premises as an extension of the school campus.

Consequently, given the proportion of young people in our Parish, the leadership of the church took the decision 14 years ago to invest in a full-time Youth Specialist who would work across these areas. There have been 3 phases in the employment pattern of the Youth Worker:

Phase 1: Directly employed with funding from church reserves, supplemented by committed and specific giving by members of the congregation.

Phase 2: Youth Worker comes to us from USA missionary organisation. Funding for first 4 years provided by USA supporters with cost of housing met by ourselves.

Phase 3: Fully supported funding by congregation with Youth Worker now employed and paid for by the congregation.

Having just undergone a very thorough review of the Worker there are some vital lessons we’ve learned having been in for the ‘long haul’. Some of these include:

A. The benefit of a dedicated Youth Specialist
   The principle of a shared ministry is central to our understanding of the New Testament Church. As you will see from my photograph, I’m told I now have grey hair! Over my 13 or so years here it has been an enormous benefit to see someone whose primary responsibility is to focus on all aspects of youth ministry (11–18), to build relationships and to stay in touch with youth culture and thinking.

B. The downside of a dedicated Youth Specialist
   Over time the congregation faces a danger of leaving the youth ministry to the Youth Worker. In our recent period of review we realised that the Youth Worker had become the youth work. Rather than being the person who enabled, equipped, encouraged the youth work in many areas he had become the person doing the youth work. The review group saw this and have put in place a new job description that works towards delegating responsibility to folks in the congregation for the individual areas of youth work.

C. The changing faces of youth ministry
   One of the things we have quickly recognised is that the “congregation” of any Youth Worker is one which is constantly changing and moving on. They arrive into our youth work programme aged 11 / 12 and within 5 years they are off to University, working world and a new network of friends and relationships. Over these 5 years our Youth Worker journeys with them and then they all go!

Building anything long term is very difficult but the continuity that a permanent post provides allows the work to continue as the new kids emerge and the focus moves to them.

D. Don’t leave the management just to the Minister
   Build the team of folks who share responsibility for the youth ministry. Recently we have divided the management of our Youth Worker between myself for day-to-day tasks as well as matters of life and doctrine and a Youth Council comprising parents, young people, youth leaders, Session, Board representatives etc. The Council meets with the Youth Worker and together they take responsibility for the youth ministry of the whole Congregation. This is in its early days and is already beginning to make a difference.

Rev David Cameron is the Minister of Maxwell Mearns Parish Church near Glasgow.

And in the ‘burbs.....
How to use the DVD resource

The DVD enclosed with this booklet has two sections of material on it. The first is a recording of the launch of the Strategy for Young People at the General Assembly in May 2006. It gives you a sense of what the Strategy is about and the kinds of themes that are being explored. It can also be used as a guide to a discussion you could have in a small group or Kirk Session Meeting.

The second section shows a group of young people talking about their experience of belonging to their local churches and to the Church of Scotland. This is a resource that could be used at a Kirk Session, congregational or Presbytery meeting.

The Mission and Discipleship Council have Regional Development Officers based around Scotland who can help you as you seek to progress your journey in your work with young people. The contact details for the offices have been included in the pack that came with this material.

If you need any advice on how to run a discussion or how to facilitate a congregational or presbytery event on issues facing young people, please get in touch with Steve Mallon: smallon@cofscotland.org.uk.

I love being part of CofS because I feel like I belong here, I have this overwhelming sense of this is where I am meant to be. Andi, Carnoustie